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03 Jul 11

“*This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it*” (Psalm 118:24). Today we welcome new members into Calvary B-P Church through baptism and transfer. Membership in the church comes with privileges and responsibilities, with the latter more than the former.

The Church [Gk: *ekklesia*] in the Bible never refers to a building of brick and mortar; it always refers to an assembly of believers of flesh and blood. “*Ekklesia*” means “to be called out.” This New Testament concept of a church was alien to the Old Testament Jews and Gentiles. To them, religion had always been localised, coming together in temples made with hands. However, in biblical Christianity, the church consists of God-fearing, Christ-centred, Spirit-filled men and women coming together in the Name and under the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the head of the church.

The English word for “church” can be traced back to the Scottish word “*kirk*.” And that is derived from the Greek word – “*kuriakos*.” This word is found only in two places in the New Testament, also used in as a possessive adjective – the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 11:20), and the Lord’s Day (Revelation 1:10). We adopt this word because wherever the early Christians met, the place became known as the Lord’s house or the house that belonged to God. So church – *kirk* in Scottish – became known as the Lord’s house. The main point is this: church refers to something that belongs to the Lord. Just as the Lord’s Day is the day that belongs to God, and the Lord’s House is the house that belongs to God, so the church – the gathering of the Lord’s people – is therefore the people who belong to God.

Put the two words – *ekklesia* and *kirk* – together, we have a beautiful picture of the church as a group of people whom God has called out to be His own. There is both a diversity that gives the church beauty as well as a unity that renders the church strong. So to all members of the church – present, new and potential – you have a part in the beauty and strength of the body of believers here at Calvary B-P Church.

Personal prayer request: please keep us in your prayers as we spend the next three weeks visiting the church in Vancouver. I shall not be doing much preaching, but will spend the time praying, planning and preparing for 2012. We leave on 4 July and God willing, we will be back 25 July.

We continue with our consideration on the clothes that we wear. Malay ladies wear the *sarong kebaya*. Indians don their *saris*. The Vietnamese ladies have their *ao dai*. Scottish men wear the kilt; for the Texans, Stetsons will be a part of their attire. What a person wears reveals something of himself/herself. The question is what a Christian should wear to reflect the person that he/she is. Christian modesty in dressing must therefore take into consideration who we are as God’s redeemed.

### **The Purpose of Clothing**

Clothing serves several purposes. First, clothing has a spiritual purpose. When God first created Adam and Eve, they were both naked yet they were not ashamed (Genesis 2:25). After they disobeyed God, their eyes “*were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons*” (Genesis 3:7). The first act after the fall was that they clothed themselves. The first intent of clothing was associated with and rooted in sin and shame. After the fall, Adam and Eve knew that it was shameful for their bodies to be left uncovered for public display. They sewed fig leaves to cover themselves. That God later covered them with animal skins substantiated the truth that nakedness after the fall was not something that God approves. Public display of nakedness, after the fall, has always been associated with sin. Nakedness in the Bible is also associated with demonic possession.

In Luke 8, when our Lord Jesus came to the city of Gadarenes, there was a man who was demon possessed; he was described as one who “*had devils long time, and ware no clothes, neither abode in any house, but in the tombs*” (Luke 8:27). When our Lord Jesus delivered him, the same man was described as one who was “*sitting at*

*the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid*” (Luke 8:35). The demon-possessed man wore no clothes. The delivered man was clothed and in his right mind. What we wear reflects our spiritual nature.

Clothing also served a practical purpose. When Paul was in prison, he asked for his cloak (2 Timothy 4:13). The Old Testament law forbade a person holding a debtor’s garment as collateral overnight lest the person had nothing to keep him warm (Exodus 22:26-27). Clothing serves a practical purpose – to protect us from the elements of nature. Some years ago, I remember reading about a student at UCLA who decided that it was natural for man not to be clothed. So he started the fall semester attending class in his bodysuit, but it was not long before he was forced to clothe himself out of necessity. His conviction was not strong enough to overcome the falling temperatures.

Clothing also has a functional role. The priests in the Old Testament were given special clothing. The priests had to put on *“holy garment...for glory and for beauty”* (Exodus 28:2). Certain professions require special kinds of clothing – white coats for doctors, scrubs for nurses, swim shorts for life-guards, helmets for construction workers, etc. The clothes we wear are sometimes dependent upon the kind of work we perform.

Lastly, clothes serve an aesthetic purpose. The priestly robes were designed *“for glory and for beauty”* (Exodus 28:2). Jacob *“loved Joseph more than all his children...and he made him a coat of many colours”* (Genesis 37:3). The multi-coloured coat that was made for Joseph was a beautiful one which elicited the envy of his brothers. Tamar, David’s daughter, also *“had a garment of divers colours upon her: for with such robes were the king’s daughters that were virgins apparelled”* (2 Samuel 13:18).

Clothes served as a means of adornment. The Apostle Paul says, *“women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array”* (1 Timothy 2:9). The word “adorn” [Gk: *kosmeo*], from which we derive the word “cosmetic.” To “adorn” means “to beautify,” or “to decorate.” Paul is acknowledging that clothes can be used to enhance one’s physical looks. He is not against all forms of enhancement.

God who is the Creator of all things does not frown man’s need to beautify. Paul says that *“whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things”* (Philippians 4:8). Christians are to take account of things that are lovely.

It would be a mistake for Christians to equate sloppy dressing with spirituality. God is not against men and women trying to add beauty to their lives, but He is against any preoccupation and inordinate attention in physical adornment to the extent that it takes priority over spiritual adornment.

### **Immodest Dressing**

Fashion is as fluid as the clouds in the sky. Change is its only constant. It changes from culture to culture. When we consider how a Christian should dress, we have to consider the culture in which we live. When the team from our church went to Sri Lanka, we had to inform ladies that they ought not to wear shorts to church, and they must wear skirts/dresses for Lord’s Day worship services, and the dresses must not reveal too much of their shoulders – in other words, no spaghetti straps.

Fashion also changes from age to age. The hemline of ladies’ dress goes up and down like a yo-yo. The same can be said of men; ties vary in widths. So in considering what dressing is modest or immodest for Christians, it is wise to give general principles rather than specific fashion styles.

### **Do not be ostentatious**

To be ostentatious, as defined by Merriam Dictionary, is to be “marked by or fond of conspicuous or vainglorious and sometimes pretentious display.” It is too much, too elaborate, too loud, too attention-getting. And ostentation may be applied to clothing, jewellery, and make-up. *“In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array”* (1 Timothy 2:9).

John Calvin describes ostentation as a vice, that “excessive eagerness and desire to be richly dressed...a desire to make a display either for the sake of pride or of departure from chastity.” He adds that “everything in dress which is not in accordance with modesty and sobriety must be disapproved.”

The idea is any physical adornment that brings attention is ostentatious. It can be from a lady who dresses like she is a model from the pages of a fashion magazine or a young man who has a Mohawk hair style and dyed bright pink.

One form of ostentation that is becoming popular is tattooing. In the past, tattoos are associated with sailors and other hardy men, but today, it is in the in thing for young people, male and female. In 2007, the Pew Research describes the age group between 26 and 40 as the “Gen-Nexters” or the “Look at me” generation, where half of the people in this age group have “either gotten a tattoo, dyed their hair an untraditional color, or had a body piercing in a place other than their ear lobe. The most popular are tattoos, which decorate the bodies of more than a third of these young adults.”

Another study done in 2006 by the journal of the American Academy of Dermatology found that about 36% of Americans age 18 to 29 have at least one tattoo! Of those surveyed, an overwhelming 60% say that they had tattoos to be more attractive, 29% have them as a mark of rebellion. Tattooing is having permanent ostentation, and it was forbidden by OT because of its association with pagan worship (Leviticus 19:28). Ostentation is immodest because it attracts attention. It is the desire to stand out from amongst the crowd. It is to boast of oneself. This is the last thing that any born again believer would want to do. Paul tells us that, “no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:29-31). God willing, we will continue with more in the principles for modest dressing next Lord’s Day.

10 Jul 11

We appreciate very much your prayers. It is good to be reacquainted with the congregation of Vancouver B-P Church. They have had a blessed Bible Conference down at Washington. Please continue to pray for VBPC, its leaders and members, and its various ministries.

### **Christian Modesty**

The clothes we wear serve several purposes. First, there is a biblical and spiritual reason for clothing; it is associated with and rooted in sin. Second, clothing serves a practical purpose of protecting us from the elements of nature. Third, clothing has a functional role. Certain jobs require special kinds of clothing. Fourth, clothing serves an aesthetic purpose. Clothes served as a means of adornment.

We still wear clothes for these reasons, although it is clear to people who are more fashion conscious today, the aesthetics of clothing have become more important than its function, and this has raised issues concerning immodest dressing. There are several guidelines to help Christians determine as to what constitutes modest dressing. First, do not be ostentatious, which is attention-getting. The Apostle Paul says that women should “*adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array*” (1 Timothy 2:9).

The second biblical principle is androgyny, a compound word consisting of *aner* (male) and *gyne* (woman), and it describes a situation where the traditional male and female roles are obscured or reversed.

The Bible is clear on androgynous dressing. “*The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the LORD thy God*” (Deuteronomy 22:5). In the New Testament, Paul argues that this distinction in physical appearance between the genders is natural and biblical. “*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....Doth not even **nature** itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering. But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God*” (1 Corinthians 11:2-16).

The word “nature” refers to a person’s original constitution which has not been altered, his natural propensity. A person’s nature is something which has been ordered by the laws of creation.

The word is used several ways in the New Testament (Romans 1:26; 2:14, 27; Galatians 2:15, etc). In Romans 11, commenting on the difference between the Jews and Gentiles, Paul writes, “*For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.... For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?*” (Romans 11:21, 24). The Jews were God’s natural branches; the Gentiles, on the other hand, were “wild by nature.”

Commenting on the sin of homosexuality, Paul writes, “*For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the **natural** use into that which is against **nature***” (Romans 1:26). Here, “nature” is used to describe the natural order of things. Homosexuality is “against nature.” In Greek, it literally means “beside nature,” an act that is out of the natural realm.

This is the meaning that Paul wants to convey in 1 Corinthians 11:14; that it is out of the realm of the natural order for men to have long hair and for women to shave their heads to make a fashion statement.

The Bible tells us very clearly that men and women are created to be different. They have different roles and functions. Deuteronomy 22:5 and 1 Corinthians 11 teach that they are also supposed to look different. Men and

women are part of God's created order. God has intended for the genders to be distinct. We must not blur that distinction by our dressing. Believers, being witnesses of God, are to consciously reflect the gender distinctions in what we wear. We cannot change our gender, and we cannot even appear to change our gender by what we wear.

In the past, when the circus came to town, one of the sideshows was the so-called circus freaks; example, the Siamese twins, or a man in a dress, or a woman who wore a beard.



In our day, this practice of cross dressing cuts across gender lines. There are men who dress like women, and women who dress like men, and it is not freakish but fashionable. The extremes of these cross-dressed to shock. Their goal was to attract attention.

However, the blurring of gender distinction is becoming more popular. In 1994, Mark Simpson, a British journalist, coined a new word – metrosexual. The dictionary defines “metrosexual” as “a usually urban [hence *metro*] heterosexual male given to enhancing his personal appearance by fastidious grooming, beauty treatments, and fashionable clothes.” Simpson has a different take. He writes that “gay men provided the early prototype for metrosexuality. Decidedly single, definitely urban, dreadfully uncertain of their identity...and socially emasculated, gay men.”

Sociologists have observed that one of the most important shifts in masculinity is that there is less avoidance of femininity; that there is a segment of men who has no qualms embracing styles, behaviour and attitudes once deemed feminine.

Just as some men become more and more enamoured to things of the fairer sex, there are also women who lift weights to have bulging muscles, dress and behave like men. In either case, it is a blurring of the distinction between men and women.

For the Christian, the clothes we wear reflect who we are in Christ. We honour Him and reflect His holy nature in what we wear. We reflect the beauty of His creation by making clear distinctions in our choice of clothes. May the Lord help us to be discerning!

17 Jul 11

In 1964, the US Supreme Court was asked to decide whether obscenity can be protected as free speech. The case involved the showing of a French film which had been banned by the state of Ohio because it had deemed the film as obscene. The case was brought up to Supreme Court, and much of it was centred on the definition of obscenity. One of the Justices, Potter Stewart wrote that obscenity was protected under free speech (which the Americans called the First Amendment), except the worst form of pornography. In his opinion, Justice Stewart offered no definition of what the worst form of pornography was except to say this: "I know it when I see it." That became one of the famous phrases in the history of the US Supreme Court.

"I know it when I see it." This standard is ambiguous to say the least. The Word of God gives Christians a more objective standard. However, this statement does show that man has an innate – albeit imperfect – understanding of what obscenity is. The same can be said about immodest dressing. You know it when you see it. We have touched on two principles of modest dressings – do not be ostentatious, and do not blur the distinction of the genders.

The third principle is – do not be sensual. Sensuality has to do with the preoccupation and gratification of the senses. To be sensuous is to be carnal or fleshly. The Biblical definition of sensuality is found in 1 John 2:16-17. *"For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever"* (1 John 2:16-17). Thus sensuality is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

One writer says that clothing that is sensual is 'too little,' 'too thin,' or 'too tight.' The British playwright, George Bernard Shaw once commented that in the past, it took the wool from two sheep to clothe a lady but today, the silk from one silkworm is more than enough. Shaw wrote this in the early 1900's. We are several decades past Shaw's time, and modesty in fashion has gone from bad to worse.

It is impossible – and not feasible – to have a standard measurement of hemlines of dresses to determine that one is long, another is short, and a third is too short; or a standard of translucence by which one blouse is deemed as just nice and another as too thin; or to have an objective standard of tightness. To paraphrase Justice Stewart, "you know it when you see it." Or others will know it when they see you wearing it.

Satan's temptations infiltrate our lives through our sight. Eve saw the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 3:6). Lot saw the well-watered plains of Jordan (Genesis 13:10). Achan saw *"a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them"* (Joshua 7:21). David saw Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:2).

The human form is created by God and it was created perfect, but the fall destroyed man's innocence. Therefore any clothing that accentuates the flesh would be immodest.

The fourth test when we can apply to determine whether a piece of clothing is modest or immodest is the principle of association. There is a great deal of things which are by themselves not immoral, but Christians refrain from doing these things because of their associations with the world and sin.

The principle of association is the argument that Paul employed in 1 Corinthians 8-10 when he dealt with the issue of Christian liberty. There are activities that Christians do not engage in not because the activities are sinful or immoral, but that they are associated with some sin.

Take for example: rock and roll music, rap, heavy metal are an integral part of the drug culture of our age. It is inexplicable – in my personal opinion – for Christians therefore to be associated with such musical styles in their worship of God.

The most popular form of association is branding. Brands conjure a certain image, and people who wear certain brands of clothes are sending the message that they are of the same values as those who promote those brands.

I remember some years ago, some one gave me a polo shirt with a small logo of the infamous *Playboy* bunny on it. A shirt is a shirt, right? No! I do not think that it is possible for a person to see the logo and not think about its association. The brand names for clothing today are also not only experts at advertising, but they are also activists promoting a social agenda which is always sensual and mostly anti-Christian.

There are also other forms of association that may not be sensual but no less sinister. There is a growing Goth subculture amongst teenagers with its unique fashion of black clothing, ashen make-up, and body piercings. The point is that the clothes we wear send a message.

## **Conclusion**

Even after excluding the clothes that may be ostentatious, androgynous, sensual and those that have questionable associations, there is still much room for personal preferences and tastes. And Christians must exercise discernment in what they wear.

There are Christians who swing to the other extreme in thinking that since we should not be overly concerned about what we wear, we should therefore pay no attention at all. That too is wrong. Christians are not to be preoccupied with our dressing, but that does not mean that we are to totally neglect what we wear. Sloppy dressing also draws attraction, the negative kind. The dirty, unkempt, sloppily dressed Christian is not a good witness for the Lord Jesus. We do not wear clothes to impress man, but what we wear must glorify God.

There are 15-dollar shirts, and there are 150-dollar ones (I suppose there are 1,500-dollar ones as well). What one wears depends on the rank and means of the person. Less well-to-do Christians should not be covetous that they could not afford what the more well-off could; neither should the rich despise the poor.

Both the rich and poor can be preoccupied with the external appearances if they devote more time than they should and more resources that they could afford to beautify the body but not the soul. To wives specifically, but it may be applied to men as well, Peter writes, that the Christians' "*adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price*" (1 Peter 3:3-4).

What others see in Christians is not just what they wear but who they are. When a person professes to be a Christian, let his/her profession be matched by his/her appearance and behaviour. Good looks must be matched by good works.

24 Jul 11

We have been considering the issue of Christian modesty. Whenever the word “modesty” is mentioned, most people would think of the clothes that people wear. Indeed, a large part of Christian modesty has to do with what one wears, but clothes alone do not make a man or woman. Christian modesty extends beyond one’s clothes to one’s conduct and demeanour. It is not just the make-up but also the manner. The conduct of a person is ultimately rooted in his heart. What we do on the outside is what we are truly on the inside. Of course, there are – and always will be – those who put up a false front. But as the saying goes, one can fool some of the people some times, but one cannot fool all the people all the time. The heart and the conduct are inseparable.

### **How One Behaves?**

Besides the clothes that we wear, there are three things that Christians need to be aware of when we consider Christian modesty. First, a Christian’s demeanour. *“Moreover the LORD saith, Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet”* (Isaiah 3:16). This proud look also applies to men. Both men and women must be careful of pride in their lives.

Second, Christian modesty also extends to the manner in which Christians conduct themselves with the opposite gender. Be discreet. Be chaste. Paul, writing to Titus, had this advice for the women, “To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed” (Titus 2:5). To be “discreet” [Gk: *sophron*] is to behave wisely. To be “chaste” [Gk: *hagnos*] is to be pure.

The idea here is that one should refrain from excessive physical contact with the opposite gender. A man should refrain from having his arms around a girl who is not his wife. A man and a woman who are not married must never go for holidays together by themselves. In this regard, I am also opposed to co-ed dorms because they promote an immoral life-style.

There will be people who say that I am being old-fashioned and narrow-minded but one must be careful not to place ourselves in the way of temptation. It is wise to listen to the Word of God to *“abstain from all appearance of evil”* (1 Thessalonians 5:22). Paul also gave this warning to the Corinthian believers, *“Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall”* (1 Corinthians 10:12).

### **How and What One Speaks?**

Christian modesty also applies to our speech – what is spoken (our content), to whom we are speaking (our audience), and the manner in which it is spoken (our delivery) reveal the internal workings and motivations of a person. *“But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them. For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light”* (Ephesians 5:3-8).

As far as content is concerned, truth is paramount. But Paul also warns against foolish talking and jesting. “Foolish talking” means buffoonery or silly inane talk. “Jesting which are not convenient” refers to a kind of senseless and unprofitable witticisms. There are people who like to trade jokes, especially the off-coloured kind. There are Christians who make light of spiritual things. This kind of levity and irreverent humour should never be found in a Christian.

Speech, especially in the presence of the opposite gender, must not contain any impure, sensual innuendoes. All that we say must *“be alway with grace, seasoned with salt”* (Colossians 4:6). A practical principle is this: what you will not say in God’s presence should not be said in any person’s company. So think before you speak. Words are like feathers blown in the wind, once dispersed, it is impossible to retrieve them.

A man is wise not because he has something to say on every topic. Solomon writes, *“He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool. In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise. The tongue of the just is as choice silver: the heart of the wicked is little worth. The lips of*



*the righteous feed many: but fools die for want of wisdom*” (Proverbs 10:18-21). A wise man knows the truth, and speaks the truth at the appropriate time in the appropriate manner.

### **How One is Being Seen?**

Speech is just a form of communication. One can communicate by other means. Peter warns about *“having eyes full of adultery”* (2 Peter 2:14). Our Lord Jesus says that *“whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart”* (Matthew 5:28). Such non-verbal communication is more subtle but no less ineffective than plainly spoken words. The modern advertising media has honed this form of non-verbal communication to a fine art.

What should Christians do in light of these subtleties? Always be conscious of how your behaviour and speech affect another person. Be careful of the way you behave. Do not send the wrong signal. Be careful of the manner and content of your communication. Avoid all appearance of evil. John Wesley has this advice: “Let a single intention to please God prescribe both what clothing you shall buy, and the manner wherein it shall be made, and how you shall put on and wear it. To express the same thing in other words: Let all you do, in this respect, be so done that you may offer it to God, a sacrifice acceptable through Christ Jesus; so that, consequently, it may increase your reward and brighten your crown in heaven. And so it will do, if it be agreeable to Christian humility, seriousness, and charity.”

God willing, next week, we will consider the inner man, or what Peter describes as “the hidden man of the heart” (1 Peter 3:4).

31 Jul 11

It has been a busy month of travel. My family and I greatly appreciate your prayers during the days that we were away. We had a brief visit to Vancouver. It was good to see God's blessings upon the Vancouver BP Church (VBPC). The church is doing well under the watchful care of the Rev James Chan and Preacher Mok. They also had a blessed Bible Camp down in Washington, and it was followed by their Annual Vacation Bible School.

VBPC is also going through an interesting phase. The children are all grown. Most of the young people are either beginning or already studying in the universities. A couple of them have graduated. This poses an interesting challenge for the Church. Will the values of these young people be affected by the world around them? Will they remain committed to biblical truth and values? Will they be committed to the Church which has nurtured them? Please continue to pray for VBPC.

Today we also rejoice with Pastor Yang Degang on the occasion of his ordination as a minister of the Gospel. Degang became associated with Calvary BP Church in 2004 when we supported him and Xiurong in their theological studies at Chin Lien Bible Seminary. Earlier, this year, a request was made by the church to ordain Preacher Yang. An ordination council (Rev David Wong, Rev Peter Tan and I) was formed. After presenting his written submissions and a series of interviews, the ordaining council is happy to ordain Degang as a minister of the Gospel. Ordination, of course, is not a mark of arrival. Rather, it marks the commencement of a greater ministry and heavier burdens. Please remember to pray for Pastor Yang Degang, Xiurong, and the congregation to whom they will minister.

A gentle reminder to all: There will be an evangelism training seminar conducted by the Rev Mike Redick on 30 August 2011, which is a public holiday. For those who say that you do not know what to say when asked to present the Gospel, this is an opportunity not to be missed. Come and learn. Be equipped. Be trained. Be prepared.

This training seminar is held ahead of the Combined Fellowship Gospel Meetings on 9 and 10 September 2011 (Friday and Saturday). Every Tuesday night, we have a list of people whose salvation we have been praying for. Now there is something more you can do. Invite your friends, relatives, colleagues, classmates, neighbours – go...into the highways, and as many as ye shall find – bid them come to the Gospel meetings.

Resuming our study on the issue of modesty, at the root of immodesty is sin – the sin of pride, vanity and carnality. The saying – the heart of the problem is the problem of the heart – is old but true. What the heart is has a way of finding expression in our daily life. Thus for Christians who have the desire to address this problem of immodesty, we have to consider the heart.

### **Shamefastness**

There are several words that are used in the New Testament to describe modesty. *“In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with **shamefacedness** [Gk: *aidos*] and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array”* (1 Timothy 2:9). The same word is translated “reverence” in Hebrews 12:28 – *“Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with **reverence** [Gk: *aidos*] and godly fear.”*

In classical Greek, it means to have respect for others or to have self-respect. In Hebrews 12:28, it has the idea of respect for and fear of the Lord. In 1 Timothy 2:9, it is used to describe women's dress and demeanour in the context of a worship service. Here, reverence for God is manifested by modesty in dressing. Hendriksen says “modesty indicates a sense of shame, a shrinking from trespassing the boundaries of propriety; hence, proper reserve.”

Others look at modesty from the perspective of appropriateness and good sense. It is certainly appropriate for a woman who is going for a swim to be dressed for that activity. But it would be entirely inappropriate for a woman to go to the supermarket dressed as if she was going for a swim not because the swimsuit is wrong in and of themselves, but because they were worn at the wrong time at the wrong place. A modest and wise lady will avoid clothes and behaviour that are inappropriate.

The 1611 Authorised Version translated *aidos* in 1 Timothy 2:9 as “shamefastness,” not “shamefacedness.” The latter's connotation is negative; to have “shamefacedness” has the idea of not doing something that is shameful.

When we say that a person is shameless, we mean that he has no shame; that he is given to inappropriate behaviour. Shamefastness has a positive connotation. It describes a person who does not dress or behave inappropriately out of a sense of reverence and honour. In other words, a Christian who has *aidos* (shamefastness) will dress and behave in a manner that is appropriate to his calling as a Christian.

This is particularly important for those who hold positions of spiritual leadership. There is a decorum in the office that forbids one to behave flippantly and callously. The responsibility of a church leader is not to lower the bar but to raise the bar of behaviour in terms of conduct and speech.

### **Sobriety**

There is a second word that is used in 1 Timothy 2:9 – “*Women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and **sobriety** [Gk: *sophrosune*].*” To have sobriety is to be of “sound mind.” It is an attitude that expresses itself in a life of moderation and self-control. The Apostle Paul used this word in his own defence against the charges of insanity levied against him by the Jews. Paul told Festus, “*I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and **soberness**” (Acts 26:25). In 1 Timothy 2:9, the idea is that a Christian’s dressing must reflect the soundness of a redeemed life and a renewed mind.*

A Christian who has a sound mind is self-controlled and is not easily given to the latest fashion or the desire for attention. Hendriksen writes, “In getting dressed for church women must practise *sanity*. They must dress in *sensible* attire. They must not try to show off, to be ‘all the rage’...They should *adorn* themselves...They do not have to balk at fashion, unless a particular fashion happens to be immoral or indecent. They must not look decidedly old-fashioned, awkward, or queer. It must ever be borne in mind that a proud heart is sometimes concealed behind a mask of pretended modesty. That too is sin. Extremes must be carefully avoided...The robe must be expressive of inner modesty and of a sane outlook on life, the outlook of the Christian. Applied to our own day and age this means that [Alexander] Pope’s well-known lines should be pondered. They contain food for thought: ‘Be not the first by whom the new is tried, Nor yet the last to lay the old aside.’”

### **Chaste**

Writing to Titus, Paul says that young women are, “*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 2:4-5). The word “discreet” is a cognate of “sobriety” in 1 Timothy 2:9. “Chaste” [Gk: *hagnos*] is also found in 1 Peter 3:2 – “*Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; while they behold your **chaste** conversation coupled with fear*” (1 Peter 3:1-2).

To be chaste is to be holy. One Puritan writer puts it this way, “it is the purity both of soul and body...it abandons all unlawful and strange pleasures.” This purity applies not only to the behaviour of the person but also to those with whom he would have to deal with. A Christian must behave and dress in a way that will not elicit thoughts of impurity from the people around him.

### **Holy behaviour**

“*The aged women likewise, that they be in **behaviour as becometh holiness**, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things*” (Titus 2:3). The phrase “behaviour as becometh holiness” can be translated as “demeanour that is characteristic of holy priests.” As Hendriksen points out, “there is wide-spread agreement...that the language here describes a sacred priest carrying out her duties. Thus, the picture is one of a person who sees her entire life as worship to God.”

John Calvin adds, “We very frequently see, that females advanced in age either continue to dress with the lightness of youthful years, or have something superstitious in their apparel, and seldom hit the golden mean. Paul wished to guard against both extremes, by enjoining them to follow a course that is agreeable both to outward propriety and to religion...to give evidence, by their very dress, that they are holy and godly women.”

Christian modesty certainly covers more than one’s attire to one’s attitudes. It is clothes and conduct that makes the whole man. Clothes are important because they reflect the mindset of the person. But clothes alone cannot conceal the true nature of the person. As the heart is, so is the life. As God’s people, we must be careful to nurture our heart so that our life will reflect the grace of God.

07 Aug 11

Praise the LORD for His mercies in our travels. It always gladdens and challenges my heart when I see the expression of faith in worship by believers outside of Singapore. And the sincerity and earnestness of worship is not determined by the condition of living. We worship in security. In some countries, when believers go to church, it is literally putting themselves in harm's way. We worship in air-conditioned comfort; we sit on cushioned pews; there are places where believers sit on stools which they have brought from home. Yet I dare say that our expression of faith and commitment to our Lord pales in comparison to theirs.

Next week (14-21 August), Dn Jeffrey Soh will be leading a team to Jaffna to conduct a Vacation Bible School. Jaffna had been embroiled in civil war for the last century. The war ceased only in May 2009, and foreign travel to Jaffna was only open this year. Our team will be ministering to a group of 100 children. Please pray for the team and the children.

Continuing on our study on modesty, we will do well to remember that the habits of old age are formed at childhood. Proverbs 22:6 says, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." This truth cuts both ways. Train the children in the ways of God, they will likely turn out one way. Train them in the ways of the world, they will turn out in a totally different way.

Bishop JC Ryle writes, "We are made what we are by training. Our character takes the form of that mold into which our first years are cast...Time will show how much we owe to the early impressions, and how many things in us may be traced up to seeds sown in the days of our very infancy, by those who were about us."

And as we consider Christian modesty, we must not overlook and dismiss the importance of the parents and their influence upon their children. Consider the following duties of parents.

**Parents are to provide a Christian education.** Christian education is not the responsibility of the church. The church is a supplement to and not a substitute of the parents. Parents are responsible for their children's spiritual education (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). Paul says fathers are to "bring [the children] up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4).

The KJV translators in the margin of Proverbs 22:6 – "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" – use "catechize" as an alternative reading to "train." Parents are to catechize their children. That is the reason the Westminster Assembly wrote the Shorter Catechism.

It follows that Christian parents are to provide spiritual instruction directly to their children. The father is the pastor and theologian in the home. Part of that training would include Christian modesty.

**Parents are to nurture their children.** "Obey me or else..." A father may rule his family like a drill sergeant controls his recruits. However, this method of training would tend to breed a silent defiance which may explode into outright rebellion. The unintended outcome is that it substitutes moralism for true spirituality. Parents must blend love and authority in nurturing our children.

**Parents are to provide a godly example.** Christian education is not merely the transmission of facts, but the transference of faith. Faith is passed down from parents to children by way of instruction and also inspiration. One Christian writer says "Nothing is more certain than that whatever we wish others to practise, we must exemplify in our conduct....In every department of moral and religious conduct, we [meaning parents] must not only point out the path, but lead the way."

In his commentary on Ephesians 6:4, Albert Barnes wrote, "Men *do* inculcate their own sentiments in religion. An infidel is not usually *very* anxious to conceal his views from his children. Men teach by example, by incidental remarks, by the neglect of that which they regard as of no value. A man who does not pray, is teaching his children not to pray; he who neglects the public worship of God, is teaching his children to neglect it; he who does not read the Bible, is teaching his children not to read it. Such is the constitution of things, that it is impossible for a parent *not* to inculcate his own religious views on his children. Since this is so, all that the Bible requires is, that his instructions should be right....If a man does not teach his children *truth*, others will teach them *error*. The young

sceptic that the child meets in the street; the artful infidel; the hater of God; the unprincipled stranger, *will* teach the child. But is it not better for a parent to teach his child the *truth* than for a stranger to teach him *error*?"

In this regard, mothers should serve as role models for their daughters in the area of Christian modesty. What a mother dresses and how she conducts herself will be the main influence upon her daughters.

**Parents are to protect the purity of the children.** The world is the domain of “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience” (Ephesians 2:2). The world is not a friendly romping ground. The world and its values find a permanent presence in Christian homes through the popular media. Parents are to protect the purity of the children by monitoring what our children are hearing, watching and reading; where and with whom they are spending their time.

**Parents are to discipline their children.** Biblical discipline is more than punishment, although it does not exclude it. The reason for biblical discipline is because “foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him” (Proverbs 22:15).

Biblical discipline has two aspects: to remove foolishness from the child, and to impart virtue. One writer says that biblical discipline is to enable the children to understand the Word of God, the logic of love, and the value of virtue.

Biblical discipline is to train the children in the path of righteousness, to restrain them when they go astray, and to constrain in their behaviour by God’s love and grace.

**Parents are to pray for their children.** Parents must never neglect to pray for their children – for their salvation as well as their sanctification. The former is the work of God in their hearts. The latter is the work of God from within and manifesting the spiritual transformation in their lives.

The problem with many a Christian home is not that our children do not know the content of the Bible. They know truth; the problem is that they do not love it. Thus in nurturing our children, it is not enough to decide for them what they should and should not wear. Thus to tell our children that a particular fashion style is not appropriate for a Christian is to miss the point. The point is that they do not see that way. And more stringent dress codes are not the answer. The answer must be a transformation from within by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Parents must pray for their children that the vice and foolishness of their hearts not be driven out by rules and dress codes, but replaced by the Christian graces represented by the fruit of the Holy Spirit. We must pray for our children that they will not only know Christ, but to love Him, and to do all things to please Him. That is the first step toward inculcating Christian modesty in our children.

14 Aug 11

Please take note of these two dates.

**30 AUGUST 2011 (Tuesday).** Evangelism Workshop conducted by Rev Mike Redick. For some people, sharing the Gospel seems like a near impossible task. You do not know what to say. You do not know how to begin. Here is an opportunity to be trained. The workshop will equip you with the skills to share the Gospel, to be witness for our Lord Jesus Christ. This workshop is planned ahead of the English Congregation Gospel Rally. Lunch will be provided.

**9-10 SEPTEMBER 2011 (Friday and Saturday).** English Congregation Gospel Rally. Speaker: Rev Mike Redick. Every Tuesday night prayer meeting, we have a list of people whose salvation we have been praying for. These two nights of evangelistic meeting are an opportunity for you to do more than just pray. Invite your friends, neighbours, colleagues, classmates to these meetings. This is the first Gospel Rally organised by the English Congregation in many years. All who have a passion for souls, invite your friends.

Please also pray for the team leaving for Jaffna, Sri Lanka this evening. The team, led by Dn Jeff Soh, will be conducting a Vacation Bible School in Jaffna. After about 50 years of civil war, Jaffna is now opened to foreigners. Calvary will be amongst the first Christian group to have a mission trip to Jaffna. We are expecting about 100 children. Please pray for journeying mercies, health and safety, and also for the Holy Spirit to work in the hearts of the children.

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There was a time when “Sunday Best” refers to the clothes that one would reserve for going to church, and usually, this is a formal set of clothes. Men and boys would go to church in their suits, and ladies would likewise dress appropriately for the Worship service. Going to church then was a formal event. But times have changed, and with it, the clothes that Christians wear to church also changed.

Paul wrote to Timothy on the duty of men and women in the church – *“I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting. In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works”* (1 Timothy 2:8-9). Take away the modifiers in the statement, Paul is saying that he would have that when women come to church be clothed in *“modest apparel...[and] good works”* (1 Timothy 2:8-9).

What then is the church’s role in inculcating Christian modesty? The primary responsibility is pulpit instruction. Robert Candlish wrote that the Word of God “may be directly taught and enforced by reading and expounding, by preaching...by catechizing of the young, by pressing it, in short, in every form of persuasion and of warning” so Christians may be awakened to their new life in Christ.

There is a definite and direct connection between expectations of Christians and the exposition of the Word of God. To the extent that the Church ignores or neglects – by choice or not – the solid instruction of the Holy Scriptures, believers will have little understanding of the expectations that God requires of them.

As one author puts it, “It’s not that we have denied God. We just don’t pay much attention to Him. He’s like the elderly grandpa we put in the nursing home. We know He’s there, and we really do care about Him...it’s just that we only visit Him a couple of times a year. This won’t do, of course, because what we believe about God will shape every area of our lives.”

If Christians are serious about restoring virtue and modesty in the church, we must restore God His rightful place in our lives. This means we cannot sideline God. This means that we must declare and accept that the Bible is the standard of our faith and life. We preach the Word of God without apology in those issues that fall within the realm of Christian liberty (e.g. lifestyle choices).

Second, the church must restore worship that exalts God and not entertains worshippers. The solemnity of worship demands that our attitude of worship and our attire be appropriate to the occasion. In the Old Testament, the high

priest who represented the people before God had to put on the priestly garb as commanded by God. While there is no dress code for people coming to church, it will do well for worshippers that we are coming to the throne of grace.

There are Christians who argue that worship is a matter of the heart. It is true that our worship must be sincere, it must also be pointed that worship is expressed through our bodies. Stephen Charnock, a Reformed theologian, wrote, “As God under the ceremonial law did not command the worship of the body and the observation of outward rites without the engagement of the spirit, so neither doth He command that of the spirit without the peculiar attendance of the body....Our bodies as well as our spirits are to be presented to God.”

The third thing that a church can do to promote Christian virtue and modesty is to emphasize the unity and community of the church. As members of a body of believers, we are required to be conscious of how our lives – including what we wear – would affect the people. Immodest dressing not only offends God but it may also stumble another believer. Of course, the argument can be made that a person has the liberty to wear what he wants, and if another person is offended, the problem is with the other person.

However, this kind of argument smacks of spiritual immaturity. The Bible teaches that freedom is not to be used for our own interest. *“For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself”* (Galatians 5:13-14). Part of loving our neighbours (including the one sitting near in the church), is to be mindful of his/her sensitivities.

Lastly, to promote virtue and Christian modesty in the church, the leaders of the church must set the example. Example is the most powerful form of instruction. I read about a church in California where the pastor’s pulpit attire was Hawaiian shirt and bermudas. It is also no wonder that the worshippers come into the sanctuary dressed in a similar fashion. Whatever happens to solemnity of worship and the reverence for the God whom we worship?

God has called His church to be a holy people. God commands us to be holy as He is holy. And our holiness is reflected in part by how we pray, how we serve, and how we appear when we worship Him.

21 Aug 11

The Church is a microcosm of the home (or at least it should be); that is why Christians address one another as brothers and sisters. The Scripture also describes believers as being in the “household of faith” (Galatians 6:10). That also means that we have things in common for which we must exercise wise and careful stewardship. So here are some matters that we must all be aware of – call them house-keeping rules, if you like – but some common sense deeds that we all do in our own homes.

1. **If you switch it on, switch it off.** Please turn off all lights and air-conditioning when your group has finished using the room. For that matter, when you see that the lights are on in an empty room, turn it off. Cost for utilities is expected to increase, and we must all learn to conserve energy. Please do not adjust the air-con. It has been set at a reasonable 23-24 degrees. It has been found that thermostats in some rooms have been set to below 20 because the room is not cool when you step in from the outside. Give the air-con a chance; the room will take time to cool.
2. **If you take it, put it back.** Please return all chairs, tables, equipment to the rooms from where you have taken them. Others will need them.
3. **If you make a mess, clean it up.**
4. **If you use it, take care of it.** Please take care of the equipment in the church. A projector in the studio was damaged, but it was not reported until the next person who wanted to use it discovered that it was damaged.
5. **Whatever you will not do in the home, do not do it in church.** The general principle is this – take care of the church facilities and equipment as you would take care of your home and your own equipment.

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We have been dwelling on Christian modesty, and the biblical principles underlying the choice of what we wear. But the advertisements today call on us to be cool and hip, to be with the “in” crowd. So the question is: Are these principles realistic in light of the culture which we live in today?

Yes, it is difficult, and Christians will look strange and dated if we do not follow the fashion trends. But no, it is not impossible although it requires consecration. The Apostle Paul writes, *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And 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”* (Romans 12:1-2).

We are to present “our bodies” – all of what we are – as “living sacrifices.” In other words, our lives must be totally dedicated to God. It also means that it is a day to day decision. It is life of consecration.

Our Lord Jesus puts it another way, *“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment”* (Matthew 22:37-38). The command is to love God and nothing else. A Christian who claims to love God 99% and reserve 1% for something else has failed to obey this great commandment. Christians must understand that our love for our neighbours must flow out of our love for God. Our love for God and our love for man are on different paradigm.

Our Lord Jesus asked Peter, *“Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?”* (John 21:15). Our Lord Jesus was not asking Peter to give Him more time and devotion to Him than to the other things. No! Our Lord did not say to Peter, “Follow Me most of the time,” or “Follow Me when it is convenient.” The command was simply, “Follow Me.”

Adam Clarke writes: “He loves God with all his heart, who loves nothing in comparison of him, and nothing but in reference to him; who is ready to give up, do, or suffer any thing in order to please and glorify him; who has in his heart neither love nor hatred, hope nor fear, inclination, nor aversion, desire, nor delight, but as they relate to God, and are regulated by him.



He loves God with all his soul, who is ready to give up life for his sake – to endure all sorts of torments, and to be deprived of all kinds of comforts...who employs life with all its comforts, and conveniences, to glorify God in, by, and through all; to whom life and death are nothing...

He loves God with all his strength who exerts all the powers of his body and soul in the service of God; who, for the glory of his Maker, spares neither labour nor cost – who sacrifices his time, body, health, ease, for the honor of God his Divine Master; who employs in his service all his goods, his talents, his power, credit, authority, and influence.

He loves God with all his mind who applies himself only to know God, and his holy will; who receives with submission, gratitude, and pleasure, the sacred truths which God has revealed to man; who studies no art nor science but as far as it is necessary for the service of God, and uses it at all times to promote his glory...who banishes from his understanding and memory every useless, foolish, and dangerous thought, together with every idea which has any tendency to defile his soul, or turn it for a moment from the center of eternal repose.

In a word, he who sees God in all things – thinks of him at all times – having his mind continually fixed upon God, acknowledging him in all his ways – who begins, continues, and ends all his thoughts, words, and works, to the glory of his name; this is the person who loves God with all his heart, life, strength, and intellect. He is crucified to the world, and the world to him: he lives, yet not he, but Christ lives in him.”

In other words, the Christian who loves God loves Him more than he loves the world and the things of the world. And his one desire would be “*to behold the beauty of the LORD*” (Psalm 27:4), and not the beauty of the world.

Ultimately, Christian modesty is a decision that hinges upon the answer to this simple question – Who do we desire more, God or the world? May the LORD grant us the spiritual discernment to choose the best from among the good, and the boldness to develop biblical convictions that will glorify Him.

28 Aug 11

In 1440, Johannes Gutenberg made the first moveable type printing press. Before that, books were hand-copied. Or they were block-printed, which means the words were carved into a wooden block, inked, and pressed onto paper. Both processes were slow, time-consuming, and expensive. That was why books were not accessible to the common man.

Gutenberg's moveable type press sped up and lowered the cost of printing of books. 1452, Gutenberg undertook to print 200 copies of the Bible. A copy cost the equivalent of three years' wages pay for the average worker. That was significantly lower than that the 15-years of wages one would have to pay for a hand-copied Bible during the time of John Wycliffe.

Gutenberg's invention also changed the world. The moveable type printing press played no small role in the dissemination of Martin Luther's 95 Theses. Luther sparked the kindling. Gutenberg's press spread the fire. I believe that printing press was one of the greatest inventions in history.

### **The Internet Revolution**

For the next 500 years, the main medium of communication was still the printed word – books, newspapers, magazines – until the internet found its way in our vocabulary, psyche and life. I noticed that things start to change in the mid-1900's when I was still working in the university press. The University was able to take a manuscript from the author, transform it into a book with the help of a team of editors and illustrators, sent it to the press for printing. The whole process – writing, editing, proof-reading, compositing – were all done on-line without having to print a single page. It would not be long before people realise why bother to print, why not just sell the soft-copy on-line.

Like Gutenberg's printing press, the internet has also revolutionized how information is being shared. The speed of transmission and the amount of the information is mind-boggling. How things have changed in a matter of two decades.

When I was going to school in the United States, there were no laptops. The Macintosh (Apple computer) came in the form of a square box with a small screen. There was no email, Facebook, Tweeter, or Skype. Now we have palm-sized phones and skinny laptops that allow one to surf the net, communicate and connect with the rest of the world. I cannot imagine returning to the days without the internet.

What is the internet? Imagine a market place as big as the world. One can buy a leather bag from Italy, order antiquarian books from England or durians ([www.durianseller.com](http://www.durianseller.com)) just with the laptop on your lap.

Imagine a library that is far bigger than the largest library in the world. The National Library in Singapore has a collection of 15 million books. The Library of Congress in Washington DC has a collection of 33 million books. Google Books has at present 15 million books available on line, and its target is that by 2020, it will have 130 million books on the internet. Imagine a library that is able to elevate you to the heights of the greatest thinkers, and denigrate you to the gutters of immoral filth.

Imagine a huge theme park where you can be what you want others to think that you are, be what you fancy, do what you desire. Imagine a place where you can be out there in the world and yet not leave your home, hang out with friends in the privacy of your own room, read the inner most thoughts – fears, hatred, anxieties, frustrations – of friends and strangers; and have yours read.

This is Internet.

### **The Internet Effect**

How has the internet changed our lives? First, the internet has led to an information overload. We are drowning in information. The problem is that it is hard to filter the toxic from the good, sieve out falsehoods from truth. Everyone has an opinion and because of the anonymity of the on-line community, every opinion is given legitimacy. Today, if you have a question, just google. Everyone becomes an “expert” just because they have spent some time surfing the net. We may have the raw data, but do we think?

Second, the internet has led to an increased connectivity. The electronic mail connects people from faraway places and faster. Time and space have shrunk. It is cheap (you do not have to buy stamps and envelopes), convenient (you do not have to make a trip to the post office), and easy (you do not have to worry about your handwriting). However, the good of e-mail comes with the evil of spam (junk e-mail) and on-line scams.

Third, the internet allows for the expression of freedom with no self-restraint. With a pseudonym, a person dares to express himself with words that would probably not be heard in polite company. Under the veil of anonymity, people abandon all social conventions of courteous communication. One needs only to read the on-line responses to news websites. For every serious debate on a topic, there are countless, who by the choice of words and expressions, poisoned the discussion. It seems that the internet has opened the door for man’s sinful nature to surface and exhibit itself with little or no restrictions.

### **The Christian Response**

Just as Gutenberg’s printing press changed the world some 600 years ago, so the internet has changed our world. And just as the printing press was a tool, so is the internet. The internet has changed the way we work, shop, transact business.

What should Christians do? God willing, we will cover this topic over the next few weeks. But we have to realise that the world has gone through great changes. The Industrial Revolution not only moved the world out of its agrarian economy, but it also changed the way people lived. Cities were built. The Internet Revolution is doing the same. The world has moved. But human nature remains unchanged.

Should Christians withdraw themselves from the cyberspace? The answer is no! Technological asceticism will never work. As society becomes more and more wired and more dependent on the Internet, Christians cannot avoid it. We must remember that it is a tool like printing presses and dial up telephones were tools. Like all tools, the internet is extremely useful for evangelism and instruction.

However, we must know that this is a tool that must be used with discernment and discipline. We must protect our families and ourselves from all the nasty netizens who prey on, seduce, and take advantage of the naïve and unwary. We must not worship the tool technology.

One interesting account in the Bible of a tool that became an idol is the bronze serpent that God asked Moses to make. God sent fiery serpents upon the children of Israel because of their rebellion. After Moses had interceded for the people, God told Moses, “Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live” (Numbers 21:8).

In time to come, that serpent which Moses made became an object of worship, and it was eventually destroyed by Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:4). What God had intended to be a tool, the people turned it into an object of worship. Likewise, it is easy for Christians to do the same to make the internet, which is a tool, into an object of worship.

Of course, to worship the internet does not mean that we bow and genuflect ourselves before our computers and laptops, but that we allow ourselves to be controlled by it. Unlike other tools, the internet is a tool that we can use, and in turn, it can also use us. The reason is that the information we gather from the internet affects our thinking and values.

The Psalmist warns, “They [The people] that make them [idols] are like unto them [idols]; *so is* every one that trusteth in them [idols]” (Psalm 115:8). We become like the idols that we worship. Likewise, if Christians are not discerning in the use of the internet, we every easily embrace its values and thinking.

Christian parents have to be extra cautious in this regard. Just because you give a child a tennis racquet, it does not mean that he will use it correctly. The extra precaution is needed because the internet is not amoral.

Over the internet, good and evil intermingle with little classification. Falsehood and truths are mixed without warning labels. Thus we need to exercise spiritual discernment and godly discipline. There are softwares that filter out the undesirable elements in the internet. But the greatest software that Christian can have is the regeneration of our hearts. “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it *are* the issues of life” (Proverbs 4:23). Our faith needs to be “grounded and settled, and *be* not moved away from the hope of the gospel” (Colossians 1:23). May the LORD help us to grow in sanctification of our heart and mind through the Word of God and His Spirit.

04 Sep 11

When the powerful Persians were defeated by the Greeks at the Battle of Marathon, a Greek messenger by the name of Pheidippides ran the entire distance from Marathon to Athens – a distance of some 25 miles – to bring the news of victory. That is one of the ways messages were delivered.

When Ahasuerus' decree "published throughout all his empire, (for it is great,)" (Esther 1:20), the fastest means of communication was the horseback courier service. The Persians were said to have the most efficient postal service in the ancient world. Posting stations were placed a day's ride apart, where new horses and new riders were on hand to take the message to the next station as soon as it arrives. Herodotus, the Greek historian, wrote: "There is nothing in the world which travels faster than the Persian couriers." In this way, it was said that it took only 10 days to get a message from one end of the Persian Empire to the other end.

In the 1860's, the Pony Express was the only way to deliver mail in the United States from coast to coast. Stephen Ambrose, an American writer, wrote in 1801 that "nothing moved faster than the speed of a horse."

That was perhaps one of the greatest overstatements in history. In about 40 years, Samuel Morse invented the telegraph and the Morse Code. In 1844, between Baltimore and Washington DC, he laid 37 miles of cable, and transmitted the message – "What hath God wrought" – taken from Numbers 23:23. Morse was a devout Christian, and he believed that what he had invented came from God Himself.

Overnight, as long as towns and cities were wired, the speed of communication was exponentially increased. Messages that took months to deliver could be transmitted and received in seconds. Newspapers which were mostly opinion editorials and essays before became reporters of news (up-to-date). Wire agencies, such as the Associated Press, were set up. Today, we have the internet that sends messages across the world in seconds.

The speed of communication changed the world. It is still changing ours today.

The speed of computation is also changing the world. Before the electronic computer, the fastest means of computation was the abacus. Deals were transacted by the clicking of beads. The abacus is still being used in some places. But the world of computation has since moved from abacus to computers, from beads to buttons.

But even computers have changed. The first computers used a punch-card technology, and only experts who were trained in programming languages could operate these machines. One of the earliest computers – the ENIAC – weighed almost 30 tonnes, and occupied 1,800 square feet of floor space.

The early computers were huge and expensive. It was not until the vacuum tubes were replaced by transistors, computer chips, and then microprocessors that the size of computers shrunk significantly. They became faster, friendlier, lighter, slimmer, smaller, and cheaper. The computer became a household consumer item. It became personal.

The ease of computing changed the world. It is changing ours.

Where it once filled a room, the PC now sits on a desk, and now the smallest ones (PDAs) rest on the palm of a hand. Where it once had to be hooked up with wires and cables, these "ropes" are replaced by wireless and Bluetooth technologies.

The ubiquitous nature of the PC is such that it infiltrates into every aspect of our lives that it became invisible and indispensable. Look around us, our lives – media, entertainment, even our social life – is somehow linked to the computer. We do not meet face to face, instead we Facebook. We do not chit-chat, we Twitter. We do not even call each other on the phone, we SMS.

We see the domination of the computer also in the fusion of the various technologies. It used to be a phone was a phone, and a camera was a camera. Now there are TVs that are also computers, and phones that do everything from playing music and videos, to taking pictures, to a myriad of other tasks.

The incommunicable attributes of God include His omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence. We see a semblance of these qualities in the computer. When we need information, we Google; when the computer is down, we are almost helpless.

While the technology seems to fade into the background, it is at the same time dominating our lives. The tool becomes the master, and the user becomes the slave.

It is therefore a good reminder to Christians the first message that Samuel Morse sent out via the telegraph – What hath God wrought – taken from Numbers 23:23. It seemed like an odd choice. The context of the verse is that Balaam was hired by Balak – the king of Moab – to curse Israel (Numbers 22:6). However, every word from Balaam’s lips blessed Israel.

What hath God wrought! (Numbers 23:23) is a declarative statement, not a question. The meaning is to call Balak to see what God had done. What God has done for the sinful humanity is that “He loved us, and sent his Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10).

Morse, being a devout Christian, saw his invention as a tool to be used for the cause of the Gospel. Likewise, the internet and the computer are tools to be used for the same purpose. The speed communication and ease of computation gives Christians opportunities for evangelism that believers a generation ago did not have.

The greatest threat of technology is that it has such a hold on our lives that we forget it is just a tool. Balaam told Balak, “Surely *there is* no enchantment against Jacob, neither *is there* any divination against Israel: according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought!” (Numbers 23:23).

See what God has done! As long as the children of Israel were aware of God in their lives, they were blessed. Sadly, the Bible tells us that “Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods. And Israel joined himself unto Baalpeor: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel” (Numbers 25:1-3). As long as Israel was aware of what God had wrought for them, they were blessed. When they did not, they were cursed.

Christians too must awake to the possibilities of good and evil that comes with technology. Christians must awake to the reality of who we are in Christ Jesus. What God has wrought for us through the modern technology, let us use it for His glory. What God has wrought in us through His Son, let us be used for His glory.

11 Sep 11

Today we celebrate the 37<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Mandarin Congregation. We are one church with three congregations – English, Mandarin, and Hokkien. Nevertheless, it is good for us to recount God’s blessings upon the various ministries in Calvary. The Psalmist reminds us, “The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies *are* over all his works. All thy works shall praise thee, O LORD; and thy saints shall bless thee” (Psalm 145:9-10).

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We have been considering the topic of the internet, its pervasiveness and domination in our lives. The internet began as a military project. In the later 1950’s, as the Cold War was beginning to gear up between the former Soviet Union and the United States, and the space race was on, the US Defence department wanted to find a way for computers around the world to communicate with one another in a fast and more efficient manner. They also wanted to create a computer network that would survive a nuclear war.

In 1961, the US Defence Department joined with four universities to develop such a network. A rudimentary internet system was set up, but the universities found other uses for it outside of defence. Business opportunities sprang from this new development, but access was restricted to the few who were able to master the technology.

One of the earlier developments was the electronic bulletin board, where users can pin their messages, ideas, the latest gossips on electronic bulletin boards, very much we leave notes for our family members on the refrigerator door. Other people can read the notes, and leave theirs as well. The thrill was the immediacy of the communication. However, it will take another 20 years or so before the internet is really accessible to the end user.

I still can remember the days when I had to endure the swirling sound of the dial-up modem. But it was not long after that when fibre optics and broadband transfer words, sounds and pictures. The internet has become an indispensable tool for communications. It enables people living at opposite ends of the globe to connect with one another. The internet created a space that never existed before. Over the internet, people are doing business, sharing information, meeting each other, and some eventually got married; many others broke up. The point is these relationships started online.

Online relationship begins with screen names. This is where the internet presents the possibilities and perils. When we are dealing with screen names, it is hard to know the person behind the name. While the internet opens the door to a whole new world of knowledge, it is also a hiding place with unseen dangers. The internet allows a person to adopt any identity, gender, age, personality. A person could be anyone he wants to be. (I know of a pastor who used the email to slam and spam other pastors, spread lies, and spread rumours, under a disguised name of course.)

Online relationships take up time at the expense of real-life relationships. The virtual world is one of loners. One study shows that the computer keeps people away from friends and family. Statistics show that as much as a quarter of internet users admitted that they have reduced their interaction with friends and family, and even the outside world. So what happens when people spend their hours in front of a screen? What becomes of family, home, church, and community? It seems that the internet which has created a virtual world is destroying the real one.

### **Virtual World. Real Dangers.**

But this virtual world has real dangers. One danger is the addictive nature of the internet. When I was a journalist, a group of us co-produced a series on the information technology. One of the sponsors then was Pacific Internet who introduced Netscape, a web browser to Singapore. The name “Netscape” is carefully chosen; the internet as a means of escape. With a click, one enters into the cyber world. And the possibilities are so vast that many chose not to leave.

We have heard of young people who failed in their school work and office workers whose productivity dropped because of uncontrolled surfing. On-line casinos had lured millions of people and drained their savings without having to leave home.

Another danger of the internet is the development of on-line computer games. As all things, computer games started innocently. I remember Pong, a two-dimensional game that simulates squash. It had a green bar and bouncing ball,

and the idea was to bounce the ball of the bar against a wall. And there was that yellow furry monster that moves in a labyrinth eating up other furry monsters.

Games today are no longer that simple. They are sophisticated. They are three-dimensional. They are also more violent and addictive. Games today allow its users to assume an on-line identity, adopt an alter-ego, and live in an ethereal world. They become gladiators, sorcerers, speedsters, gangsters, road-killers. They rob. They maim. They kill. The question is why would people want to do that, even if it is just virtual?

Back in the first and second centuries, Roman citizens gathered at their local amphitheatres to watch the gladiator games. Slaves fought against wild beasts, or one another until one is left standing to fight another day. The Romans would cheer – “Kill! Kill! Kill!”

Why would any person delight in the death of another person? Why do they find the blood-sport thrilling? The Romans found it thrilling for the same reason that computer gamers find the killing, road-racing thrilling. But the argument is that the violence is not real; it is virtual. Nonetheless, the point is this – why is that thrilling? Computer gamers are no better than the Romans at the amphitheatre shouting “Kill! Kill! Kill!” For all the good that the internet offers, it comes with vices that are more attractive and appealing to the depraved human nature.

The Bible reminds us that our warfare is spiritual, and therefore, “the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:4-5). The battle for the Christian is one of the heart and mind.

The world is the domain of the devil. He is the father of lies, and he offers us a false religion, a false (virtual) reality with its set of false values. Christians can be victorious only if we employ the right weapons for this battle. The stronghold of sin could only be demolished with our Lord Jesus Christ as the great Captain in this warfare. In His name and by His power the victory is certain. The tools of weapon (in this case, the internet) must be subject to His control, and used for His glory. May the LORD help us!



18 Sep 11

We have been considering the effects that technology has on our lives. The speed and ease of communication have changed the way the world operates. The computer is the tool. The internet is the means by which the tool is being connected and used. When the individual parts of the technology come together, the whole is far greater than the sum of its parts.

What we have is the creation of a new environment in which the world lives and operates – the World Wide Web. Rev James Chan has been avoiding computers until only recently. He was given an iBook. His life changed, he was like Christopher Columbus who had discovered a whole new world. Whereas he used to write on pen and paper, now he is on the computer and hooked on the internet roaming through space making discoveries, as excited as a small boy in Toys R Us at Christmas time.

### **Easy to Get On**

The World Wide Web opens the door to a whole range of activities. There is no technical jargon to master. Just a click of the mouse, and one can go wherever one fancies. The technology is known as hypertext, where a word or picture can be linked to another page in the World Wide Web.

The possibilities are endless. When NASA wanted to share its discoveries when Pathfinder landed on Mars, it placed the data and photographs on line. When scientists working the Human Genome Project wanted to share their discoveries, the only space big enough to do so was the Web. New Horizons, the NASA space probe, is presently hurtling through space on its way to Pluto, you can track its path on line too. Not only are the possibilities endless, it is available to anyone at almost no cost.

However, there is money to be made too. Now, one can buy anything from the Web from cookies to cars; one can download movies, music, books, etc. Almost over-night, everything is prefixed with the letter “e” – eMail, eCommerce, eBanking, eBooks, ePublishing, etc.

### **Endless Possibilities**

Through electronic publishing (ePublishing), the Web becomes a treasure trove of information. The first person to recognise the potential of ePublishing is Michael Hart. He died earlier this week. Hart started Project Gutenberg in the 1990’s, and his goal was to convert and distribute public domain books.

The Church, at large, cannot afford to ignore this technological tool. There are several ways in which the Web is useful for the Gospel ministry. Calvin College runs a website called Christian Classics Ethereal Library ([www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org)). The CCEL offers classic Christian books from George Whitefield to John Calvin.

For the local church, the Web serves as a platform for the Gospel. The church website is a vital link to outside world. When I visit a new place, and I am looking for a church to worship, one of the first places I go to is the Web. There are people who have visited our church because they have first visited our website. Our materials – Daily Manna, pastoral letters, sermons – are also uploaded on line. And with the onset of PDAs, iPads, iPhones, and other handheld devices, books, audios and videos can easily be downloaded.

### **Pernicious Perils**

The possibilities are endless, but so are the perils. The World Wide Web is a web. I do not know if the name was coined with any negative connotation. It is probably a description of the finely woven links of the internet and its resemblance to the spider web. Nonetheless, it is a web, and there are spiders in the Web with its temptations and dangers.

Besides the proverbial dark corners of sin and vice that is online, the Web had become an online Mars Hill, where “strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing” (Acts 17:21).

As one writer puts it, “The Web is the ultimate pluralism, the ultimate toleration, and the ultimate postmodernity....All thoughts are reduced to the same level, all equally accessible and equally valid. If you don’t

like surfing up Calvinism, alternatives are available; a chaos cult, an atheist circle, or a radical Darwinist clique is easy to find. Nothing is holding you down or making you pay attention to anything in particular.”

One of the greatest dangers of the World Wide Web is the lack of value assessment. One can as easily find John Calvin’s *Institutes of Christian Religion* as Joseph Smith’s *Book of Mormon*. If it is there on the Web, you will find it.

Case in point, I know a new Christian, who in his eagerness to know more about Scripture, unsuspectingly wandered into the cultic website and was led astray. With the proliferation of information on the Web, and without an established gatekeeper to filter out the falsehoods, the Web can be a snare.

### **Spiritual Discernment**

To manage the deluge of information, one needs to have a standard. Heresies in the past were slow in dissemination because the tools of mass and rapid communication were not there. But old heresies have resurfaced and are gaining acceptance because they were been hawked online.

This is where spiritually mature Christians can play important roles. First, as a gatekeeper to the Web for your family and the Christian community; Christian parents must be as savvy as the children when it comes to the use of this technology. The dangers of the internet are well known. Of course there are software (Net Nanny, CYBERsitter, PureSight) to block out those unsavoury sites.

Parents must not overlook the addictive nature of the Web. The internet is a solitary medium that kills family communication. It used to be the TV that robs the family of quality time together. The internet is a worse family time killer than TV. With endless possibilities, varied personal interests, and the availability of wireless connection, the Web is a medium that caters to the individual. The family comes home but is never together because each is on his/her own in surfing through cyberspace. This is the dysfunctional family of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Parents therefore must work hard to find alternatives that call for active participation of the members of the family – alternative away from anything that has to do with a screen – wide, flat, HD.

Second, the World Wide Web is a tool, where Christians, individually or as a body of believers, can use as a Mars Hill – as Paul did – to present God’s truth. As a means of mass and rapid communication, the Web is a good platform for Christian witness.

25 Sep 11

How a tool is used, and the effects that it produces depends on the user. The media revolutions throughout history had had both good and bad effects. The printing press which speedily disseminated the Bible and made it affordable to the common man was also the means for the spreading of humanistic thinking that came through Enlightenment. The television which brings the news of the world into our living rooms and also gives us a new medium of instruction also brings with it mind-numbing entertainment that is shallow at best and depraved at its worst.

### **Exit Old Gatekeepers**

The internet too has its good and bad sides. What the internet does is that it removes all the traditional gatekeepers. The gatekeepers – reporters, editors, publishers, TV news anchors – control access to the public. The editors determine events and happenings that are newsworthy to go on the front page of the daily newspaper, or to be included in the evening news. Publishers decide what is worth printing in the journals and books; decisions which are generally influenced by their own worldview.

With the internet, their gates are too big to be manned, and the traditional gatekeepers are impotent. Unlike newspapers, print-media or TV, the internet is neither restricted by print space nor limited to a certain number of channels. A centralised control of content becomes difficult. This is most evident in politics where anti-establishment politicians increasingly rely on the internet to get their messages out. They and the electorate do not have to rely on newspapers and TV as the only sources of news and opinion. The internet gives the common man a voice. This means that every person has direct access to an audience over the web. A person who has something to say has the means to make his views known.

Under the traditional gatekeepers, who are mostly liberal and anti-Christian, it was difficult for the Christian view to find newspaper space or air time that would present an honest, unbiased, and undistorted view of the biblical worldview. In the decades preceding the internet, Christianity was gradually removed from the public square under the guise of pluralism. Bible-believing Christians were seen as narrow. The Bible was deemed as irrelevant and biblical values were said to be not in sync with progressive mentality. The Christian worldview was derided as outdated and puritanical. The Gospel of salvation through Christ alone was considered too narrow. Christianity could only be discussed in the public square in hushed tones.

Just as the internet gives a voice to the marginalized, so it also gives a voice to the Christians in the world. With the internet, Christians have found a new medium of expression, one that is no longer controlled by the liberal anti-Christian elite. Serious Christian discourse could no longer be silenced. Christians can be and is being heard.

### **Enter New Dangers**

Ironically, the very absence of internet gatekeepers that gave Christians a voice is the very thing that poses one of the greatest dangers to Christians as well. The absence of gatekeepers means that there is no control over the quality of the content. There is no filtering of truth from trash, treasure from garbage, of things valuable from things valueless. The freedom that the internet affords us can easily be turned to folly, and liberty to do right degenerate in licence to do wrong.

### **Sanctified Use of the Internet**

What then is the Christian's response to this technology? It is not to ignore it (not that we can), or to reject it all together (that would be a loss on our part); neither is it to adopt it blindly (that would be utter foolishness). Christians should first regard the internet the same way that Samuel Morse regarded the telegraph, the internet is something which God has wrought. It is a tool that ought to be used for the glory of God, not for the gratification of the self.

Second, in the absence of gatekeepers, there is a need for Christians to exercise discernment to filter out the bad from the good, falsehood from truth. This is the responsibility of mature Christians – parents in the homes, leaders in the church – who “are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Hebrews 5:14). The onus is on spiritually mature Christians whose senses are honed to carefully and accurately distinguish error from truth.

Third, we should regard the internet as the key that opens the door that frees us to preach the Gospel. The Christian's response then to employing this technology would be the same as our using the liberty that Christ has given us. "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another" (Galatians 5:13).

The liberty that Christ has given the elect can be used for self-gratification, or it can be used to serve others. Likewise, Christians can use the internet as "an occasion to the flesh," or we can use it to "serve one another" in love.

On the exercise of Christian liberty, John Calvin comments, "The method...of restraining liberty from breaking out into wide and licentious abuse is, to have it regulated by love. Let us always remember that the present question is not, in what manner we are free before God, but in what manner we may use our liberty in our intercourse with men....In a word, if 'by love we serve one another,' we shall always have regard to edification, so that we shall not grow wanton, but use the grace of God for his honour and the salvation of our neighbours."

Calvin preceded the internet by some 500 years, but what he said about the exercise of Christian liberty is directly applicable to the Christian's use of the internet – use what God has wrought for us for His honour and the salvation of our neighbours.

May the Lord grant us the wisdom to use what He has wrought for us for His glory and our good.

In Christ  
Pastor Isaac Ong

+++The End+++