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04 Apr 10

SORROW INTO JOY

Today, we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and His victory over sin and death. On Friday evening, we considered the sorrows of our suffering Saviour. How that as He approached the cross, the circle of people around Him grew smaller and smaller. The multitudes that flocked to Him left Him. The disciples deserted Him. In the hours before His crucifixion, He was all alone in the Garden of Gethsemane, and on the cross, even the Heavenly Father turned away from the Son. When Jesus cried out – My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? – God the Son took on the wrath of God the Father for the sins of mankind.

THE SORROW OF THE DISCIPLES

For the disciples, the days leading up to the crucifixion were times of great anxiety. They could not understand when our Lord Jesus told them about His going away (John 16:16-18). There was disquiet in the hearts of the disciples. For them, the departure of the Saviour was to them a terrible loss, the loss of a friend who comforted them in the sorrows, who calmed the storms in their lives, who consoled them in their setbacks. To them, the departure of the Lord Jesus would mean that they would be like sheep without a shepherd. They had left everything to follow Him. Now that He was going away, where would they go? Who would they follow? Where was their hope?

Like the disciples, we can sorrow in the death of Christ; we can feel the emotions, but it is not the death of Christ that gives hope, it is His resurrection. Sorrow alone does not save, but it must be a sorrow that worketh repentance — a sorrow for sins that leads us to turn away from the sins of the world and to the living and true God.

THE “JOY” OF THE WORLD

While the disciples wept and lamented, the world shall rejoice. *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy”* (John 16:20).

When Jesus was crucified, the world rejoiced. Here the “world” refers not to all the people in the world or the physical world, rather there is the element of morality, and it specifically refers to those who were against the Lord Jesus.

To the “world,” the crucifixion of Christ was not a sad day at all; on the contrary, it was a joyful one. To them the crucifixion of Jesus meant that justice was carried out; a blasphemer was silenced; a trouble-maker was removed; a threat was put down.

Just as the world then rejoiced in the death of Jesus, so the world today regale in pouring scorn upon our Lord Jesus Christ. But why? There is an anti-Christ attitude and mentality. History is replete with examples of people who would rejoice over the death of Christ and the destruction of the Christian faith.

I dare say that many in the world would celebrate if there is a law that bans the preaching of the Bible, and one that closes down churches — at least the ones that stand resolutely on God’s truth. There are many reasons for this anti-Christian mentality. Let me give you three reasons.

First, the holiness of the Lord Jesus is an affront to their sins. The people in the world do not like it when their sins are exposed, when their evil is juxtaposed against the holiness of God. We will notice that any debate over any moral issue, the first wall to be raised is that the church has no part in the public domain. The argument starts and ends with — “Do not impose your Christian values on us.” What it really means is that — “We can do what we want; we do not have to live by your rules. But you have to live by our rules.”

Second, the uniqueness of the Lord Jesus is an insult to their intelligence. To the world, the Gospel is too simple. There must be something more. There must be something they ought to do. They would not believe in the finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ. So what does the world do? They devise their own ways of salvation.

Third, the exclusiveness of the Lord Jesus is an offence to their idea of tolerance. The modern mind will not accept absolutes. Everything is relative. Every so called truth is dependent upon the situation. So when the Bible says that the Lord Jesus is the only way, the truth and the life and no man comes to the Father but by Him, the world recoils in disgust at such narrow-mindedness or intolerance. Tolerance is a two-edged sword that cuts both ways. If there is a call for tolerance in any society, then Biblical Christianity must also be tolerated.

The world rejoices at the death of Christ because the people in the world take offence at the truth. Our Lord Jesus says, *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful”* (John 16:20). There is a sense that the things over which the world rejoices in are the same things the true believer of God must sorrow over.

THE JOY OF THE REDEEMED

The sorrow of the Christians will only be for a little while. Our Lord says, *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy”* (John 16:20). To illustrate the sorrow and joy that the disciples will experience, our Lord Jesus uses the analogy of childbirth. *“A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you”* (John 16:21-22).

A woman experiences labour pains, but when the child is delivered, the pain and distress is turned into joy. Likewise, the disciples would be sorrowful because the Lord is going away, but that brief period of sorrow will be turned into joy when they see Jesus again.

Our Lord Jesus did not say that the sorrow of the disciples will be exchanged for joy, but that their sorrow would become joy. Their sorrow will be made into joy. The very reason for their sorrow will be the very reason for their rejoicing. The reason is that by the death of Christ, we have peace and pardon, reconciliation with God, and assurance of sins forgiven and hope of eternal life.

There is also the connotation of a permanent change. Our Lord is saying that our sorrow shall be permanently changed into joy.

First, we have the joy of finished atonement. The work of redemption is complete (John 17:4). *“We are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all”* (Hebrews 10:10). There is now no condemnation in Christ. As God’s redeemed, we rejoice because that means that our forgiveness is real and certain.

Second, we have the joy of knowing that the Word of God is true. From the sermons of the Apostles, we find that they preached almost entirely on the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The reason is that the resurrection is the central truth of the Christian faith. Christianity stands or falls on this doctrine. *“But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain”* (1 Corinthians 15:13-14). The resurrection of Christ gives us the believer’s joy of knowing that when our Lord spoke of giving His life a ransom for many — that is true. When He said that He and the Father are one, and if you have seen Him, you have seen the Father — that is true. When He said that He is the Way, the Truth and the Life, and no man comes to the Father but by Him — that is true. And when He said that He went to prepare a place for us and that He will come again, and receive us unto Himself; that where He is, there we may be also — that is also true.

Third, we have the joy of future resurrection. As Christians, we can rejoice because our Lord’s resurrection proved that there is life beyond the grave. His body was laid in the tomb. The tomb was placed with an imperial seal. It was guarded by Roman soldiers. All the sceptics needed to do was to produce a dead body. The resurrection of our Lord Jesus is the irrefutable evidence of who He is.

The resurrection of our Lord also proves that our Lord Jesus can, will, and is able to show the way to the Father. It proves that we have the blessed hope as well. *“Knowing that He which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus”* (2 Corinthians 4:14).

CONCLUSION

According to His abundant mercy, we have a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. But how long do we have to wait? Our Lord Jesus told the disciples, *“A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father”* (John 16:16). Paul writes, *“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory”* (2 Corinthians 4:16-17).

The resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ gives us the hope that life as we know it is just a little while and a brief moment. A little while you shall weep but a little while your sorrow will turn to eternal joy.

May our Lord Jesus fill our hearts with the hope and joy of resurrection.

11 Apr 10

There are a couple of things that need your immediate attention. First, the deadline for registration for the annual Bible Conference is two weeks away. The deadline is 18 April 2010. I urge all who are planning to go to please register as soon as possible. This will be a great help to the organizing committee. For those who are still sitting on the fence and undecided because of some concerns, let me address them now. If you are afraid that you will not be able to understand the speaker's spoken English; let me say that this is not the first time that Pastor Bob Landis is coming to Singapore. He has ministered here before and to other churches like ours, and if they could understand him so that they invited him back again, I am sure he will be understood by you.

Second, if it is the place and price that you are concerned about. Then I can only say that Marriott Putrajaya is certainly one of the best facilities available for the price range. Those who were at last year's camp can attest to the service provided by the hotel. The Camp Committee has tried very hard to balance between affordability and comfort. And again, I urge all of you to consider the spiritual blessings that you will reap above the creature comforts.

Third, I always regard the Bible Conference as a time for spiritual recharge. This year, Pastor Landis and his MTT (Make a Timothy Today) Team, which consists of 13 young people, will be there to minister to us. The MTT members are highly committed young people who raised their funds for their airfare, accommodation, and even daily expenses. They will be ministering to the children through puppets, crafts, skits, and etc. They will also be ministering to the adults through music. I am sure that they will be a great source of blessing for you and encouragement to our young people.

The second matter that requires your immediate attention is the Church Family Day on 1 May 2010, which is a public holiday. Dn Mark Tay of the Mandarin Congregation has secured Gombak Stadium for our use. Please sign up on the notice board as soon as possible. This will greatly help him and his team in organising the event.

There are also several matters for your prayers. I am ministering to the brethren at Evangel BP Church this morning, and later tonight, Dn Jeffrey Soh, Bro Bendick Ong, and I will be going to Sri Lanka to minister at the Trinity Reformed Presbyterian Church (TRPC) Bible Camp and to visit the various mission stations. TRPC, formerly known as Calvary Reformed Presbyterian Church, will be celebrating its 10th Anniversary on 18 April 2010. God willing, we will be back by 21 April 2010. Please remember us in your prayers.

Over the last few months, we have been considering the role of the members in the local church. As members of the church, we have to commit ourselves in attending the worship services of the church, serving the LORD with our spiritual gifts, giving to support the ministry, preserving the purity and unity of the church, and praying for one another. There is another aspect of church membership that is often neglected because it is potentially troublesome, and that is holding one another accountable.

When people meet, there will be bound to be cases where toes are stepped upon, feelings are hurt, unkind words are said. And while the church is to strive for purity and unity, there are obstacles of sin and conflict often stand in the way.

Unity in the church is threatened when there is conflict brought about by unkind words. Rarely do we see physical violence in the church, but there are plenty of hurtful words that are uttered without much thought. A common saying: "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me" is also far from reality. The truth is that words hurt, and the hurt linger on for a long while. "*A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city: and their contentions are like the bars of a castle*" (Proverbs 18:19).

Purity in the church is threatened when a member in the body of Christ sins. There are people who choose to ignore these spiritual fissures because it is unloving. After all, the Bible says that love covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8).

Reasons for Confrontation

The Bible's answer to these conflicts is not to ignore them, but to confront them with the purpose of bringing about change – transformation through biblical confrontation. Biblical confrontation is one of the ways in which we express concern for our fellow Christians. Consider the following verses.

* *Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head.* (Psalm 141:5)

* *Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee.* (Proverbs 9:8)

* *Open rebuke is better than secret love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.* (Proverbs 27:5-6)

* *And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.* (Hebrews 12:5-6)

The Bible also exhorts us to...

* *“admonish one another”* (Romans 15:14),

* *“have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them”* (Ephesians 5:11),

* *“preach, warning every man”* (Colossians 1:28),

* *“warn them that are unruly”* (1 Thessalonians 5:14),

* *“them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear”* (1 Timothy 5:20),

* *“preach the word...reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine”* (2 Timothy 4:2)

Our Lord Jesus' teaching on this matter is found in Matthew 18:15-17. *“Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican”* (Matthew 18:15-17).

Grounds for Confrontation

The first person pronoun is used in this passage, meaning to say that every member of the local church has the responsibility to engage in this process of transformation through biblical confrontation.

The first thing to note is that we are to confront brethren, which implies that biblical confrontation is restricted to those who are believers; those who profess to believe; and those who are members of a local church. “Thy brother” implies a familiar relationship. Believers are part of a larger spiritual family. The term “brother” is used to describe people who have certain thing in common. It is not limited only to those who are on good terms.

The Bible has certain expectations of brothers and sisters who are in God's family. We are to love one another. This is important because there is tendency for some Christians to judge another believer too hastily by saying that he/she is not a Christian.

“We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him” (1 John 3:14-15).

The Bible's exhortation is do not pre-judge. It is better to confront than to pass a judgment without due process.

Times for Confrontation

“Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault...” (Matthew 18:15). That begs the question: What kind of trespasses do we confront? Should we confront every sin? Should we confront everything that we have seen and heard? Should we confront everything that has been told us? Or should we just confront the “big sins”?

The Bible tells us that we are to confront sin, and sin is defined as anything that is against the Word of God. The Bible makes no distinction between lesser and more serious sins.

However, there are some boundaries. First, before we confront, we must discern between sins that are committed out of ignorance and those that are due to wilful disobedience. The former must be taught; that latter must be disciplined.

Second, we can only confront actions and words, not thoughts and motivations. In other words, biblical confrontation is warranted when a person acts in a way that is contrary to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. That means that we cannot confront a person with whom we have a difference in opinion. It also means that we cannot confront a person's motivations and thoughts. We cannot confront a person for his attitude unless his words and actions betray that attitude.

Third, there are some things that can be forgiven without confrontation. Solomon tells us, *“The discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression”* (Proverbs 19:11). If every member in the church is going to confront every sin committed by other Christians, we will not have time to do anything else. There are things such as inconsiderate remarks, selfish actions, prideful motivations that are common in every church. Many of these trespasses can be overlooked.

But there will be times when confrontation becomes necessary. When a brother's sin causes you to think of him badly and it cuts off any fellowship and threatens the unity of the church, then it is necessary to confront the brother. Second, when a brother's sin has resulted in his backsliding and staying away from church, it is right to restore him to Christ by confronting him (Galatians 6:1). Third, when a brother's sin may cause a great deal of hurt to those who are close to him, then it is necessary to rectify the situation by confrontation. Biblical confrontation of sin is necessary for the purity and the unity of the church. God willing, next Lord's Day, we will deal with the how's of confrontation. Here's the caution from God's Word, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1). The purpose of confrontation is ultimately restoration of the person to Christ.

May the Lord help us.

18 Apr 10

This is the last week before the close of the registration for the Bible Conference. If you are still procrastinating, still holding back from registering – DIN (do it now).

There are a couple more important matters for you to take note: First, the Church Family Day will be held at the Gombak Stadium on 1 May. Please sign up at the notice board. Second, the Annual Congregational Meeting will be held on 24 April at 7:00pm. This will be an important meeting because we need to make an amendment to our church Constitution, and that requires fifty percent of voting members to be present. So please attend the Congregational Meeting.

Praise God for the good response to the Calvary Shoebox ministry. This is one way in which your family can participate in missions. This is one way in which you can teach your child to give. Not every one is able to go to the mission field, but certainly every one of us can put a box together for an orphan in North Thailand or even a girl or boy in Sri Lanka.

Today, the Trinity Reformed Presbyterian Church (TRPC) celebrates its 10th anniversary. TRPC under the leadership of the Reverend Vijayenthiran has been working to stabilise the ministry in Colombo. We rejoice with them over what the LORD has been doing for them, and it is certainly our prayer that the work in Colombo will grow in numbers as well as in spiritual vitality.

Last Lord's Day, we began considering the matter of confrontation of sin committed by Christians in the church. When it comes to this matter, most Christians would rather be ostriches, bury their heads in the sand; or they adopt the posture of the three proverbial monkeys – see no evil, hear no evil and talk no evil. Other Christians would simply move on to another church. And there are also Christians who make it a point to make known their displeasure.

The Bible teaches that the less we speak, the less we sin. *"In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise"* (Proverbs 10:19). *"Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath"* (James 1:19).

However, there are times when there are issues that are of serious nature that cannot and ought not to be ignored. The Apostle Paul was forthright in dealing with sin in Corinth (1 Corinthians 5). He did not mince his words. When there is sin in the body of believers, the offender must be confronted.

How? There are many examples of confrontation of sins that have gone wrong, where the rift between the parties widens instead of being healed, where the offender is made to feel humiliated, the offended is left feeling that he has been denied justice, and God is not glorified.

Thus, it is one thing to confront sin; it is quite another thing to confront in a way in which the matter will be biblically resolved, the offender restored, the offended renewed, and God glorified.

Our Lord Jesus gives this instruction. *"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother"* (Matthew 18:15).

Biblical confrontation is reserved for Christian brethren. The implication is that the parties involved hold the same beliefs, submit to the same authority, recognise the same LORD over their lives, and thus live by the same Christian principles. The same starting place is important because this is the only way for meaningful confrontation.

* Go. *"If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go..."* (Matthew 18:15a). The first step to biblical confrontation is to "go" to the person directly. This means that there is to be no behind the back gossiping, or back-biting, or garnering of "support." In our modern technological context, do not send e-mails or SMSes to all and sundry except the person in question.

* Go with a sense of urgency. *"Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift"* (Matthew 5:23-24). Do not allow a 'secret' dispute to snowball into open conflict.

But before we confront another person with his sin, we would do well to examine ourselves. *“Every way of a man is right in his own eyes”* (Proverbs 21:2a), even the fool (Proverbs 12:15). So, *“first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye”* (Matthew 7:5).

* Go with a holy purpose. The purpose is not to humiliate the other party or to make him feel guilty, rather it is to gain the brother (Matthew 18:15) and to be reconciled with him (Matthew 5:24).

* Go and communicate verbally. *“Go and tell him...”* (Matthew 18:15). We are to communicate with the person clearly and candidly. Some situations are made worse when the communication is neither forthright nor candid. When a person couches his words, the other person will read between the lines. *“But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil”* (Matthew 5:37).

The person who says “stick and stones may break my bones but words do not hurt me” is probably hard of hearing. Words hurt! And we confront another person concerning his sin, words can either drive him away or draw him back.

* Go in private. *“Go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone”* (Matthew 18:15). If the matter has not reached the public domain, then it is right to keep it private between you and the other party. The objective is to protect the name of the person. Besides, to go to other people without first going to the person involved is gossip.

* Go with humility. Do not be too quick to jump to conclusions. Do not be too quick to condemn. Do not be too quick to judge. Paul warns those who think themselves to be spiritual, *“Restore...in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted”* (Galatians 6:1). Do not over-estimate your own strength. Every Christian is just as capable of falling into sin as any one else. *“Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall”* (1 Corinthians 10:12).

* Go with compassion. A person who has sinned – if he is truly born-again – would be dealing his guilt. He would be broken-hearted. Sadly, there are Christians who crush other fallen brethren by their insensitivities and unkind words. The purpose of the confrontation is not to further shatter his broken heart. The purpose of confronting him is so that he may be restored to fellowship with God and the church. *“The sweetness of the lips increaseth learning... Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones”* (Proverbs 16:21, 24).

* Go with much prayer. All sins are ultimately sins against God. Sin is a spiritual matter, and all confrontation is therefore a spiritual battle. Hence, when we pray, we must cover ourselves in prayer.

Every Christian has a responsibility to ensure the purity of the Church. Rightly or wrongly, the world does not look at the Church and see us individual believers; it sees the Church as a body! When one member of the body sins, the whole body is tarred, and even the Head of the Church – Christ Himself – is not spared. Therefore as members of the body of Christ we have to hold one another accountable, keep ourselves pure even as our Lord Jesus is pure (1 John 3:3).

25 Apr 10

One of the uncertainties in travelling is delayed flights. This is second time in a row that my flight has been delayed. A couple of weeks ago, it was four hours due to the plane's mechanical failure. Two Saturdays ago (10 April 2010), it was for two hours for the engineers to check the plane because they suspected something amiss. Then another two hours because the problem was more serious than they thought. And even then, they could not guarantee that the problem would be fixed. I suppose it is better to be safe than sorry. As I sit in the holding area waiting for the announcement, my mind is turned to a few things.

First, God is always in control. It is understandable that travellers are anxious to get to where they want to go, and they are frustrated by delays. The psalmist says, *"My times are in thy hand"* (Psalm 31:15); that includes the time of delays.

Second, God is always true. On the flight to KL, after the first deadline of two hours passed, frustrated passengers became angry when they were told that the deadline was extended for another two hours. Now the 9am flight was pushed back to 2pm. The passengers pressed the ground crew for a commitment that they would get on the plane two hours later. Alas, there was no such commitment. Not so with God. *"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also"* (John 14:1-3).

Third, there were some very angry passengers. But vent as they did, the airline ground staff could not do anything. We cannot control the events of life, but we certainly can control our reactions to the events, especially the not so good ones. And it is our reactions to bad situations that is revealing about our Christian character.

And this brings me to my last point: be prepared. Bring a good book with you wherever you go. Do not waste time. I was pleased that I had my little trusty netbook with me, and while I wait for the plane to be fixed, I can do work on my pastoral letters.

Continuing with our discussion on confrontation of sin in the church between believers, our Lord Jesus gives this instruction. *"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother"* (Matthew 18:15).

The first step of confrontation is private – between the two parties. The purpose of the confrontation is to gain the sinning brother. The private nature of this first step is to give the person to repent of his sins and to avoid any public humiliation.

When to call the "one or two more"?

However, if the one-to-one meeting fails, our Lord says, *"If he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established"* (Matthew 18:16).

The grounds for calling "one or two more" to go with you are that the offender would not listen to your counsel. The word "listen" means that he rejects your counsel and refuses to repent.

"Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him" (Luke 17:3). The repentance here involves a turning away from sin and asking for forgiveness. If the offender repents, then there is no need for the "one or two more" witnesses.

But if the offender is unrepentant and despite loving biblical counsel, he remains hardened in his sin, that is where the "one or two more" witnesses come in.

What is the role of the "one or two more" witnesses?

Our Lord Jesus says *"In the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established"* (Matthew 18:16). The purpose of the "one or two more" witnesses is to affirm the veracity of the charges that have been brought against the offender. There must be an independent investigation before the one or two more witnesses confront the offender.

The confrontation is not a time for accusations; rather it is a time to affirm and prove that the charges that have been made were true. In other words, the confrontation is not a fishing expedition. The purpose of having witnesses in a court of law is to prove the veracity of the charges. Therefore, the role of the "one or two more witnesses" is to testify that sin has indeed been committed.

The second purpose of the one or two more witnesses is to counsel. *"If he shall neglect to hear them..."* (Matthew 18:17). When they have established that sin has been committed, then the witnesses have to counsel the offender to repent.

Who can be the “one or two more” witnesses?

The Bible does not identify the witnesses, nor does it give the qualities of those who can play this role. However, Christian prudence and wisdom would tell us that the witnesses would be spiritually mature Christians who are impartial in the specific case.

The witnesses must be spiritual. The Apostle Paul gives some general guidelines in Galatians. “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted” (Galatians 6:1). Those who are spiritual would be those who...

* Have strong working knowledge of the Scripture. “For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Hebrews 5:13-14).

* Are filled with the Holy Spirit. “Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:17-18).

* Walk in the Spirit and not in the flesh. “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would” (Galatians 5:16-17).

The witnesses must be men of integrity. The Psalmist prays, “Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try my reins and my heart” (Psalm 26:2). The witnesses in such a confrontation must be first and foremost men of integrity for them to be credible and objective. The first witnesses obviously would be the leaders of the church.

The witnesses must be men of seriousness. Confrontation of sin in the church is a serious matter, and those who are involved in counselling the offender must realise the seriousness of their task. In the Old Testament, by the word of the witnesses, capital punishment could be meted out (Deuteronomy 15:5-7). The life of the accused was in the hand of the witnesses.

In our modern context, even though the witnesses do not have such power, the responsibility is no less grave. What is at stake is a man’s reputation and soul. Thus, witnesses must be men who are serious-minded because the task before them is serious.

The work of confrontation is not a pleasant one, and few men want to put themselves in the position of “judging” another man. As unpleasant as it is, this ministry is necessary to maintain the purity of the church. May the Lord preserve the purity of our church!

02 May 10

This is the last day of registration for the Bible Conference. Please pray and sign up. Here is another update from Pastor Bob Landis. He wrote: “Just a note to let you know that I am very impressed in all the effort that you men are putting into this summer ministry endeavour.”

Besides speaking at our Bible Conference (14-19 June), Pastor Landis will also be preaching at our Missions Conference on 12 June (Saturday). At the Missions Conference, Pastor Landis will also be showing a video presentation which he has prepared.

Pastor Landis will also be preaching at a special meeting on 27 June (Sunday) at 6:00pm in our church. That evening meeting will consist of testimonies, special vocal and instrumental music, and more. So please mark these dates on your calendar – 12 June and 27 June.

Praise God for a blessed Annual Congregational Meeting. I thank those who have worked hard to prepare the annual report (Dns Atchima Tang and the office staff) and the financial accounts (Bros. Colin Yam and Willie Quek, our internal auditors). I thank God for your co-labouring in the Gospel work, and your prayers, service, and giving to the ministry. May our LORD richly bless you.

For the benefit of those who were unable to come, I am reproducing here the exhortation that was given at the ACM.

ENLARGE THY TENT

The text is taken from Isaiah 54:2 – “*Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes.*” God’s work cannot be measured strictly along the same lines as businesses in the world. The reason is that most of our activities and programmes do not bear immediate or tangible returns. Nevertheless, we do them because God has commanded. The purpose for the existence of the church is not for self-enrichment, but for enriching for others. We are engaged in the work of the Gospel for the sake of others – others beyond our shores (foreign missions) and others beyond our time (our next generation).

ENLARGE THE PLACE OF THY TENT

In May 1792, William Carey, then a cobbler and part-time preacher preached from Isaiah 54:2 to a group of preachers and pastors on the importance of foreign missions. Although the initial response was lukewarm, God would use William Carey’s sermon that day to move the hearts of His people, and bring about not only foreign missions in India, but also spiritual revival in England.

In 2010, we have embarked on enlarging our missions abroad by encouraging more participation from our people. We have started the Old Clothes ministry, and Shoe-box ministry. We will be supporting the New Sky Home Orphanage in Fang, North Thailand. We will be organising more short-term missions trips so that you can go and visit and serve at our missions stations.

STRENGTHEN THY STAKES

Even as we go abroad, we must also take care of the home base. In order to enlarge our tent, we have to stretch forth the curtains, lengthen the cords, and strengthen the stakes.

The word “lengthen” suggests stretching, extending. The word “strengthen” suggests shoring up strength, becoming more focused and intense. There is always danger in stretching that is not accompanied by shoring up of our strength. Thus, as we lengthen, we must strengthen. How?

First, in our leadership. We need leaders. We need to prepare for our next generation of leaders to be spiritually and theologically strong. As a church and as individuals, we need to enlarge our tents, stretch forth the curtains, lengthen the cords, and strengthen the stakes; meaning to say that we must be willing to do more and go farther for our Lord Jesus.

Second, we need men who are willing to give their lives to serve God as pastors and preachers. In a sense it requires effort and sacrifice. And while we continue to pray for God to provide, we must at the same time nurture within our own to have our own lay leaders, who are spiritually strong and theologically trained, to preach.

Isaiah 54:2 is an individual call, but it is not a call to a just one individual. It is a call to every Christian. Every Christian must enlarge our tent and strengthen our stakes. Every one of us must enlarge our tent of service. Every one of us must strengthen our stakes of devotion and commitment.

To do that, we must prepare the heart. There are two words that God uses in the preceding verses leading to Isaiah 54:2. The two words are “hearken” and “awake.” Each word is used three times.

“Hearken...”

“Hearken” used in Isaiah 51:1, 4, and 7. To “hearken” means to hear, to listen to God, to let God have your attention.

* Isaiah 51:1 – *“Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the LORD: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged.”*

Here God is calling on us to hearken to Him and remember our past. Before there was a building for us to worship, this was a swamp. But there were people in the past who had the vision to enlarge their tent and lengthen their cords and strengthen their stakes. We are here today because they enlarged their tents and strengthen their cord.

Before we believed the Gospel, we were sinners. But there were people who had the vision to enlarge their tent and lengthen their cords and strengthen their stakes, so that the Gospel could be preached and souls were saved.

* Isaiah 51:4 – *“Hearken unto me, my people; and give ear unto me, O my nation: for a law shall proceed from me, and I will make my judgment to rest for a light of the people.”*

The second “hearken” is to remember our purpose. Hearken to God because He will make His law and judgment to be a light of the people. That is the purpose of the church. That is our purpose, that we may hold forth the Word of life as a light to the world.

* Isaiah 51:7 – *“Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings.”*

The third “hearken” is remember God’s presence. To enlarge our tent is a great endeavour. All great endeavours will have great challenges and opposition. But God says, “Fear ye not, remember My presence.”

“Awake, awake...”

The second word that leads up to Isaiah 54:2 is “awake” (Isaiah 51:9, 17; 52:1).

* Isaiah 51:9 – *“Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon?”*

“The arm of the Lord” is the strength of God. If we are to enlarge our tents, it will have to be with the strength of God.

* Isaiah 51:17 – *“Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem, which hast drunk at the hand of the LORD the cup of his fury; thou hast drunken the dregs of the cup of trembling, and wrung them out.”*

This second call to awake comes in the context of God’s judgment. Israel was punished for their rebellion against God. But now God called on them to arise. The judgment was over – awake!

Awake from past failures and past successes. If it were a failure, learn from the past mistakes, awake and move on. If it was someone who has failed you, encourage that person to awake to God’s truth and move on.

There are people who live in the past and never awake and they remain useless for God. For fear of failure, they never want to attempt anything for God.

* Isaiah 52:1 – *“Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city: for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean.”*

This is the “awake” that calls us to our purpose. The purpose of the church is to shine for God. “Put on thy beautiful garments.” The aim is that we will win sinners to God. *“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!”* (Isaiah 52:7).

Enlarge your tent, lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes. This is God's work. But before we can do that, we have to hearken and awake! This is God's call to personal spiritual revival.

William Carey said, "Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God." It is my prayer that every member of Calvary will "*enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes,*" and attempt great things for God.

09 May 10

Over the last few months, we have been considering responsibility of church membership. Members of a local congregation must be faithful in attending the worship services of the church, in supporting her activities, in serving, giving, showing mutual love and concern, in maintaining the purity and the unity of the church.

In the last few weeks, we have been considering the matter of the members' responsibility in church discipline. In the matter of confronting other believers who have committed grave sin. The Word of God does not teach us to close our eyes and ignore sin, nor does it teach us to deal with every sin like a sledgehammer falling upon an egg. The Word of God lays out for us a series of steps to be taken.

"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established" (Matthew 18:15-16).

The first step is a private one-to-one confrontation. If that fails, the second step is to bring "one or two more witnesses. In most cases, the matter would have been resolved by the second step. However, if the person remains hardened in and unrepentant of his sin, the third step is to bring the matter before the church.

"And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican" (Matthew 18:17).

Here, we see a person who is stubbornly rejecting all biblical counsel; he refuses to repent. The phrase "neglect to hear" has the connotation of who rejects all counsel. There is a hardness of the heart in the offender. If such a situation arises, the only option left is to "tell it unto the church."

How to tell the matter to the church is important. Man's tendency is either to under-react or over-react. Some say that "tell it unto the church" suggests an official reaction from the church, meaning to say that the church sends an official letter to the person urging him to repent, and informing him of the church's intention to discipline. If the person fails to respond and continues to reject the church's counsel, then the church will be informed publicly over the pulpit of the church's disciplinary action against the person.

This form of discipline is not only found in Matthew 18:17, but it is taught throughout the New Testament. Read 1 Corinthians 5; Romans 16:17-18; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15; etc.).

Reasons for "To Tell it Unto the Church"

There are several reasons for this final step in church discipline. First, obedience to the Word of God. Our Lord Jesus did not make church discipline as an option. He instructed that this step be taken.

John Calvin, in his Institutes of the Christian Religion, wrote: "Therefore, all who desire to remove discipline or to hinder its restoration – whether they do this deliberately or out of ignorance – are surely contributing to the ultimate dissolution of the church... Discipline is like a bridle to restrain and tame those who rage against the doctrine of Christ; or like a spur to arouse those of little inclination; and also sometimes like a father's rod to chastise mildly and with the gentleness of Christ's Spirit those who have more seriously lapsed. When, therefore, we discern frightful devastation beginning to threaten the church because there is no concern and no means of restraining the people, necessity itself cries out that a remedy is needed. Now, this is the sole remedy that Christ has enjoined and the one that has always been used among the godly" (Institutes, Book IV, Chapter 12).

Second, it is for the spiritual welfare of the person who sinned. Church discipline is not for retributive justice. Church discipline must be motivated by love. The underlying motivation behind our Lord's instruction in Matthew 18:15-18 is to "gain thy brother" (Matthew 18:15); and to "restore such an one in the spirit of meekness" (Galatians 6:1).

By God's mercy and grace, the increased pressure of the church upon the person, the sense of guilt would drive the person to seek repentance and forgiveness for his sins.

That spirit is seen in one of David's penitentiary psalms, "*Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah. I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah*" (Psalm 32:1-5). When David kept silent and refused to repent, he was laden with guilt, but when he confessed his sin, there is the restoration of joy.

Third, it is for the good of the church. Church discipline is that it gives an opportunity of instruction. It teaches the church that sin has earthly as well as eternal consequences. Sin also has individual and corporate consequences. Paul says, "*Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us*" (1 Corinthians 5:6-7). The purity of the church depends on the purity of each and every member of the church.

Most Christians would frown upon such open discipline because it appears to be unchristian. And the reason is that Christians today have a diminished sense of God's holiness and man's wickedness.

Church discipline will therefore teach the members of the importance of personal purity. "*Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear*" (1 Timothy 5:19-20).

Excommunication

After having told the matter to the church, and the person remains unrepentant, our Lord Jesus says "*let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican*" (Matthew 18:17). The heathen and the publicans were the people with whom the Jews have no religious interaction. The person is therefore not regarded as a member of the covenant people of Israel. He is an alien and a stranger. In Corinthians 5, the Apostle Paul describes it this way – "*to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus*" (1 Corinthians 5:5).

In our modern parlance, that is excommunication. The person is put out of the fellowship of the local congregation, removed from the membership roll and all areas of ministry, and forbidden to partake the Lord's Supper.

Excommunication concerns the whole church. In other words, the members of the church are to treat the person as an unbeliever and to have no spiritual fellowship with him. The church as a whole is to withdraw from the person. "*Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us*" (2 Thessalonians 3:6). "*Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself*" (1 Timothy 6:5).

With the person being delivered unto Satan and treated as a heathen and publican would serve to remove all false assurances and pretences of his relationship with God.

God's Approval

Our Lord Jesus ended His instruction on church discipline with these words: "*Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them*" (Matthew 18:18-20).

Matthew 18:19-20 is often used to apply to corporate praying. The specific context, however, is church discipline. Because church discipline is a serious and unpleasant matter, our Lord Jesus gives this added note of assurance to those who have to bear this heavy responsibility. If church discipline is carried out according to the steps as delineated by our Lord Jesus Christ, men's decision on earth will have the mark of approval from heaven. May God give us the courage to do until the stars fall.

Tribute to Mrs Tow Siang Hwa

This week, we mourn the passing of Mrs Tow. She was called home to rest and glory by our Lord on 5 May 2010. We know her as the quintessential wife of a pastor with a meek and quiet spirit.

Our family came to know Dr and Mrs Tow better when we were serving in Vancouver, British Columbia. During that time, we experienced the love and generosity of Dr and Mrs Tow. At that time, her health still allowed her to travel with Dr Tow wherever the work of God demanded his personal attention. Later, when health did not allow her to keep up with the rigours of travel, he travelled alone, but her prayers went with him. She was very much the Proverbs 31 woman so that he could be the Proverbs 31 man who “is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land.”

During the times when Dr Tow stayed at our home, they would call each other on the telephone several times a day. The calls were not long, but they were frequent. My wife and I looked with admiration at the love of our pastor for his wife and hers for him – a love that spanned over half a century and waned not a bit. He must have done something right, we said to ourselves. She must have too.

To the members of Vancouver, she was like our mother. She was one whom the ladies of the church looked up to. To the young members of the church, including my daughter, Mrs Tow was their grandma. I am sure that it can be said of Mrs Tow that her children – Calvary Jurong as well as in Vancouver – will arise to call her blessed.

This time, we shared in the grief of Dr Tow over the passing of his wife. This time, we also shared in the joy over the work of salvation that God had wrought in the life of Mrs Tow through our Lord Jesus Christ. Mrs Tow will be fondly remembered by the congregations of Calvary and Vancouver for her life. Today, we rise up and bless God for her. One day, we will rise up and bless God with her.

16 May 10

June will be a busy month for all of us. Below is a list of up coming events which you should be praying for and planning to attend.

28 May (Friday and public holiday)

- * Combined BP Youth Conference (9:30am – 3:30pm). This will be held at Life BPC. Dr Jack Sin and Mr Mark Chen will be speaking on the theme *Believing and Be Living!*
- * Teachers' Retreat (Mandarin Congregation, 9:30am – 2:30pm).

11 June (Friday)

- * Annual Missions Conference (7:30pm). Rev David Li, Field Director of China Evangelistic Mission (North Thailand) will be preaching, and several missionaries will also be giving their reports.

12 June (Saturday)

- * Missions Workshop (3:00pm – 6:00pm). Pastor Bob Landis will be speaking on “Seven Reasons Why You Should Serve God” and MTT members will be giving their testimonies on their calling into the ministry. This will be followed by a Q&A.
- * Annual Missions Conference (7:30pm). Pastor Bob Landis will be preaching. He will also be presenting a video on missions.

13 June (Sunday)

- * Lord's Day Worship services. Pastor Bob Landis preaches, and the MTT members will be teaching the children in the Junior Worship.

14-19 June (Monday to Saturday)

- * Annual Bible Conference at Marriott Putrajaya.

27 June (Sunday)

- * Evening of Praise and Thanksgiving (6:00pm). This will be an evening service with testimonies, special vocal and instrumental music; Mrs Landis will be doing a chalk drawing.

Roles and Responsibilities of Men in the Church

“God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” (Genesis 1:27). God made man and woman to be different. The differences do not in anyway indicate the disparity in worth or value of one gender over the other. The differences between man and woman simply mean that that they have different roles and responsibilities.

The world today wants to obliterate the differences so that in some cases, women were sent to do men's jobs. In *Numbers*, only men were numbered. The reason is not because women were not important to be included in the census; rather the census was taken for the purpose of preparing for war (*Numbers* 1:3). In those days, the defence of the nation was men's work. During Second World War, women filled the positions in the factories producing munitions and war supplies. They replaced the men who were called to the battlefield. Posters of Rosie the Riveter sprung up everywhere showing a lady flexing her biceps with the slogan – We Can Do It! Rosie became an American feminist icon with the message that women can do everything that men can do.

Since then women have taken on work that were traditionally done by men, and some have even risen to the top. Some of the world's strongest political leaders were women – Golda Meir, Indira Gandhi, Margaret Thatcher.

This We-Can-Do-It attitude has influenced the thinking of many in Christendom. The current head of the Episcopal Church is a woman. Protestant denominations – Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians – have ordained women ministers.

Our consideration will focus on the roles and responsibilities of men and women in the church and not in the home or in society. The emphasis is the church because the church represents a special relationship between mankind and God. Our Lord Jesus built the church (*Matthew* 16:18). He loved the church, “and gave himself for it” (*Ephesians* 5:25). He has given specific instruction for the running of the church, which means that if God's commands



concerning the roles and responsibilities of men and women in the church are disregarded or distorted, then we cannot claim that we honour our Lord Jesus Christ as the Head of the church; neither can we claim that we are obedient to His will.

On several occasions, God sought men to assume leadership in the church. Samuel told Saul that *“the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the LORD hath commanded him to be captain over his people”* (1 Samuel 13:14). God told Jeremiah, *“Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth; and I will pardon it”* (Jeremiah 5:1). He said the same to Ezekiel, *“And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it”* (Ezekiel 22:30). Sadly, as in the days of Ezekiel, God said that He found none. The church today suffers from a similar dearth of godly male leadership – men who will stand in the gap.

Desiring a Good Work

Spirit leadership in the church is men’s responsibility. The phenomenon of women taking a lead in the spiritual leadership of the church is the result of liberal theology and the feminist movement.

The reason for women spiritual leadership is also due in part to men abrogating their God-given responsibilities. There are few men who are willing to step forward and be counted. Men ought to give heed to what Paul said: *“This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work”* (1 Timothy 3:1). The phrase “true saying” means that it is a statement of fact that is worth its constant repeating. It seems that the Christian men in Paul’s time also needed constant reminders to be spiritual leaders in the church.

The “desire” is also translated as “coveted” in 1 Timothy 6:10, and it has a negative connotation. In our present context, there are men who sincerely think that it is wrong to desire the office of a bishop because such a desire is not only presumptuous but it also could be motivated by pride.

Paul’s exhortation must also be seen its historical context. Back in the days of the church, to be leader in the church was hardly an attractive proposition. Persecution against Christians was rampant, and often the authorities would go for leaders first.

Also, the concept of biblical leadership is servanthood. The man who aspires to the leader of all must be the servant of all. Our Lord Jesus teaches that *“whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister [Gk: diakonos]; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant [Gk: doulous]”* (Matthew 20:26-27).

Spiritual leaders are servants. This is the kind of leadership that Paul is calling men to aspire to. This is also the kind of leadership that the future well being of the church is absolutely dependent upon, and it is the kind of leadership that the church so desperately needs.

Christian man, have you prayed and thought about the possibility of serving God in the church? Rather than just stay on the sidelines complaining about how things could be better, are you willing to step forward and stand in the gap?

Doing the Work of Teaching

The role of preaching the Word of God to the people of God is primarily man’s responsibility. In the Bible, there are numerous examples of women taking on the teaching role. *“My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother”* (Proverbs 1:8). Paul also commended the influence of Timothy’s mother and grandmother on his life (2 Timothy 1:5).

However, God has ordained men to be teachers in a local assembly. *“But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression”* (1 Timothy 2:12-14). *“Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church”* (1 Corinthians 14:34-35).

These passages do not suggest that women are weaker and less competent on spiritual matters. They merely state the structure that God has ordained for His church. Men who have the privilege to teach ought not to be proud because ministers of God’s Word are spiritual servants.

Sadly, women are assuming the roles of teachers because men are unwilling to be trained and fulfil this role. The fact that women are ordained as ministers does not speak well of Christian men.

I remember very well what the late Reverend Timothy Tow said in response to criticisms that we co-labour with ordained women missionaries. He said, “If the men would not go to the mission field, and the women would, then the men should keep quiet!”

The challenge for Christian men is not to wait or pray for some other men to go into the full-time ministry. As I have said before, we must be prepared for the eventuality that Calvary would have to do without full-time ministers, and the work of teaching and preaching must be shared by lay leaders.

To be sure, a full-time minister with formal seminary training has many benefits, and as a church, we must look and prepare young men to serve our LORD full-time. However, every man in the church must purposefully develop his skills at teaching the Bible because that is also the work of a husband and a father.

Being the Godly Example

All Christians are examples to others, for good or for bad. Christian men/leaders have the direct instruction from God. Leaders are to “*feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock*” (1 Peter 5:2-3).

Paul's epistles to Timothy and Titus (1 Timothy 3:2-13; Titus 1:6-9) give us a list of characteristics of a godly man. The purpose for this list is to identify the men who have the kind of qualities to be spiritual leaders in the church. The list is also a teaching tool for parents to cultivate these qualities in their sons. Here is the list of qualities taken from 1 Timothy 3:2-13 and Titus 1:6-9.

- * Blameless – beyond reproach meaning to say that there is a consistency in the person's life that no one can question his commitment to Christ.
- * The husband of one wife – marital fidelity.
- * Vigilance – to be watchful over his thoughts, words, and actions; one who is diligent in his business.
- * Sober (also Titus 1:8) – to be sensible.
- * Of good behaviour – to be modest in one's conduct.
- * Given to hospitality... a lover of hospitality (Titus 1:8) – generous with one's possessions.
- * Apt to teach – diligent and faithful in the study of Scriptures. John Gill adds, that such a man is “able to explain, lay open, and illustrate the truths of the Gospel, and defend them, and refute error.”
- * Not given to wine (also Titus 1:7) – not to have one's judgment impaired by lack of self-control.
- * No striker...not a brawler... Not soon angry (Titus 1:7) – not abusive verbally or physically, not quarrelsome, able to disagree without being disagreeable.
- * Not greedy of filthy lucre...not covetous... not given to filthy lucre (Titus 1:7) – not a materialistic person, not motivated by money.
- * Patient – is able to bear the wrongs and offences of others.
- * One that ruleth well his own house – one who is able to manage his own home, fulfils the duties of a husband and father.
- * Not a novice – not spiritually immature, not spiritually proud.
- * Have a good report of them which are without – an exemplary Christian in and out of the church.
- * Grave – man of dignity. A man with *gravitas*, one to whom others can look to with confidence.
- * Not double tongued – consistently truthful, not slanderers or gossipers.
- * Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience... Holding fast the faithful word (Titus 1:9) – faithful to the doctrines of the Christian faith.
- * Not selfwilled (Titus 1:7) – does not promote his own agenda in the church, a team player.
- * A lover of good men – choose the company of good and godly people.
- * Just – fair and without partiality in dealing with others.
- * Holy – devout towards God.
- * Temperate – to exercise self-control in the natural appetites.

Undoubtedly, these are high standards. It is ironic that we look for these qualities in those we would like elders and deacons of the church, but yet most Christian men do not make a point to live up to these qualities in their own lives. These high standards are not for just leaders of the church but for all Christian men. May God impress upon all Christian men to pursue the role of being theologically strong teachers, spiritually mature leaders and godly examples in the church. The church cannot afford not to have them.

23 May 10

The Bible extols the value of the godly woman. *“Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies”* (Proverbs 31:10). She is the *“a crown to her husband”* (Proverbs 12:4). Alexander Pope, English poet writes, *“All other goods by fortune’s hand are given; a wife is the peculiar gift of Heaven.”*

When the Bible exhorts husbands to *“dwell with [their wives] according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered”* (1 Peter 3:7), the description of the wives as “weaker vessels” does not mean that the women are of an inferior quality; rather, it means that they are more delicate and are therefore to be treated with more gently and kindly. Spiritually, women are equal with men. The women are entitled to all the hopes and promises of God. They have the same spiritual privileges. But women are more precious! As the weaker vessel, women are made of fine china; men, on the other hand, are made of clay.

Those who claim that the Bible and traditional Christian views are biased against women failed to see that the Bible ensures women’s property rights (Numbers 27:1-11); that she was to be loved and protected by her husband (Ephesians 5:28-30). Such teachings on women far exceeded the treatment that other women enjoyed in those days, when women were nothing but their husband’s chattel.

In both the Old and New Testaments, women were engaged in all manner of work. They tended the flock (Exodus 2:16). They did business (Proverbs 31:14-18). However, the Bible does place some restrictions on what women can do in the church. Again, it does not mean that God made women to be inferior; He simply made them different.

She is Submissive

Every Christian is to be submissive. *“Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble”* (1 Peter 5:5). But the Bible emphasizes this trait when describing the roles of women in the church. Here are the key passages.

“But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God. Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered. For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man. For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels” (1 Corinthians 11:3-10, see also 1 Corinthians 14:34-38; 1 Timothy 2:11-14).

Again, we have to remind ourselves that this submissive role of women does not mean that they are inferior to men. The differences between men and women are not one of quality or ability, the differences are merely functional.

“I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God” (1 Corinthians 11:3). The relationship between man and woman is compared to the relationship between Christ and God. The man being the head of the woman does not mean that he is superior; in the same way, God being the head of Christ does not mean that God is superior to Christ. The differences are functional because the roles are different.

When Paul wrote, *“Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence”* (1 Timothy 2:11-12), the meaning is this: do not let a woman enter into a work for which she is not created.

It is like asking a woman to sing bass. She cannot not because she is inferior, but simply because she was not made to sing bass just as man is not made to sing soprano (at least not naturally). In the same way, God has made them for His ordained purposes and specific roles. When His authority is defied, and His purposes are ignored, the whole structure of humanity breaks down.

The modern society has also fed the false view that to lead is better than to follow; that followers are of lesser worth than leaders. The Bible teaches that the leader is the servant. *“Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant”* (Matthew 20:26-27). Biblical leadership is servanthood. The leader is the one who is expected to lay down his all to protect and provide

for those whom he is called to lead. Protection of and provision for the church are not burdens that woman ought to bear. Man must shoulder those responsibilities.

She Teaches

It would be a mistake to think that the woman has no teaching role in the church. *“Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man, Well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work”* (1 Timothy 5:9-10). To bring up children is to train the children.

Solomon wrote, *“My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother: For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck”* (Proverbs 1:8-9; 6:20; 15:20). Woman is responsible also for the training of children.

The role of teaching and nurturing children is not to be diminished. The many examples of godly leaders in the Bible prove this point. Without Jochebed, there would be no Moses. Without Hannah, there would be no Samuel. Without Lois and Eunice, there would be no Timothy. No woman would know the extent of her influence in the lives of the children until they receive their rewards in heaven. Who knows may be one of you is training a future minister of the Gospel.

Besides training children, women in the church also has a role in training younger women. *“The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed”* (Titus 2:3-5). To teach the young women is a ministry that is specifically designed for women in the church. Women may minister to other women more effectively than men.

She Serves

Hospitality is an important ministry in the church. *“Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality”* (Romans 12:13). *“Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares”* (Hebrews 13:2). Hospitality is an avenue where we can show Christian love. Hospitality can also be a tool for evangelism.

In the days before hotels, the only way for travellers to rest for the night is to count on the hospitality of other people. It was a common thing for the early Christians to keep an empty room and full pantry for strangers. Paul says that a woman is well regarded *“if she have lodged strangers.”*

Paul adds, *“if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted.”* The apostle is not saying that women literally should wash the feet of other believers; rather he is describing the humble attitude of women in service, especially in the area of consolation.

The godly woman in the church learns, nurtures, serves, and comforts. Her roles and responsibilities in the church are different from man's, but they are not any less significant or important; neither is she inferior to man. May the LORD help the women in the church to serve God in the ministries for which He has ordained for them, and may the LORD also help men to honour the women for what they do.

30 May 10

The Will of God

Which university should I apply to? What course of study should I take in university? What job should I apply for? Should I quit my job and change my career? Should I go into the full-time ministry? Should I move to another part of the country? Should I buy this house? Who should I marry? Should I marry at all?

Every Christian would have asked some, if not all, of these questions some time in his life. These questions concern the will of God for a person. It is good that believers ask these questions because it is an indication of a person's desire to do what is right and pleasing to God.

The problem, however, is not in asking these questions, but in finding the answers to them. Can you know the will of God for your life? How can you find out what is God's will for you?

Sadly, there are Christians who do not care about God's will for their lives. They are content to know that they are going to heaven, and they are the least concerned about what they do on earth. Most of the time, they just flounder about aimlessly. They live their lives like the rifleman that shoots with both his eyes closed, just pull the trigger and hope for the best.

On the other hand, there are Christians who have resorted to looking for that special revelation from God. They "fleece test" God, just as Gideon did. They look to God to reveal His will by fulfilling some tasks, just as Eliezer did when he was looking for a wife for Isaac. They hope for an audible voice from an unlikely source, such as the donkey that spoke to Balaam. They look for circumstances that seem to fall nicely into place, as in the case of Jonah. They pray for that dramatic experience, such as the one Paul had on his way to Damascus.

The Bible tells us that God is our Father and our Provider. Our Lord Jesus asked the disciples, "*Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows.*" (Luke 12:6-7). If we believe that God is good, and that He cares about us, it would also mean that He would not leave us to wander about aimlessly in our lives' journey.

What is God's Will?

Before we can do God's will, it would be easier if we know what it is, where and how to look for it. So, what is God's will? Some have used the phrase "God's will" to refer to a time of uncertainty, flux, perhaps even indolence. "What do you want to do after you graduate?" The usual answer: "I'm waiting for God's will."

Others have used the phrase as an excuse for disobedience, or to wriggle out of some responsibility or commitment. "Why do you quit seminary?" The answer: "It's not God's will." Of course, the follow-up question is – "Were you mistaken?"

What is God's will? There are some who define God's will in terms of His dealings with men: His perceptive, desiderative, directive, cooperative, punitive, permissive, and decretive wills (for more, read *The Clock of the Sevenfold Will of God* by Rev. Timothy Tow).

Others define God's will in several aspects: His sovereign will, His desire, His general providence, and His specific direction.

God's sovereign will:

The Westminster Confession of Faith defines God's sovereign will this way: "God from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass." (WCF, Chapter 3.1). The sovereign will of God refers to His rule over the world. "*And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as*

nothing: and He [the LORD] doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" (Dan. 4:35).

The Apostle Paul wrote that God *"Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him: In Whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will"* (Ephesians 1:9-11). The will of God is sovereign, eternal, immutable and perfect.

God's desire: This refers to the will of God that delights Him. In the Garden of Gethsemane, our Lord Jesus prayed, *"Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done"* (Luke 22:42). With regard to sinners, God's desire is that all be saved, *"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"* (2 Pet, 3:9). With regard to believers, Paul exhorts us, *"For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication"* (1 Thess. 4:3), which means that God's desire also works for the good of His people.

God's general providence: Before he left for Jerusalem, the Apostle Paul told the elders in Ephesus, *"I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will"* (Acts 18:21). Clearly, Paul did not know what the future would bring; he might return to Ephesus or he might not. It all depended on God's providence. The Bible rebukes the self-confident man who plans without praying. Instead, we are to pray and seek God's will, *"Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that"* (James 4:14-15).

God's specific direction: This refers to God's direct leading in a person's life – what course of study to take, who to marry, where to live, etc. This is usually what people mean when they say that they are seeking God's will. In the Old Testament, there are many examples of God's direct and specific leading in the lives of His people. In the New Testament, the disciples prayed for God's specific leading in choosing a replacement for Judas Iscariot: *"And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen"* (Acts 1:24).

When we talk about "finding God's will" we usually mean God's direct guidance to specific issues in our lives. The question is: Does God still reveal His will to us directly and specifically? God willing – *which one is it?* – we will explore this issue in the weeks to come.

06 Jun 10

Our Church's Annual Missions Conference this year has taken up a notch higher with more activities and more meetings. The meetings will be held over two evenings: Friday (11 June), and Saturday (12 June), with a missions workshop on Saturday afternoon. Present at the Missions Conference will be our missionaries from Sri Lanka, the Rev. Vijay and his wife, Thanuja; from Vietnam, Pr. Phan and Hau; from China, Pr. Yang De-gang and Xiu-rong. They will be giving reports of their work.

We are also privileged to have the Rev. David Li and his wife, Sarah. Rev. Li is the Director of China Evangelistic Mission (CEM) in North Thailand. He will be bringing the message on Friday evening. Pastor Bob Landis will be conducting the missions workshop on Saturday afternoon; he will be preaching on Saturday evening.

Let me encourage you to come for the Missions Conference. You have been praying for our missionaries. At the Missions Conference, you will be able to meet with them personally. So come, and see and hear what the LORD has been doing in these missions stations.

Last week, we began a new series in our pastoral letter – *Finding God's Will*. What does it mean to find the will of God? To "find" means "actively search in order to discover." When a man says that he is finding God's will for his life, it means that he is seeking what God would want him to do. This is a noble pursuit. However, we must be careful that this idea of finding God's will is not unique to the Christian faith. As a young boy growing up in an idolatrous home, I remember my great-grandfather and grandfather prostrating themselves before the idols divining the will of gods.

Pagans and Divination

The Bible has many accounts of unbelievers who sought the wills of their gods in times of crises. After the Philistines had captured the Ark of the Covenant, the LORD afflicted them with emerods. The plague spread throughout Philistia as the Ark was passed from city to city. To find out the real cause of the emerods, the Philistines put the Ark on a cart, and "*send it away...if it goeth up by the way of his own coast to Bethshemesh, then [God] hath done us this great evil: but if not, then we shall know that it is not His hand that smote us: it was a chance that happened to us*" (1 Sam. 6:8-9). This was a form of divination.

When the ship on which Jonah was travelling met with strong winds, the sailors cast lots to find out the cause of the terrible storm (Jon. 1:7). Pagan kings such as Nebuchadnezzar also used astrologers to discover the divine will. Laban pursued Jacob because Laban thought that his son-in-law had stolen his household gods, which were used for divination (Gen. 31:23ff). Necromancy – divination by invoking the dead – was a common practice (1 Sam. 28:7). Necromancy is a compound word – *nekros* (corpse) and *manteuomai* (soothsaying).

Unbelievers today also resort to these practices: geomancy (Feng Shui), cartomancy (divination by cards such as tarot or the use of ouija boards), cheiromancy (palmistry), demonomancy (divination by demons), horoscope, astrology, and many others.

All forms of divination are explicitly forbidden by God. "*When thou art come into the land which the LORD Thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination (witchcraft), or an observer of times (horoscope), or an enchanter, or a witch, Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the LORD: and because of these abominations the LORD Thy God doth drive them out from before thee. Thou shalt be perfect with the LORD Thy God. For these nations, which thou shalt possess, hearkened unto observers of times, and unto diviners: but as for thee, the LORD Thy God hath not suffered thee so to do*" (Deut. 18:9-14, see also Lev. 19:26, 31; 2 Kings 17:17; Isa. 8:19).

The Word of God warns us about the dreadful end of those who engage in these devilish activities, *“the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death”* (Rev. 21:8). God’s people are never to be involved in any divination activity.

Seeking God’s Will is Submitting to His Authority

Why does the Bible forbid divination? There are several reasons: First, pagan divination involves external and visible signs, and these things do not engender faith. In fact, they are antithetical to faith. The reliance on external signs is the mark of spiritual immaturity; such a person cannot believe and obey what God has plainly revealed in the Holy Scriptures.

Second, when a man says that he wants to seek God’s will, it also presupposes that he is willing to obey God. To find God’s will is essentially to submit to God’s authority.

Strange as it may sound, every person is looking for some authority to guide him through his life because every man wants to be sure that he is on the right track. A man has been offered a new job. Should he take or reject the offer? He can do one of three things: One, he can work out the pros and cons – higher pay, better perks, more vacation, but longer working hours, longer commute. Then he makes his decision. Who is this man’s authority? Answer: Himself. He decides to accept or reject the job offer based upon his own reasoning and needs.

Two, he can pay a quick visit to his friendly crystal ball gazer, who would then tell him what he can expect in the next five years. Who is the man’s authority? The fortune-teller.

Third, this man prayerfully considers God’s calling for his life. What are his motives for taking up the job? How would the job affect his spiritual life? What is the advice given by his godly friends? What is God telling him through the Holy Scriptures? Who is the man’s authority? God.

To seek God’s will is to submit to His authority, and that authority is found in His Word. Solomon exhorts us to *“Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths”* (Prov. 3:5-6). Most people misquote this verse to mean that the LORD will give special direction in our day to day decisions and especially in special circumstances. However, the Hebrew word for “direct” means “to go straight” (Prov. 4:25) or “walk uprightly” (Prov. 15:21). The lesson is this: when the LORD directs our paths, He is not giving special revelation by signs and visions through fortune-telling and divination. Rather, He expects us to walk straight and uprightly according to what He has already given us in His inspired Word.

13 Jun 10

We extend a warm welcome to the Rev and Mrs David Li from North Thailand. Pastor Li is the Director of China Evangelistic Mission (CEM) in North Thailand. We thank God for their faithfulness in the Gospel ministry in North Thailand.

We also welcome the Rev and Mrs Bob Landis and members of the Make a Timothy Today (MTT). They will be ministering the Word at our Annual Bible Conference starting tomorrow. Please pray for the Annual Bible Conference that our LORD will be pleased to bless the ministry of His Word.

Knowing the Will of God

The Bible categorically forbids all forms of pagan divination because they represented a subversion of the authority of God, and a circumvention of the laws of God. *“There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the LORD: and because of these abominations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee. Thou shalt be perfect with the LORD thy God”* (Deut. 18:10-13).

However, in the Old Testament, the LORD did guide His people in very specific and visible ways. He also provided means through which the people can know His will.

Prophets

In the Old Testament, a man could go to the prophet if he wanted help to deal with a particular situation. When Saul wanted help to find his father’s donkeys, he went to a “man of God” (1 Sam. 9:6). This man was a seer or a prophet (1 Sam. 9:9). When Barak needed confirmation of his calling to deliver the Israelites, he went to Deborah, a prophetess (Judges 4).

The Old Testament prophets often prefaced their messages with “thus saith the LORD,” indicating that they were speaking the will of God. The history of Israel was also fraught with false prophets whose *modus operandi* were similar to God’s prophets. The telling differences between God’s prophets and the false ones were that the words of God’s prophets also came to pass (Deut. 18:22); they would never subvert the faith of the people (Deut. 13:1-3).

There are people who are easily impressed by the “accurate predictions” of well-known fortune tellers. I saw one who declared on a news network that he had a sixty percent fulfillment rate. By biblical standards, he was still a false prophet. And even if he had a perfect fulfillment rate, he would still be a false prophet because his predictions undermined the authority of God and the faith of another person.

Urim and Thummim

In the Old Testament, the high priest could use the Urim and Thummim to determine God’s will. The Bible does not give many details concerning the Urim and Thummim. We do not know what they looked like. We do not know how they were used. The Bible only records the instances in which they were used (Exod. 28:30; Deut. 33:8). The use of the Urim and Thummim faded from the picture during the period of the kings, when God spoke to Israel through the prophets. The last mention of the Urim and Thummim is Ezra 2:63, when Ezra used this device to determine the genealogy of the priests.

Casting Lots

Lots were cast to divide the Promised Land (Josh. 18:6). However, it must be pointed out that the lots were merely a confirmation of what Jacob had told his sons before his death, some 400 years earlier (Gen. 49). Lots were also cast to choose a king (1 Sam. 10); they were cast to determine the order of the priesthood (1 Chron. 24).

Although lots were cast, the use of lots did not undermine the sovereignty of God. *“The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD”* (Prov. 16:33).

It also pointed that the casting of lots ended just before the downpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Prior to that blessed event, the disciples cast lots to choose a replacement for Judas Iscariot. The lot fell on Matthias. After that, the Holy Spirit and the inspired Word of God were the means by which the people can know the will of God.

Signs and Visions

In the Old Testament, God also revealed His will to the people through signs and visions. God spoke to Moses from the burning bush. He revealed His will to Jacob in a dream. Gideon discovered God’s will by the fleece test. There are many other accounts in the Old Testament in which God dealt directly with His people. However, the Apostles never resorted to such means. God led His people through the Holy Spirit, His Word, and not through visible signs and visions.

The Word of God

The ministry of our Lord Jesus is proof that people would not turn to God just because they saw a miracle. Instead, those who had seen a miracle would ask for another.

The Jews in Capernaum saw the miracles of our Lord; yet He said to the people, *“If the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell”* (Luke 10:13-15). But the people who saw the miracles would not believe or follow Him.

This is not to say that the power of God is in any way diminished. God is still omnipotent, but for a believer to expect and demand that God reveals His will through spectacular signs when He has given us His complete revelation is a lazy way to find out the will of God. It requires neither work nor discipline, nor does it help in the spiritual and character development of the person.

The angels came to Lot to inform him of God’s will for the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, *“Hast thou here any besides? son in law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring them out of this place: For we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the LORD; and the LORD hath sent us to destroy it”* (Gen. 19:12-13). Did Lot’s daughters and their husbands believe? No.

Would people today believe if God had told us He would visit the nations of the world with a worse judgment than that of Sodom and Gomorrah? Unlikely. What if God should send His angels to warn us (and you personally) of His imminent judgment, would people more likely believe? I think not.

Abraham told the rich man who asked that Lazarus be sent back to earth to warn his five brothers of the reality of hell fire and God’s judgment. Abraham said to the rich man, *“If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.”* (Luke 16:31). Moses and the prophets refer to the Holy Scriptures. The point is that if the people will not believe the Word of God, neither will they believe even if they have seen a miracle.

We must acknowledge that the means by which God revealed His will to Israel in the Old Testament and to the church in the apostolic age should not be taken as the norm. These were narratives of God’s leading in the lives of His people in very specific circumstances, and we must be careful not to turn them into precepts or principles for our own convenience. The Word of God does not give us any procedure by which we can discover the will of God. There is, however, one thing that is repeatedly emphasized in the Holy Scriptures – *“If ye love me, keep my commandments”* (John 14:15, 23; 10:27; Matt. 7:24). If you want to know God’s will, begin by obeying what He has revealed to us in the Holy Scriptures. In Christ.

20 Jun 10

Praise God for the Missions Conference. Personally, I am much encouraged and challenged by the reports and the Word that had been preached over Friday and Saturday.

We also praise God for the success of our Annual Bible Conference. Praise God for the ministry of the Word through God's servants: Preachers Eric Tay and Jonathan Yeo and Pastor Bob Landis and the MTT. I pray that the Word that has been sowed would bear much fruit in the days to come.

On 26 June (Saturday), there is a conference echo as we recount the blessings that God has bestowed upon us. On 27 June (Sunday) at 6:00pm, Pastor Landis and the MTT will minister to us one last time before they return to home. So please come for an evening of Praise, Thanksgiving and Testimonies.

Knowing the Will of God (IV)

Whenever a person says that he is seeking God's will, it usually means that he is looking for God's specific direction in his life, especially with regard to major decisions – what course of study to take, who to marry, where to live, etc. These are important decisions, and it is honourable that a person wants to know and obey what God has planned for him. The next step is more difficult – If God has a specific will for my life, how can I discover it?

Seek the Centre of God's Will

This is the topic that has fascinated many believers. Like most issues, there is a whole spectrum of views. There are those who believe that God has a specific will for every person, and they must seek God's will. The statements – “I am seeking to be in the centre of God's will” and “I am praying and waiting for God's will” – apply to this group of people.

The sad reality is that many of those whom I know who were seeking God's will at one time of their lives or another ended as average Christians. They became frustrated because they were looking for God's will with rose-tinted glasses. They had a fairy tale concept that just because they were seeking God's will, the Lord was duty-bound to bring everything into place just as they desired and imagined.

The opposite is true: seeking and doing God's will is like taking a walk in the dark. Our only consolation is that we do not walk alone. Our Lord walks with us, and He has given us His Word, which “*is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path*” (Ps. 119:105).

There are also believers who are praying for and waiting for God's will. Sadly for many, the waiting becomes an excuse for slothfulness in the Lord's ministry. Many also become disenchanted with their present work because they are constantly looking for the nebulous “will of God” that will be more fulfilling. As the wise Preacher says “*the soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing*” (Prov. 13:4). Even the sluggard has a desire to know God's will, but he will never find it because he is not faithful in his present calling.

Do not Seek, there is no Centre

At the other end of the spectrum, there are people who said that God has no specific will for the individual person. Hence, it is futile for a person to seek God's will because it cannot be found. And it cannot be found because it is not there.

Those who hold to this view say if God has a specific will for a person, then he ought to be seeking God's will in everything – what clothes to wear, what to cook, where to shop, etc. In other words, believers should not make any distinction between important decisions and ordinary day-to-day ones.

Furthermore, they say that if God has a specific will for a person, then there can be no equal options because God's will is only one. Hence, a person would be out of God's will if he wears a blue shirt on Tuesday when it is God's will that he wears a yellow one.

Such an argument is fallacious because it argues from absurdity. It is foolish for a believer to place equal importance in the choosing of his lunch and his life partner. Early in his ministry, Moses made no such distinction, and the people had to stand in line waiting from morning to evening to ask him about God's counsel. His father-in-law told Moses that he was going about things the wrong way. Moses listened to his father-in-law, and he appointed able men to help him so that "*they judged the people at all seasons: the **hard causes** they brought unto Moses, but every **small matter** they judged themselves*" (Exod. 18:25).

The same principle is applied by the apostles when they appointed deacons to take over the business of ministering to the widows in the church so that they could give themselves "*to prayer, and to the ministry of the word*" (Acts 6:2-4).

Moses and the apostles made distinctions between essentials and non-essentials; so did our Lord Jesus when He rebuked the Pharisees for tithing spices but omitting "*the **weightier matters** of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone*" (Matt. 23:23). Our Lord's charge was that while the Pharisees were scrupulous in observing the small matters, they had neglected the more important ones (*the weightier matters*). Our Lord Jesus differentiated issues in terms of their importance, and so should every discerning Christian. Not every decision is of equal weight, but all decisions – even in eating and drinking – should be made to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31).

A Christian had prayed and sincerely sought God's will, and he made a decision because he said, "God told me to do it." That decision later proved to be wrong. Does not this prove that no one can really know God's will? And that God does not have a specific will for a person?

The fact that a sincere Christian makes foolish decisions does not mean that God does not have a will for him. Neither does it mean that God's will is unknowable.

God's Will or Not? Seek or Not Seek?

Personally, I believe in God's will for a person's life. I also believe that God's will is primarily revealed in the Holy Scriptures, and that as we walk in obedience to His Word (not occasionally or selectively, but whole-heartedly), we are doing His will. Obedience to God's Word then is the key to knowing His will. Sadly, that may be too high a price for the average Christian.

27 Jun 10

Praise the LORD for another successful Bible Conference. It was indeed a blessed week as we gathered in Marriott Putrajaya for a week of intense study of the Holy Scriptures. We thank the LORD for the faithful exposition of His Word through His servants – Preachers Eric Tay and Jonathan Yeo, and the Pastor Bob Landis and the MTT ministry.

The Conference committee under the leadership of Drs Liang and Ho had worked very hard months before, throughout, and right up to the last minutes of the conference. We truly thank God for their labour of love.

All it remains for us is to remember the lessons that we have learned, keep the promises that some of us might have made to God. As the theme for the Mandarin Congregation says – unity in Christ – let us press on, striving together for the sake of the Gospel. And that as God’s people, we will do all that God has entrusted to us, and having done all, to stand!

KNOWING THE WILL OF GOD (V)

The Westminster Confession of Faith states: “God from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.” (WCF, Chap. 3.1).

God’s Decree

God’s sovereign will is eternal and unchangeable – “*The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations*” (Ps. 33:11). But lest we think of God as a cosmic tyrant imposing His will arbitrarily on poor creatures like us, we must realize that God’s sovereign will is most wise and more holy; His will for us is perfect. As the Apostle Paul exhorts Christians to “*be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God*” (Rom. 12:2).

God’s will refers to His sovereign decrees. In other words, God wills certain things for our lives by sovereignly determining them to be so in our lives. Election is God’s sovereign will. “*According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love...according to the good pleasure of His will*” (Eph. 1:4-5). God’s decrees reveal what He intends to do.

God’s Commands

God’s will also refers to His commands. By His Word, God also wills certain things for us by requiring our obedience to His revealed Word. “*Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven*” (Matt. 7:21). His commands reveal what we ought to do.

The sovereign will of God and the commandment to obey His Word are best seen in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was the decree of God the Father that our Lord Jesus should be crucified for our sins – “*The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against His Christ. For of a truth against Thy holy child Jesus, whom **Thou hast anointed**, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever **Thy hand and Thy counsel determined before to be done***” (Acts 4:26-28). At the same time, God the Son fully obeyed the Father – “*I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me*” (John 5:30).

Obey God’s Word to Do God’s Will

Years ago, I participated in an IQ test. We were handed a piece of paper with a list of thirty questions. We were told to read the instructions, and we were told that we had one minute to do the test. The moment our teacher gave the signal to start, I was writing down the answers, skipping those questions that were too difficult for me. At the end of sixty seconds, the teacher collected the paper, and promptly announced that we had all failed. The reason was that we had not followed the instruction. The one instruction at the top of the page simply required us to read the questions and write our name at the bottom of the page. The lesson of the “test” was to drive home the point that following instructions is the key to success.

The same principle applies to our spiritual lives. The Word of God is the instruction for our faith and life. God has not left us to our own devices to live our lives according to our own desires. Instead He has given us His Word so that we may live our lives accordingly to glorify Him. The will of God is often expressed as an imperative – a commandment to be obeyed. “*For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should **abstain from fornication***” (1 Thess. 4:3). “*In every thing **give thanks**: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you*” (1 Thess. 5:18). The Psalmist says the Word of God is “*more to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward*” (Ps. 19:10-11).

God’s Word is a revelation of His character as well as His will for us – “*Be ye holy; for I am holy.*” (1 Pet. 1:16). Thus in obeying God’s Word, we are also doing His will, and we are becoming more like Him. Ironically, that was Satan’s goal when he said, “*I will be like the most High*” (Isa. 14:14). That was the lie that he told Eve, “*ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil*” (Gen. 3:5).

Both Satan and Eve were trying to be like God, but not according to God’s will (holiness) or by the means He has prescribed (obedience to His Word). They were doing apart from the Word of God.

The fundamental biblical principle is that God’s will for us will never contradict His Word. Practically, it means that we do God’s will primarily by obeying His Word. However, we must also bear in mind that God is concerned not only with what we do, but He is also concerned about why we do what we do, and how we do it. In finding God’s will, we must examine our aims, attitudes and activities.

Aims: Our goals must reflect God’s purpose for our lives. The Westminster Shorter Catechism reminds that man’s chief end is to “glorify God and enjoy Him forever” (WSC, Question #1). The ultimate aim of man is to glorify God – “*Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God*” (1 Cor. 10:31). This simple and yet profound statement encompasses every aspect of our lives from the mundane to the extraordinary, from the daily routine (eating and drinking) to the occasional events (buying a house). It also includes God’s expectations of believers – be faithful stewards (1 Cor. 4:2), be witnesses for Him (Acts 1:8), be fruitful (Col. 1:10), be a loving husband, be a submissive wife (Eph. 5:22, 25), honour your parents (Eph. 6:1-2), nurture your children (Eph. 6:4), be servants to one another (Gal. 5:13), etc. These imperatives tell us plainly God’s expectations of and goals for believers. When we make these our goals, we are doing God’s will.

If a believer is presented with an opportunity, he will have to prayerfully consider the pros and cons by carefully taking into account whether the opportunity will help or hinder God’s goals and purposes for His children. In other words, he has to consider the spiritual goals of his life, and how he may fulfill those goals in his various roles – spouse, parent, church member, Christian, etc. He would also have to consider whether the opportunity would allow him to maximize his spiritual goals.

Attitudes: God is equally concerned about how we do what we do. It is not enough to be a servant, God wants a loving servant (Gal. 5:13). It is not enough to be merciful; God wants us to extend mercy with cheerfulness (Rom. 12:8). The Church needs leaders, but God wants leaders to serve willingly and with a ready mind (1 Pet. 5:2).

The Pharisee prayed. Prayer is certainly God’s will for His children. The publican also prayed (Luke 18:11-13). Our Lord Jesus said that the publican’s prayer was answered, but not the Pharisee’s.

Actions: Our goals must be right. Our attitudes must be God-honouring. Our actions in accomplishing our goals must be biblical. We cannot use wrong actions to achieve spiritual goals. The cliché: the ends do not justify the means is scripturally right. We have seen this all too often in the world, where professional athletes use steroids to get the extra edge, businessmen exploit the loopholes, students cheat in exams, etc. As Christians, we are reminded that we cannot attain spiritual goals with satanic means – *“If a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully”* (2 Tim. 2:5).

The standard for the Christian is raised higher. It must necessarily be so because we are Christ’s! *“Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.”* (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Christians have a new Master. We have a new life in Christ, and we have a renewed mind.

Lovingly in Christ
Pastor Isaac