

July to September 2022
Teenz RPG Series on

Bible-Presbyterian Distinctives

What does it mean
to be a Bible-Presbyterian?

Do pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance before you begin your devotional time, for unless the Spirit reveals the meaning, we cannot understand scripture (1 Corinthians 2:10). Then you must read the scripture text; please don't be tempted to read the devotional alone without reading the Bible. Memorising the scripture text will help you meditate upon it (Psalm 1:2), even long after you have finished your devotional time. After reading the devotional, always end with self-reflection: compare yourself against the standard of God's Word, and humbly yield to the Holy Spirit to direct you towards that standard (James 1:23-25). Be ye doers of the Word, not hearers only!

At the end of this series, may you be able to say as David said,

*"O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee,
my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is."*

(Psalm 63:1)

May all glory be God's alone!

Dn Milton Ang

On behalf of the Teenz RPG committee

IS HISTORY IMPORTANT?

The Bible is replete with the history of the nation of Israel and how God dealt with His people. The history of the church as recorded for us, starting from the book of Acts and through the corridor of time to the Reformation is just as precious and instructive. When we seek to record the history of the Bible Presbyterian Church, we read of a story of spiritual battles fought for the faith once delivered to the saints. In it, there is much to learn of spiritual conviction, courage, perseverance and God-given victories in the face of great odds. It will inspire and encourage our hearts. It will cause us to give thanks and ever be grateful to God for His faithfulness and mercies to us – the new generation who has inherited this rich spiritual heritage.

Just as God called Israel to remember her history for the reasons given in Psalm 78:7, we see the same purposes in our study of our own church's history. As we see God's mighty hand moving to build Bible Presbyterian churches, we learn to set our hope in God. We see how futile it is to put our trust in men and in the values that the world sets. The end of all spiritual teaching is that God's children may set their confidence in God. This includes not forgetting the works of God. Those who soon forget the merciful works of the Lord will also soon fall away. God's truth as unfolded in the history of the BP Movement must cause us not only to faithfully proclaim the good news of salvation but also to defend the precious historic faith that is now under fierce attack. It ought to inspire us to cling on tightly to God's precious Word, to cherish it, obey it, and live it out in our lives.

Dear teen, do you like to study history? The history of how the BP Movement came about is something you should be very interested in. It tells us how God worked in a mighty and mysterious fashion to bring about our denomination. It tells us of the mercies and grace of God who has bestowed His loving favour on us – the people of Singapore and more specially the people of this present generation and the children that follow.

Thought: God's truth received binds the soul to God.

Prayer: Lord, thank You for the love and care of my generation, guiding us that we might fix our hopes wisely and richly on God.

HOW DID THE BP MOVEMENT COME ABOUT?

The English service at Life Church Prinsep Street started in 1950, after Rev Timothy Tow returned from his theological studies in America. In 1955, it broke away from the Presbyterian Synod as it was part of the ecumenical Malayan Council of Churches. The church thus took upon the name Life Bible-Presbyterian Church, and so the Bible Presbyterian (BP) movement in Singapore started. As the BPC's 60th Anniversary magazine says, it was “a testimony founded for God's glory”. Indeed, God has done great things throughout Singapore and beyond in the churches that were set up to preach God's Word and to bring many to salvation in the Lord.

This spirit of gladness should be in our hearts as we look back at the great things that God has done in bringing about the BP movement. It was not born out of chance, but with a divine purpose. God's manifold goodness was at work even before the BP movement was born. He raised up many godly men, from whom we get the 7 roots of the BP faith. Over many years, God prepared this great work so that His people can be blessed. The new generation that is now in place should assuredly know that God has blessed us greatly through history, and so we can sing unto His name.

If we can learn to keep our hearts focused on the Lord and remember what He has done for us, it will go a long way in giving us joy in the midst of trials.

Dear teen, do you sometimes forget the Lord's goodness and love to you? You are likely to do that when disappointments and difficulties come your way. Instead of clinging to the Lord, your love for Him grows cold. You become lukewarm and ungrateful to the Lord. Do focus on the Lord's many great things that He has done for you, your family and your country. As we remember those good times, may our hearts be lifted up and cause us to sing praises to Him. Such a thankful and grateful heart would bring glory to God.

Thought: History is His story.

Prayer: Lord, grant me remembrance of Thy manifold goodness and the many prayers you have graciously answered. Help me to be joyful, knowing that Thou art the God who works in days past, present and future.

WHAT ARE ITS STRONG FOUNDATIONS?

The BP movement has strong foundations because of the truth which it rests upon. God's truth, as found in the Holy Scriptures, stands forever. Evil men tried to undermine it over and over again in church history, but at the end of every battle, truth always triumphed over every falsehood.

With such strong foundations, the righteous can thus do great things for God. The people in the BP church loved and guarded the truth. With the truth of God in their hearts, they lived courageously and gave their best to spread the truth far and wide.

The BP Church of Singapore is likened to a great tree which has 7 godly roots. These strong and deep roots make the tree sturdy and fruitful. In studying these 7 roots, we learn of the rich history and heritage that has made us what we are today. The first root is the French root, of which is John Calvin, the leader of the Reformed Faith. The second root is the English root as it is where we get our Presbyterian system. The third root is the Scottish root with the work of Rev William Chalmers Burns who was the Scottish missionary to China in 1856. He was also known as "Grandfather of Bible-Presbyterians". The fourth root is the German root when Dr. Rudolph Lechler who started a Teochew village church where our Singapore forebears came from. The fifth and sixth roots are the Chinese root of Dr. John Sung and the American root of Dr Carl McIntire, respectively, whom God had used to call Rev Tow and taught him what it meant to defend the faith. The last root is the Singaporean root through Rev Tow himself who is the founding father of the Bible Presbyterian Church movement in Singapore.

Dear teen, do you know how blessed you are to be in a BP Church which has strong foundations? How many churches had begun well, but are now astray from the truth of God! Do you desire to take time to ground yourself in the Truth, and learn of the firm foundations that we have in the Lord?

Thought: The righteous cannot do without God's truth.

Prayer: Father in heaven, help me to love Thy truth and live upon Thy Truth, for it is my firm foundation.

WHY BIBLE PRESBYTERIAN?

The BP Church of Singapore is first of all a Protestant Church. The word “protestant” simply means “one who publicly protests”. The Protestant Church stands against the Roman Catholic Church and all her doctrines and practices, thus only preaching and teaching what the Holy Scriptures say. The branch of Protestantism that the BP Church follows is known as the Reformed Faith on the European continent, and as Presbyterianism in the British Isles.

The BP church holds on to Reformed theology, which is well expressed in Calvin’s Institutes of the Christian Religion and the Westminster Confession of Faith with its Larger and Shorter Catechisms. These creeds and confessions are excellent standards but the standard par excellence is still the Bible. The Bible, infallible and inerrant, is our supreme rule of faith and practice. Hence the word “Bible” is prefixed to “Presbyterianism”.

Another reason why the word “Bible” is added to “Presbyterian” is because there was a need then to be distinct from those in the Synod of Chinese Presbyterian Churches. The Synod was linked to the Malayan Christian Council, which was becoming modernist and ecumenical. Continual association with the Synod would mean acceptance and relationships with the Roman Catholic Church! A stand had to be made. Thus in April 1955, ties were severed with the Synod, and Life Bible-Presbyterian Church was born.

The BP Church is really a Bible-believing, Bible-obeying and Bible-loving group of Christians, regardless of one’s gender, age, cultural background and social status. We who are in the BP Church must have this undying passion for the Word of God, because it is our milk and meat, light and lamp. The more we study the Word, the more we will know God and walk closely with Him. We cannot do without the Bible.

Thought: *“I would not give a penny for your love of truth if it is not accompanied with a hearty hatred of error...”*– C.H. Spurgeon 1834 – 1892

Prayer: My gracious, merciful and loving Father, may I be continually contending and defending the precious faith that God has given me.

WHAT IS ITS FIRST ROOT?

The first root of the Bible Presbyterian Church of Singapore is the French Protestant root. That is the root that traces back to the 16th century Reformation where our spiritual forefathers broke away from Rome to return to the apostolic faith. They fought for the Bible to be freely available to the believer (previously only the priests could read the Bible), as well as from an erroneous and wicked man-made system which hid the gospel of salvation from the people.

A sinner is made righteous or just by the righteousness of Christ imputed to him. No amount of good works or religious ceremonies can save a man. They are simply counted as "filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6). This is the teaching of the Reformed Faith that we subscribe to. John Calvin (1509-1564), a French theologian and pastor, can be described as a champion and foremost theologian of the Reformed Faith. All Bible Presbyterians are advised to read the abridged version of "Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion" published by Far Eastern Bible College. There you will see the beauty and profound godliness of Reformed theology.

Calvinism is really Paulinism systematised. From Calvin we learn of God's grand redemption plan, well encapsulated in the acronym TULIP. T stands for Total depravity of sinners; U for Unconditional Election; L for Limited Atonement; I for Irresistible Grace and P for Perseverance of the Saints. Understanding this will cause us to appreciate and cherish our salvation.

Dear teen, how about spending some time during your holidays reading up on the Reformation and the apostolic faith that Luther and Calvin fought for? If you do that, you will be richly rewarded. You will learn the rich heritage you have in the Protestant root. You will thank God that you did not fall into the clutches of an evil and corrupt system of works and not of faith. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8).

Thought: True wisdom consists of the knowledge of God and the knowledge of man.

Prayer: Gracious loving heavenly Father, may I read and meditate on the Word of God to increase in my knowledge of Thee and how I ought to live a godly life.

WHAT IS THE SECOND ROOT?

Our second root is the English root, which can be traced to the English Presbyterian Mission who witnessed to our ancestors in South China. They heard, believed and became active in the work of the Lord. Their descendants migrated to Singapore and started or became active in God’s Work here. Many of them worshipped in the Presbyterian Church at Prinsep Street.

The special characteristic of the English Presbyterians is their Non-conformist stance compared to the established Church, i.e. the Church of England or Anglican Church with her bishops and Archbishop. Many English Puritan ministers did not want to conform to the conditions laid out in the Act of Uniformity of 1662. This Act sought to enforce uniformity to the state religion i.e. the Church of England which previously had shown tolerance. These ministers could not agree to all that was prescribed in the new Book of Common Prayer. Thus 2000 English ministers were expelled, losing their position and pension.

The Church should be ruled by a plurality of elders or presbyters according to the Scriptures, and not be controlled by the state. Titus 1:5-7 is one of several Bible passages which teach this. The Apostle Paul instructed Titus to “ordain elders in every city” for Crete had many cities. The churches in the various cities were to have elders to oversee the preaching of the Gospel, administer the Sacraments and see to the spiritual welfare of the flock.

The Act of Uniformity brought about some of the darkest days that the Church of Christ has ever known, yet God brought good out of the evil. The expelled ministers went to the hills and fields of England and preached to thousands that they could never have in the confines of a church. Today too we look back at admiration at the courage and sacrifice of these godly Puritans who stood for the truth of God. May we follow in their train.

Thought: Are we willing to suffer poverty and humiliation in order to honour God?

Prayer: Gracious heavenly Father, grant me the courage to take the persecution that comes from taking a stand for Thy Truth.

WHAT IS ITS ENGLISH INFLUENCE?

Another English influence concerns the missionary zeal with which the English Presbyterian Mission reached out to the lost in obedience to the Great Commission recorded for us in Matthew 28:18-20. One of their mission fields was China, especially in Amoy (Xiamen) in south Fukien (Fujian) in 1850. Later, missions were established at Swatow (Shantou), East Guangdong and in the inland Hakka-speaking area.

Today the same emphasis is also found in the Bible Presbyterian churches. It became known as the fastest growing denomination in Singapore as BP churches multiplied in the 1960s and 70s. Life, Zion, Faith, Galilee, Sembawang, Mt Carmel, Jurong and Pandan were set up during this period. In time to come there were also churches in Malaysia, Australia, London, Canada, India, and also the rest of South-east Asia.

The policy of self-supporting missions was also something that the leaders learnt from the English Presbyterian Mission, which in turn is what the Bible teaches. The early years of Life BP Church was marked by a self-sacrificing pastor and a generous congregation who gave cheerfully. The English Presbyterian Mission's concern was that the churches they set up not only be self-supporting but also self-propagating churches as soon as was feasible. To this end theological education was introduced early to develop a well-trained ministry. With the help of Far Eastern Bible College's night classes and Bible Study groups at all levels, this healthy practice is still in force.

Dear teen, are you involved, in your small way, in any mission programme or outreach? It can be being part of a mission team to visit an outreach beyond our shores. It can be giving, in cash or in your time to help God's needy people elsewhere. It is not the amount that counts but the thought and the effort that has been put in that God is pleased with. As you reach out in faith, God will bless you with much joy.

Thought: Untold millions are still untold. Untold millions are still outside the fold.

Prayer: Lord, let me not selfishly rest content in my salvation, but be up and about to rescue the perishing who have not Christ.

WHAT IS THE THIRD ROOT?

The third root is a Scottish root. This came about when the English Presbyterians sent William Chalmers Burns, a Scottish missionary to China. This happened at the beginning of the 19th century. He served at the same time as the famous Hudson Taylor (founder of China Inland Mission). While Taylor served in various fields in China, William Burns stayed on in Swatow (Santou) to found a Swatow Presbyterian Church.

The first convert in the Swatow field, by the hand of George Smith, successor to William Burns, was Rev Timothy Tow's maternal great grandfather, Tan Khai Lin. He was also the first from amongst all the converts to be ordained a minister of the Gospel in 1882. Some of the Teochew and Hokkien ancestors, converted to Christianity through the Reformed Faith, began to migrate to Singapore and the Malayan States (as Malaysia was then called) in the 1860s and 70s. The English Presbyterian Mission then sent Rev John A B Cook to organise these emigrants into four churches, one of which was Life Church, Prinsep Street. Rev Cook also founded E P Mission Church, where Rev Tow's grandfather would pastor later.

William Burns had been greatly and mightily used of the Lord in many revival meetings in Scotland for fifteen years. Then God led him to China to bring the gospel to the Chinese people. He donned Chinese clothes in order to gain closer contact with the people and bring them the Word of Life. He exemplified Paul's motto in Philippians 1:21 *“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”* He greatly glorified God – whether in the pulpits of the churches in Scotland or in the fishing villages of China. William Burns had settled in his heart and mind that God was to be glorified in all the earth.

Dear teen, do you glorify God wherever you are? If at home you are able to obey and honour your parents in the Lord, you do well. If in school, you are diligent, honest and responsible, you do well too. Everywhere you go, remember to glorify God in all that you think, say and do.

Thought: Look after God's glory and He will look after your comforts.

Prayer: Most merciful Father in heaven, grant me grace to live a life that is more yielded to Thee.

WHAT WAS WILLIAM BURNS LIKE?

The godly influence of this Scottish man, William Burns grew far and wide. He labored long and hard among the millions in China. For twenty years he travelled tirelessly, often in solitary witness with only a few helpers. On and on he went, sowing the seed of the gospel which others would reap, until he reached the borders of Manchuria where he went home to be with the Lord on April 4th, 1868.

A day in his life would begin early in the morning when he prayed for blessing. Then he would set out with a light bamboo stool and placed it in a suitable spot to preach. He would stand on the stool and speak for twenty minutes, while his assistant prayed and pleaded for blessing from the Lord. Then they changed places. After an hour or two, they would move to another point and speak again. Usually about midday they returned to their boats for dinner, fellowship and prayer, and then resumed outdoor work until dusk. Before leaving the town, they placed many Scripture portions and other gospel literature in the hands of those interested. And so it went, day after day, William Burns would labour and toil.

William Burns was also a man of deep prayer. He recognised that shallow and superficial praying was one of the greatest hindrances to the kingdom of Jesus Christ. So he would often retreat to his secret place of prayer and persevered in prayer till victory was won. Today the BP churches greatly emphasise the importance of witnessing and missions work. Coupled with this is also the recognition that prevailing prayer is just as important. The prayer meeting of the church is always the week's top priority after the Lord's Day. All fellowship groups also have their own prayer meetings. The teachers and helpers in the various children's camps and activities are also encouraged to come together to seek the Lord's blessings in prayer before the programme commences.

Dear teen, seek opportunities to witness for Christ. You will find much joy as you do so. Give out tracts even when you travel. Invite friends to gospel meetings as well as on Gospel Sundays. If you are unable to participate, pray for these events. Your prayer is just as important as your presence.

Thought: Is your all on the altar of sacrifice laid?

Prayer: Loving Father in heaven, may my life be more and more consecrated for Thy use.

WHAT IS THE FOURTH ROOT?

The fourth root is a German root. In a remote village called lam Tsau (meaning “Salt Pans” in Teochew), 25 miles from Swatow, a German by the name of Dr. Rudolph Lechler came to preach the gospel. He belonged to the Basel Missionary Society, Switzerland. Despite many difficulties, Dr. Lechler persevered, and managed to plant a church at lam Tsau (1848-1852). He was able to baptise 13 believers in this church he established. The Tow and the Lim clans descended directly from this remote Teochew village church so our BP Church also has this little German root.

Years later, Rev Tan Khai Lin, the maternal great grandfather of Rev Timothy Tow, became the superintendent pastor of lam Tsau alongside three other churches. What Lechler planted, William Burns and Tan Khai Lin watered, but God gave the increase. Rev Tow, in his autobiography “Son of a Mother’s Vow” puts it this way, “The sowing in tears by the German missionary, a decade before the English, now brought many cheers so that *“both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together”* (John 4:36).

All of us must remember that when we sow or plant, we are merely instruments that God uses. All our gifts are from God; all that we are able to do is by the grace of God. When a soul is effectually and gloriously saved, we must not think we have converted him. It is God who gives us the opportunities and abilities, and works in the hearts of hearers to convict and to convert. Therefore, all glory rightfully belongs to God.

Dear teen, do not be too disappointed if your efforts to reach out to your friends have been unsuccessful. It is God who gives the increase. As you sow and water, let the Spirit of God work in the hearts of those whom you have witnessed to. Whether they accept or reject the gospel, your part is faithfully carried out. You will not lose your reward. The blessing that you hope to bestow upon your friend, will in God’s mysterious ways, return to you. Therefore, never be weary in well-doing.

Thought: Our wise and just God knows how to reward fairly.

Prayer: Father in heaven, may I be faithful in sowing and watering while I look to Thee for fruit and increase.

WHAT IS ITS GERMAN INFLUENCE?

Iam Tsau might be an off beaten fishing village but it was prominent in the Swatow district. This was because Lechler laid the foundation before Burns came. He labored in Iam Tsau for twenty years and spent a total of fifty-two years laboring for the Lord in China. The church at Iam Tsau was the first church that Tan Khai Lin pastored. Not only was he ordained the pastor of the church, he also became a tutor at the Swatow Theological College in 1882.

Thus, we do not despise the day of small things. A small fishing village could be used by God to launch the gospel outwards; A solitary foreigner became God's instrument to reach out to the Chinese which then spread to the BP Church movement in Singapore.

In Zechariah's days, after the second temple was built, the people were dismayed. Their enemies thought the temple was contemptible, and so did those Jews who had seen the glory of the first temple. Yet, in the eyes of the Lord of hosts, it was not so. Haggai 2:9 tells us, *"The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts"*. Similarly, a young convert's faith might be small but in time the Holy Spirit works to help their infirmities, makes intercession for them, carries on the good work in them, and performs it till the day of Christ. Who could tell that Martin Luther's stand against the Church of Rome would light the fires of Reformation throughout Europe, England and Scotland? Who could tell that Tan Khai Lin was to bring forth a great grandson who would be the founder of the BP Church movement in Singapore?

Dear teen, never despise the day of small things, for God is glorified in small things and uses them to accomplish great things. Remember the young shepherd boy David who used a sling to defeat the giant Goliath? Remember the little lad's lunch of five loaves and two fishes which was able to feed a multitude (John 6)? Therefore, God can use you to serve Him. God can use the little things you do for Him, to bring honour and glory to Him.

Thought: Bible history is the record of God using small things.

Prayer: Father in heaven, help me not to despise the little things that others do or even what I am tasked to do, but let me look to the great God whom I serve.

WHAT IS THE FIFTH ROOT?

Thus far we have been tracing the history of the BP Church to the forefathers of the generation that emigrated to Singapore in the 1860s and 70s. They were grouped into four congregations worshipping at Bukit Timah, Prinsep Street, Tanjong Pagar and Upper Serangoon. The fifth root is the Chinese root that pertains to the grandchildren of the Chinese migrants in the 1930s.

This was the generation that was greatly blessed with a revival where 2,000 nominal Christians were soundly converted through the ministry of Dr. John Sung. He was the greatest evangelist China ever had. He visited Singapore first in 1935. God had already used him mightily in many revival campaigns in China. Here again in Singapore God worked a mighty work and his fiery preaching changed the heart of young Timothy Tow.

He was a man who was not only learned in the Scriptures, but also revered and loved the Word of God. He loved it for its holiness and longed to be holy. He loved it for its wisdom and studied it to be wise. It was his meditation all the day. At one time, Dr. John Sung read his Bible 40 times in six months. His ministry emphasised Bible reading and one church leader commented, “One reason why Chinese churches are conservative theologically is that we have learned to take the Bible seriously.”

Dear teen, do you take your Bible reading and studying seriously? Not only will you know the attributes of God, you will also be sanctified (Psalm 119:9). Every day when you are out in the world, whether in school or elsewhere, the stain of our sin sick world will be on you. You need God’s Word to cleanse and purify you from the sins and temptations of the world. You also need the Word of God to strengthen you so that your faith grows day by day. It is the meat for your soul.

Thought: To love the Bible is to love the Lord Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Eternal God, my loving heavenly Father, cause me to find time and to have a strong desire to know my Bible well.

WHO WAS JOHN SUNG? (I)

Many are the wonderful works that God has done to the BP movement when He sent John Sung to Singapore. One thing which the Chinese Christians learnt then was the doctrine of the premillennial return of Christ. This is the blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ that Titus 2:13 talks about. Our Saviour will return as King of kings and Lord of lords and He will reign on His throne for ever and ever in Jerusalem. We, the believers of His kingdom will reign together with Him for ever and ever too. What a wonderful day it will be!

John Sung also alerted God's people in Singapore about the dangers of the social gospel of the liberals and modernists. He himself had tasted the poisonous leaven at Union Theological Seminary. Its president was an extreme liberal called Dr. Henry Sloane Coffin who preached against the bodily resurrection of Christ and the truthfulness of the Bible every week on his radio programme. Anything in the Bible that could not be justified scientifically was rejected as being unworthy of belief. Genesis was held to be a myth and belief in miracles unscientific. The historical Jesus was presented as an ideal to imitate, a noble example but not the Saviour of mankind.

John Sung struggled in his soul when he was in this seminary but God gave him the victory. After that he preached strongly against the poison of liberal theology and the social gospel. Today the BP church movement is also strongly against the liberal tide that has swept Christendom today.

Dear teen, do you have a biblical worldview? If you have, you will see the world through a biblical lens. You will reject evolution for you will take the Bible as your infallible, final authority in all matters of faith and practice. Science is not the authority. Is our earth billions of years old? You know the truth found in the Bible, don't you?

Thought: A biblical worldview requires that you know what the Word of God teaches.

Prayer: Our loving heavenly Father, help me to know my Bible well that I may know how to respond to issues in the world and filter everything through God's Word.

WHO WAS JOHN SUNG? (II)

Tens of thousands were saved under the evangelistic ministry of John Sung when he visited the churches of South East Asia. From his headquarters in Singapore, he made trips to Malaysia and Indonesia to bring the gospel of salvation to them. His work of evangelism here was also known as the “Asian Awakening”. God, in His mercy, used his ministry to strengthen the Chinese Christians to stand through the Japanese occupation of these countries from 1941-1945.

Realising that what the Chinese Church needed was repentance and a new birth, he fearlessly spoke against the sins of the people, including that of the professing Christians. He exhorted his hearers to humble themselves before God and confess their sins. They were to be made right with God and enter God’s kingdom by being born again. Many were moved to tears, as the Holy Spirit moved mightily to convict them of their sins. Rev Timothy Tow himself recounted in his book “The Asian Awakening” how he too was moved to weep bitterly for his sins.

John Sung’s favourite theme song had these words, “In the cross, in the cross, be my glory ever. All my sins are washed away in the blood of Jesus.” With this chorus, he reminded his audience that they had been truly cleansed by the precious blood of Christ. Many gave thanks, prayed and sang loud praises to the Lord for saving them so gloriously. Feuding elders and deacons made up with one another, money stolen was returned, and relationships were made right.

Dear teen, are you truly born again? Have you experienced a change, a real change in your life? This change comes from God, and can only come about through the work of the Holy Spirit. We are to recognise that we have sinned before a holy God and then confess our sins. We need to look unto Jesus and trust that He has died for our sins on the cross at Calvary. We then resolve to walk with Jesus, obey and serve Him.

Thought: We are saved by grace through faith.

Prayer: Our gracious loving heavenly Father, thank You for saving me by the precious blood of Christ. I thank You that unworthy as I am, You loved me and reached out to me, a poor lost sinner.

WHO WAS JOHN SUNG? (III)

John Sung nearly lost his faith in America. As he pursued his academic goals, he found great success but no peace. He truly experienced the futility of worldly success that did not profit him. The depth of his struggle was at Union Seminary when liberal and modernist ideas were given to him in daily and powerful doses. He was so affected that he was sent to a mental hospital but he came out thoroughly immersed in God's Word, assured of God's salvation and his calling into the ministry.

John Sung's zeal to save souls was what the BP Churches learnt. Those who were saved or revived in his ministry showed clear evidence in their zeal to evangelize. In Singapore, during a week's meeting, he registered three hundred forty-nine conversions that immediately set out in evangelistic bands. More than twenty-one preaching bands were formed in that period. They in turn were instrumental in bringing many more souls to Christ.

The enduring fruits of his preaching ministry are seen today in the BP churches. There are tracting teams, missions teams and gospel rallies in these churches. With modern technology, the gospel seed is sown far and wide through tracts, tapes and CDs.

John Sung also had Bible Study sessions which lasted two hours and were conducted three times a day. He wanted believers to know their Bibles and live holy lives. It was said that all Bibles in Singapore were sold out as they were eagerly snapped up by the revived believers and converts.

Dear teen, are you sharing the gospel actively? Are you reading your Bible daily? You would need to join a Bible Study group and have a regular schedule of Bible reading of several chapters a day. John Sung read 11 chapters a day. Occupy yourself with the things of God. Read your Bible and pray every day to grow, grow, grow!

Thought: John Sung's ministry was one of relentless rebuke of sin in the Church.

Prayer: Father in heaven, may I guard my heart with all diligence for out of it are the issues of life.

IS THE SIXTH ROOT AMERICAN?

During the 16th century reformation, a battle for the justification of faith was fought. During the 20th century, there was another battle in America for the faith. In the Presbyterian Church of USA there was an outbreak of blatant unbelief. A group of liberals and modernists like Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick had arisen to attack the fundamentals of the faith. This prompted the General Assembly in 1923 to reaffirm the "five points of fundamentalism, i.e. the infallibility and inerrancy of Holy Scripture, the Virgin Birth of Christ, His atonement, His bodily resurrection and His miracles." The modernists hit back with the infamous "Auburn Affirmation of 1924, denying the very fundamentals they were supposed to uphold.

In 1936, J. Gresham Machen formed the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, to distinguish it from the Presbyterian Church which had fallen to such unbelief and compromise. However because of differences in eschatology, and their refusal to require total abstinence from smoking and drinking, Carl McIntire led a group out a year later to form the Bible Presbyterian Church and Faith Seminary. Thus to the Bible Presbyterians of Singapore, our sixth root is an American root through the heritage of men like McIntire and Machen, for it was through Faith Seminary and men like Carl McIntire that our founding Pastor Rev Timothy Tow received his theological education.

Faith pleases God. The modernists and liberals were in unbelief. According to Dr. Machen, liberalism is not Christianity but another religion. It has no place in the Church of Jesus Christ. It is a wolf in sheep's clothing. Men like Dr. Machen and Dr. McIntire were warriors of great faith raised of God to fight for the faith.

Dear teen, do you see the need of the hour? We need men of courage, and conviction to stand up against the flood of unbelief that will soon engulf more and more of Christendom. God will have his godly remnant. But how do you ensure that you will not join apostate Christianity? May the Lord grant you a double portion of strength and spiritual power to equip yourself in this last hour.

Thought: What is the battle in this present generation?

Prayer: Loving heavenly Father, grant me discernment to know truth from error.

HOW IS THE AMERICAN INFLUENCE SEEN?

Of the seven roots, it is the American root that directly produces the Bible Presbyterian distinctive – biblical separation. Although we are descendants of the English Presbyterian Mission, and were Singapore-Chinese Presbyterians, we became Bible Presbyterians. This is due to what Timothy Tow learned when he was at Faith Seminary. By God's providence, he learned to defend God's infallible, inerrant and forever preserved Word.

The American influence can be seen when a similar battle took place in the Presbyterian movement in Singapore. When Timothy Tow came back to pastor Life Church at Prinsep Street in the English service, it was soon clear that the Chinese Presbyterian Synod was linked to the Malayan Christian Council (MCC) which was also linked to the World Council of Churches (WCC). He passionately espoused the cause of Christ under the International Council of Christian Churches, raised of God to be the banner of truth in the end times.

Together with other faithful men, Timothy Tow brought a motion to request the Synod to leave the MCC as it was part of the Ecumenical Movement. It was a case of David against the Goliath. But Timothy Tow and the valiant men who fought with him were very much encouraged by the likes of their American counterparts who were strong and courageous. Thus the ongoing battle between fundamentalism and modernism continued in Singapore. Though the Synod refused to budge, the Lord had greater things for them. Ties were severed with the Synod; Life Presbyterian Church broke away from the mother church and became a fully constituted Church known as Life Bible-Presbyterian Church of Singapore.

Dear teens, are you strong and courageous for the Lord? If you are to contend for the faith, you need to be strong and courageous. You need to be strong to take the many harsh criticisms and hurtful things that men can do. You need to be prepared to meet with rejection and humiliation, as the faithful men that have gone before us. Fight the good fight of faith.

Thought: Many mighty men are lost for failing to take a stand.

Prayer: Our gracious heavenly Father, strengthen me that I might be strong and courageous in Thee.

HOW DID EVENTS IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, USA IMPACT US? (I)

The events that led to the establishment of the Bible Presbyterian Church, USA, and Faith Theological Seminary have a lasting impact for us. 10 years before Timothy Tow's enrollment at Faith Seminary, there was already the fundamentalist-modernist controversy within the Presbyterian Church, USA.

Tow learnt of how Dr. Gresham Machen rose to stand in the gap (Ezekiel 22:30) and chose the old paths. These paths are the ways God has prescribed for us to walk. These are paths walked by our spiritual fathers. These are the paths that Calvin, Luther and others walked at the time of the Reformation. Yet these very paths were attacked by modernists. Sadly, the Presbyterian Church USA was taken by Satan. Machen graduated from Princeton and spent a year in Germany where he tasted the bitterness of German unbelief and vowed to fight this poison then beginning to infiltrate the churches in America. This led to the founding of the Orthodox Presbyterian denomination. However, the Lord took Machen home soon after that, and a group led by Dr. Carl McIntire, withdrew from the infant Orthodox Presbyterian Church to form the Bible Presbyterian Church. The mantle then fell upon Carl McIntire to continue the fight.

All these events affected Timothy Tow. God impressed upon his heart to value the old paths too. It was the good way and he should walk therein. He showed it when he returned to Singapore. As pastor of the English service of the Life Church at Prinsep Street, he saw the need for his Interim Committee to break from the mother church, thus starting the Bible-Presbyterian Church Movement in Singapore.

Dear teens, do you also value the old paths? When you see error creeping into the church e.g. that salvation can be obtained without repentance of our sins, you must realise that something is wrong. You search the Scriptures to give proof that it is wrong. Then, in the confidence of His Word, we reject such false teachings and alert like-minded brethren. If we know the truth and keep quiet, are we contending for the faith?

Thought: The old paths are marked by God Himself.

Prayer: Our heavenly Father, grant us grace and faith to value and defend the old paths.

HOW DID EVENTS IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, USA AFFECT US? (II)

From what happened in the Presbyterian Church, USA, the need for biblical separation was clearly seen and it became one of the hallmarks of the Bible-Presbyterian Church. Biblical separation is vital to the health and life of the church. It is God's way of purifying and preserving the church.

In our Bible reading for today, the Apostle Paul was reminding the Corinthian believers that they should not boast as if they were eminent examples of purity and piety. Just as a small quantity of leaven or yeast will pervade the dough, so a single sin indulged in or allowed in the church will act like leaven. It will corrupt the church and so needs to be put away. Thus Paul exhorts the believers in Corinth to put away their sin. This separation from sin is to be an on-going daily effort in order to be pure and clean.

Separation is necessary at both the personal and ecclesiastical levels. Believers are to be separate from the world. For a church to be both salt and light of the world, it has to be pure and holy. Therefore we must separate ourselves from all forms of apostasy, unbelief, disobedience and compromise. The true Bible-Presbyterian church takes a strong stand on separation from the ecumenical movement as promoted by the World Council of Churches. In 1978, when the Billy Graham Crusade with its neo-evangelical stand came to Singapore, the BP churches did not participate. Today, it continues with its strong stand against the "Health and Wealth Gospel" as well as the "Signs and Wonders" movement of the Charismatics.

Dear teen, do you see the importance of biblical separation? Can two walk together when one is good and the other evil? Compromise is dangerous. Never fall into the trap of thinking that you are strong and invincible. That is the surest way to fall. God has told us clearly that we are to be holy. To be holy is to be separate from unbelief and error. If you are convicted of this important doctrine, you will surely grow stronger by the day. You will surely shine for Jesus.

Thought: Be not unequally yoked.

Prayer: Father in heaven, open my eyes that I may see the blessedness of separating from all that is sin.

WHO WAS J. GRESHAM MACHEN? (I)

Rev Timothy Tow wisely observes in his book “The Singapore B-P Church Story”: ‘All the Synods and Assemblies of the Church, all the Boards and Directors of the theological institutions, were unwieldy trappings if not sitting ducks to the modernist onslaughts. In the history of salvation, God has not used councils and committees, but always a man to accomplish His purpose.’ The man that God raised in the early part of the 20th century was Dr J. Gresham Machen. He rose to be one of the most eloquent spokesmen for the evangelical position in the “fundamentalism vs. liberalism” controversy of the 1920s and 1930s.

The enemy came in like a flood. Many of them were Presbyterian ministers who had vowed at their ordination to uphold the Word of God, yet spent the rest of their lives preaching doctrines contrary to the Word of God. Machen was the standard whom the Lord lifted up against this enemy. Christianity’s strongholds in the Presbyterian churches in the USA were capitulating to modernism.

Princeton Seminary, where Machen studied and later taught in, was the last bastion of faith remaining. Machen wrote extensively to defend the old faith. Alas, the battle was lost when the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church voted to place the board of the Seminary in the hands of the modernists. The only course Machen could take was separation and so Westminster Seminary was founded.

Dear teen, have you noticed throughout the Bible that God’s method of dealing with falsehood was to send a man of His own choosing to lead His people to the truth? This was especially so in the days of the judges when judges like Gideon and Samson fought against the enemies to bring peace to the land. This was also true in the days of Elijah and Elisha when the kings of Israel were evil. Can you think of any more examples?

Thought: *“There is no such thing as presenting truth without attacking error.”* Gresham Machen.

Prayer: Our loving and gracious Father in heaven, thank You for Your love and grace that has not left us without hope and help when the situation seems hopeless.

WHO WAS J GRESHAM MACHEN? (II)

In “The Present Situation in the Presbyterian Church” J. Gresham Machen describes very clearly the problem faced by the Protestant churches of his time and even today. It is prevalent not only in America but also in many Protestant churches throughout the world, including Singapore.

The problem is this: True historic Christianity finds itself in a mighty conflict with alien types of religious belief and life that is totally unbiblical. There are bizarre and non-biblical interpretations of the Bible that result in a system of beliefs that is the opposite of what the Bible teaches. For example, the word ‘gospel’ in “social gospel” is used by the liberals to better the lives of the poor but do nothing for their souls. There is exaltation of experience at the expense of God’s written Word. Such practice is made the more dangerous because it is found within the Church.

The Apostle Paul warned in Galatians 1:6-9 that there were already some who had removed themselves from the grace of the gospel of Christ unto another gospel. There were already false teachers that troubled the believers in Galatia and perverted the gospel of Christ. The greatest enemies of the church were within, tampering with God’s Word. Paul exposed them for their diabolical deception. He used the word “accursed” which means devoted to destruction.

Dear teen, do you see the spiritual conflict in Christendom today in Singapore? Are you aware that many young professionals are attracted to the “health and wealth” gospel of the Charismatic churches? Contemporary Christian music (CCM) is widely used in these Protestant churches too. Does such music promote reverential worship? Is CCM in line with what the Bible teaches? Know your Bible. It is your best weapon to equip yourself in this spiritual conflict. The tragedy is that such errors have been swallowed hook, line and sinker by many gullible people.

Thought: Which people did Jesus ask to depart from him? (See Matthew 7:21-23)

Prayer: O Father which art in heaven, keep me in Thy path of righteousness as I humbly seek to obey Thy Word.

HOW ARE WE INFLUENCED BY J. GRESHAM MACHEN?

Dr J. Gresham Machen's life was full and varied and great in achievements. For twenty-seven years he was associated with the famous Princeton Seminary, first as student and then as professor. He lived through the fierce struggles between fundamentalists and modernists in Presbyterian churches, missions boards and seminaries.

He led a group of men who were of the same spirit, faithful to the Lord and His Word, to strive together for the faith of the gospel. From him we learn the importance of standing for the faith. As a defender of the faith, he did not just speak up for the truth, but he also knew to separate from unbelief and error when it was no longer prudent and wise to stay in an organisation. Likewise, we should not stay in any church or organisation that has denied or betrayed the faith that was once delivered to the saints.

When the Presbyterian General Assembly in 1923 declared belief in the five fundamentals as requirements for ordination, modernists attacked it at once. More than a thousand ministers of the Presbyterian Church signed “The Auburn Affirmation”, declaring that they would not accept any single fundamental as essential for ordination in the Presbyterian Church. This meant a man could be ordained without believing in the Virgin Birth, or in any of the fundamentals. The enemy won when they elected a modernist over an evangelical to be the Moderator of the Presbyterian General Assembly. The General Assembly then placed Princeton in the hands of a modernist Board. Princeton had fallen. Thus, Machen left the seminary to found Westminster Seminary.

Dear teen, when you separate from worldly living, do you think you are going to be popular? When your friends invite you to attend an overnight beach party or a BBQ party and you turn it down in favour of the YF or a church function, are you likely to be on the “invite” list again? You will soon be ‘marked’ as an outcast. If it is fine with you, then you are winning the battle. Machen lost Princeton but he won in God's eyes. By his example, generations of faithful Christians are encouraged to stand on the Lord's side.

Thought: A church that is ready to compromise is ready to die.

Prayer: Loving heavenly Father, may I value Thy truth above all things, even the deadly peace of compromise and a false love with the world.

WHO WAS CARL MCINTIRE? (I)

When Dr J. Gresham Machen was called home on April 1937, the mantle fell upon Carl McIntire. McIntire entered Princeton Seminary in 1928 to prepare for the Presbyterian ministry. He became a strong supporter of Machen, his professor of New Testament. With Machen, McIntire opposed a reorganisation of the seminary which would favour the liberals. When Princeton fell, he was among those who followed Machen to found Westminster Seminary.

Before he died, Machen had also founded the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC). McIntire eventually fell out with the leadership of the OPC. He supported the premillennial position as well as a strict stance against alcohol, while the OPC and Westminster Seminary were amillennial and held to Christian liberty in drinking and smoking. So the Bible Presbyterian Church was formed, and Faith Theological Seminary was established, together with the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions. McIntire became the leader of the Bible Presbyterian Church and President of Faith Theological Seminary, the seminary in which Rev Timothy Tow would later enrol.

One of McIntire's gems was: What God wants us to say through life is "The Lord did it." Boasting is forever excluded. This echoes the psalmist who, in Psalm 115:1, called to the Lord to bring glory unto Himself, and not unto us. All our merits come from God. Any achievement and success must be ascribed wholly to God. We must not imagine that we can do anything for God by our own strength, or deserve anything from God because of our own righteousness. All the good we do is done by His power and grace.

Dear teen, if the very breath of our nostrils come from God, it is very easy to see that all things come from God. If you are saved, you also know that salvation is a gift from God. We are saved by grace through faith. Faith also comes from God. We must therefore learn to give God all the glory.

Thought: *“The church is the pillar and ground of the truth, and that truth is revealed truth”* - Carl McIntire.

Prayer: Father in heaven, give me faith and courage that I may be faithful to the truth all the days of my life.

WHO WAS CARL MCINTIRE? (II)

Carl McIntire became pastor of Collingswood Presbyterian Church in 1933 after he graduated from Westminster Seminary. He was only 26 years old. The next year he was invited to sit on the Independent Board of Presbyterian Foreign Missions, This was a newly formed Missions Board as the old one had fallen into the hands of the modernists. This new Board was started by Dr J. Gresham Machen to promote true biblical work. The General Council of the Presbyterian Church opposed this work and wrongly charged the Independent Board of diverting funds from the official Board. When Machen and Carl McIntire refused to disband, they were brought to trial.

Both of them were disciplined and defrocked. Despite all that, McIntire was not discouraged at all. To McIntire, suffering is in the perfect plan of God for all of His true saints. He courageously fought on after his dismissal and persevered in the work of the Lord. A man of great energy and vision, he continued to proclaim his conservative beliefs.

McIntire fought all the way to his death. He endured many harsh criticisms against him. His grandson, Curtis Bashaw, put it this way: “He was willing to lose the physical and temporal things because of his beliefs.” Another pastor said that he was the most consistent fundamentalist of the 20th century for he spoke up for the truth, no matter how few friends he would end up with. McIntire said, “The more we suffer, the more we love. The greater the tribulation, the deeper our discernment and our understanding as we wait upon the Lord.”

Dear teen, are you willing to lose friends because of your faith? No matter how nice your friends are, if they are dabbling in the occult by playing with the ouija board or enjoying Halloween parties, we should part company with them. If they invite you out to drinking parties or to enjoy worldly entertainments, we must have the courage to turn them down. It is better to please God than man.

Thought: *“You do what God tells you and God will take care of the consequences”* - Carl McIntire.

Prayer: Loving heavenly Father, teach me Thy way, to understand that the darker the day, the more the light will shine.

WHAT IS THE LEGACY OF CARL MCINTIRE? (I)

Rev Timothy Tow was greatly influenced by Carl McIntire. In his three years at Faith Theological Seminary, he had met and heard the President of the Seminary speak. He remembered, in particular, a Chapel Hour when McIntire spoke of the Church and the crisis she was facing. The unfaithful modernists had not only captured the Presbyterian Church but were also marshaling their forces to form the World Council of Churches. This ecumenical movement was trying to unite all churches into one great world Church, a denial of the 16th Century Reformation. This would overturn the work of Martin Luther and the Reformation martyrs who had resisted the power of Rome and paved the way for the formation of the Protestant Church. Therefore in the same year, 1948, McIntire formed the International Council of Churches (ICCC) to battle this ecumenical threat.

The urgent need of the day was for a 20th Century Reformation. McIntire spoke with passion and the power of the Holy Spirit. There and then, Tow committed his life to the cause of the 20th Century Reformation Movement. He became a disciple of McIntire.

In that same year when Tow returned to pastor Life Church, the ICCC held its 2nd Plenary Congress in Geneva, Switzerland. Tow went there with Quek Kiok Chiang. It was in Geneva that Tow was ordained. From then on, he championed the cause of the 20th Century Reformation movement.

Dear teen, do you think the battle for the faith is over in the 21st Century? Many of the valiant soldiers of Christ have been called home. Will you the spiritual sons and daughters of these faithful men defend the faith? To do so you need to hold on to your BP heritage and the doctrinal principles upon which the BP Church was founded. If you are not sure about the doctrinal principles, you need to spend time studying the Bible.

Thought: Soldiers of Christ arise, and put your armour on; Strong in the strength which God supplies, through His eternal Son. 🎵

Prayer: Our Father which art in heaven, may we wrestle, fight and pray and win the good fight of faith.

WHAT WAS THE LEGACY OF CARL MCINTIRE? (II)

As BPs, we join in the great battle that Drs J. Gresham Machen, Carl McIntire and Timothy Tow fought. We are persuaded that there is a vital need to defend the faith against modernism, compromise and worldliness. We throw our strength into the great task of winning lost souls to Christ by the gospel of the grace of God. The modernists have no gospel to offer to their followers and so men are perishing under their ministry.

In true succession to Faith Theological Seminary’s mission to train faithful men to the ministry, Far Eastern Bible College (FEBC) was formed in 1962. Its aim was to train men and women to teach the Bible and live a holy life full of good works. On its website, the heading “Spirituality, Scholarship, Service” speaks of an endeavour to provide a biblical-theological education (Acts 20:27) that is based solely on the infallible and inerrant Scriptures. This will equip both Christian men and women for effective spiritual leadership and service in the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and in the defence of the Reformed Faith.

Today FEBC has grown to an enrollment of more than 100 students and is the hub of a Bible College movement that has spread to Myanmar, Philippines, Indonesia and Africa. Every vacation many of the faculty lecturers fly over to some of these colleges to offer short-term courses to the students there. These lecturers are also available to hold Missions and Bible Conferences to combat the Satanic doctrines now sweeping the church. Some FEBC graduates have also continued the work and they too have joined in on the Bible College Movement, having established fundamental Bible colleges in many countries around the world.

Dear teen, you may want to consider equipping yourself with some biblical education by enrolling in some FEBC courses while waiting either for your O or A level results. You can also attend the night classes which are held every Monday and Thursday night. There are also on-line courses for those who are unable to travel to attend these classes. Investing time in biblical education is one the most profitable things you can do.

Thought: O for a faith that will not shrink, though pressed by many a foe 🎵

Prayer: Father in heaven, may I have a faith that shines brighter and clearer with each passing day.

HOW ARE WE LINKED TO A GREAT CHURCH MOVEMENT? (I)

Time and time again we are exhorted from God’s Word to stand fast. To stand fast is to be very sure of what you believe from God’s word. The “traditions” refer to the unchanging truths of the Holy Scriptures.

When Timothy Tow entered Faith Seminary as a student, he was soon drawn into the battle for the faith. He found a kindred spirit in men like Carl McIntire who fearlessly fought the modernists. Being a Presbyterian in upbringing, he found himself like a fish taking to the water. Before his ordination, he had to go through an oral examination before a special ordination council consisting of 24 ministers of the Bible Presbyterian Church, USA. This was under the moderatorship of Rev Dr J. Buswell, assisted by Dr Allan A. MacRae, in lieu of the written examination.

When they were assured that the candidate for ordination was called of God, the council of twenty-four ministers laid hands on Tow. This laying of hands on the founding pastor of the Bible-Presbyterian Church of Singapore made him doubly linked to the great church movement of the Bible Presbyterians, USA and the 20th Century Reformation of the International Council of Christian Churches (ICCC). For the next four decades Timothy Tow was present at every Congress of the ICCC, held on every continent, save Australia.

The battle continues today on another front. In an article, the current Principal of Far Eastern Bible College, Dr Jeffrey Khoo stated that he fully concurred with the Bible Resolution of the ICCC which met in Amsterdam in 1998 to urge all Bible-believing churches worldwide to use only the King James Bible. It also warned the followers of Christ against innumerable “new bibles” which are not faithful translations.

Dear teen, do you know why we should use the King James Bible? Why are the “new bibles” unacceptable? They are linked to a diabolical duo called Westcott and Hort. Read S.H. Tow’s “Beyond Versions” to find out more.

Thought: Reformation is an on-going battle for the faith.

Prayer: Loving heavenly Father, may I remain faithful to the cause of the Reformation until Jesus returns.

HOW ARE WE LINKED TO A GREAT CHURCH MOVEMENT? (II)

Linked to the great separatist movement of the International Council of Christian Churches (ICCC) since the 1950s, the BP Church of Singapore has also moved on to the 21st Century Reformation by accelerating the growth of missions and Bible colleges in the light of the nearness of the Lord's coming. Till he was called home to glory on 20th April 2009, Rev Timothy Tow spearheaded this movement. His successor Dr Jeffrey Khoo is continuing the task of standing fast for the faith in the battle for the verbal plenary preservation of the Bible (VPP). In 2006, his theme for the East Africa Christian Alliance Conference, an affiliate of the ICCC, was "The 21st Century Reformation on the Move". Indeed Reformation is a continuing work of the Holy Spirit that every generation of believers is involved in.

The battle for the Bible in this century concerns the doctrine of the Verbal Plenary Preservation (VPP) of the Scripture. Neo-fundamentalists deny that the Church has a perfect Bible today and believe that the Bible has "insignificant" mistakes. They claim that the Bible was perfect only in the past, but is no longer perfect today. Hear God's Word in Psalm 12:7, "Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever." God will not leave His people without a witness. The moment God inspired the words, He preserved them all to the jot and tittle (Psalm 12:6-7; Matthew 5:18; 24:35). The Bible we have today has no mistakes at all. The Bible today is perfectly preserved in the Masoretic Hebrew Old Testament Text, and the "Received" New Testament Text (Textus Receptus). From these perfectly preserved copies of God's inspired, inerrant, infallible Scriptures, is derived our King James Bible. God has magnified His word above His name (Psalm 138:2).

Dear teen, are you a true son of the faith? There is a real need for you to speak out for the perfect preservation of God's Word. A true son of the Protestant faith will not allow God's Word to be criticised, belittled, twisted, denied, and yet keep silent.

Thought: The Bible in our hands today is not only 100% inspired but also 100% preserved.

Prayer: Eternal God, our gracious heavenly Father, may we be found true sons and daughters who will defend and contend for the historic faith.

IS THE SEVENTH ROOT SINGAPOREAN?

The seventh root is Singaporean – through the late Rev Timothy Tow, the founder of the Bible-Presbyterian Movement in Singapore. He had a godly heritage as his grandfather was a godly minister of the Gospel. His maternal great grandfather was the first convert of the English Presbyterian Mission to Swatow (1859). His mother dedicated him for the Lord's service when he was born. Like Hannah making a vow to the Lord, Tow's mother vowed the same vow, that should He grant her a boy, *"then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life"* (1 Samuel 1:11).

Tow was soundly converted at a revival meeting conducted by Dr John Sung, who brought Pentecostal Revival to Singapore. In response to the altar call, he dedicated his life to full-time service in 1935. However, he soon forgot his call and pursued a law degree in London. God redirected his steps when his wife and daughter died within months. He realised the futility of living for himself. In 1946 he enrolled at a seminary in Nanking to study theology under the famed Dr Chia Yu Ming. Recognising his potential, the seminary recommended Rev Tow for transfer to Faith Theological Seminary, USA.

Tow graduated in 1950 with a Bachelor of Divinity. It was at Faith that he imbibed the spirit of the 20th Century Reformation from Dr Carl McIntire, the President of the International Council of Christian Churches (ICCC) to stand against the apostasy of the day. His heart was strangely warmed by the clarion call from McIntire to *"earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints"* (Jude 1:3).

Dear teen, God can certainly direct your steps as you seek to serve Him. It can be a call to full-time service, in a ministry, e.g. music, youth, children, aged, missions or even writing of Christian literature. Pray and be sensitive to God's will. Your own ambition must yield to what God has for you. Remember God desires the best for you.

Thought: *"...whoso trusteth in the LORD, happy is he."* (Proverbs 16:20)

Prayer: Loving heavenly Father, help me to understand that Your ways are higher and better than man's ways.

THE FIRST BP CHURCH IN SINGAPORE

Upon his return from the States, Rev Timothy Tow presented his credentials to an eager congregation from the text, "*Holding forth the Word of Life*" (Philippians 2:16). Thus, all were called upon to be witnesses for God and to share the gospel with others. This also includes being salt and light to the world, to defend the Word of God when attacking and rebuking sin. The exemplary and holy lives of the members of a church will be one of the sources of highest joy to a minister in the Day of Judgment.

Tow himself exemplified a life wholly devoted to the Lord. He served the Lord for over 50 years and was available to his flock 365 days a year, 24 hours a day. He had a burning zeal for souls. In his early days he energetically travelled to villages in Malaysia to reach out to the Chinese. Together with Rev Hsu Chiang Tai, he travelled to 60 new villages to distribute a hundred thousand tracts and thousands of gospel portions.

Rev Tow lived by a policy of immediate self-support, according to the biblical principle that "*they which preach the Gospel should live of the gospel*" (1 Corinthians 9:14). He was content with whatever free-will offerings each week. God's work included Family Worship, Prayer Meetings, Church Visitations, Special Gospel Meetings, Youth Fellowship and reorganisation of the Sunday School. The Church was busy with work for the advancement of God's Kingdom.

Dear teen, are you playing your part to hold forth the Word of Life? Do you go beyond attendance at Teens Sunday School lessons on Sunday? Do pray and seek to learn as much as you can during these lessons. It saddens many a teacher's heart and parents' too (if they were aware) that their teen(s) are passively idling their time away during these precious learning sessions. Prepare yourself to attend Youth Fellowship (YF) for you need to grow in so many ways. Once you start to attend, be regular and consistent as well as be an active participant. Remember you are in a spiritual battle.

Thought: An inch of time is an inch of gold

Prayer: Lord, grant that we may have eyes to see and hearts to know that time is to be used wisely for Thee.

WHY ARE WE BPs?

Moses, the great servant of the LORD who had led the Israelites out of slavery and through their wilderness wanderings, had died. The awesome task and duty of leading the Israelites to conquer the Promised Land now fell to Joshua. The baton of leadership and duty was thus passed from one servant of the LORD to another. Joshua had been trained under Moses. The Word of God, as given to Moses, must now always guide Joshua. It must always be in his thoughts and form the basis for all his thinking and action. It must be the very foundation upon which all his leadership principles and decisions were based on. Everything that came from his mouth – teaching, commands must be according to the Word. He must meditate – study and ponder it all the time – and then obey it completely. Every part of the law was to be his guiding light. The adversaries were great and the faith of the Israelites would be tested. But if Joshua were faithful and obedient to lead the people according to God's way, and not his own or the ways of other men, then the result would be success as promised by God!

The Bible is the Word of God. Every word, every doctrine is essential and thus 'compulsory'; not in a bad way, but for our own good! Sadly, many Christians and churches have a poor knowledge of the Bible. And, if a doctrine is unpopular or deemed irrelevant, it is not taught and is ignored! Obedience? That also seems to be optional. Christians, like the Israelites, are in a spiritual battle. Can we afford not to know the law, not to be faithful to it or not to obey it? Hence, "Bible" with Presbyterian – our system of church government and Calvinist theology – distinguishes our church from others. It clearly proclaims the foundation of our faith – the Word of God. In its entirety, it instructs every aspect of our lives, and by our testimony and faithful teaching of it, instructs future generations. As young students of God's Word, as Joshua once was, God demands that you are diligent and obedient students of His Word. The time will come when it is your turn to train up future generations when the present leaders in your church pass away.

Thought: As you mature in your faith, do you pray for and work to have the knowledge, courage and obedience of Joshua?

Prayer: Right now, may all of the Word of God be my guide to live a victorious Christian testimony for Him and do His will totally in complete obedience.

HOW FAITHFUL ARE WE TO THE BIBLE?

The entire Bible is inspired – that is, divinely influenced by God Himself. It is not merely another book written by man. It is far better than the most famous books, those on the bestseller lists or those made into blockbuster films. God is the Bible’s ultimate and divine author, and we are told that in studying this perfect and inspired book will certainly be profitable for us. To make a profit is to gain, and benefit. No matter what we do, be it study, practise a musical instrument, develop a hobby or train in sports, it is always with the hope that we make gains, progress and thus profit. The Bible, which God inspired His servants to write, will surely lead to gains, never losses. The Bible helps us in 4 areas: in doctrine - the principles of our beliefs; in reproving us – by expressing disapproval for sin and error; in correcting us – by showing us the right way; and finally, in instruction for righteous living.

You may, armed with the latest technology, study techniques, equipment and training methods, spend many hours pursuing gain in different endeavours. However, sometimes the results don’t show and gains are not made. We may feel that the gains do not commensurate with the effort we put in. Now, it’s definitely not wrong to work hard or ‘smart’ in our studies or work for testimony’s sake and for the glory of God, but what about working hard for spiritual profit that is guaranteed by your Heavenly Father? This is profit as it will directly influence our walk with God. This is profit that will last beyond this earthly life.

Perhaps the question asked in today’s devotion should instead be, how faithful must we be to the Bible? The answer should be nothing less than a total, complete adherence to every word of it, not just in our personal lives but also in what we allow in our churches. Our understanding and application of the Bible orders our system of church government, the way we worship, the hymns we sing, what is taught in Sunday School and the form and substance of our fellowship groups. The Bible is the very Word of God and so we must be faithful to it, as much as God is faithful to us.

Thought: In your church and personal walk with Christ, is there heavy reliance on books written by famous preachers, theologians or charismatic or popular leaders, over the Bible?

Prayer: “That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” (2 Timothy 3:17)

DO WE EARNESTLY CONTEND FOR THE FAITH?

Paul wrote the second epistle to the Thessalonian church to warn them of false teachers and the dangerous doctrines that they had been sowing. From outside the church, there were those who deceived them into believing that the day of the Lord had already come, causing them to despair (2 Thessalonians 2:1-3). From within the church, there were these brethren that ‘walketh disorderly’. They were not walking in accordance to the tradition (faith imparted to them by the apostles) that they had been instructed in. Instead, they had the wrong notion of what it meant to prepare for the Lord’s Second Coming, and had stopped work, becoming a nuisance, freeloader and busybody in the congregation. Such behavior was very disruptive and harmful to the church. Because of that, Paul’s instruction to the church was to withdraw, remove themselves from these wayward members, to have no fellowship with them. Paul then gave the reasons for this command and stated that he issued the command not in his name, but in the name of Christ.

When we have no fellowship with and openly oppose and name fellow believers and churches that no longer preach, teach and live according to the Holy Word of God, we are earnestly contending for the faith. It is by Christ’s authority and for Him that we do this. We do not do it out of spite or anger, but because of love, for we sincerely want these erring brethren to realise their wrong, repent and turn back to the Lord. In so doing, we are actively promoting and not compromising the faith.

Bible-based and Bible-honouring churches are few in these last days. These churches are often a lonely and scorned minority. In this sea of compromise and disobedience it is difficult to find the courage and the wisdom to sincerely contend for the faith and to persevere in doing so. But if a church as a body of believers genuinely professes Christ, then living according to the Word as taught by the apostles is not optional, but will be a great blessing – both to itself and the people around it.

Thought: What is the motivation for earnestly contending for the faith? If Christians do not contend for the faith, who will?

Prayer: Give me the courage to earnestly contend for the pure and only faith in obedience to Christ as His child.

WHAT IS THE DEFINING DISTINCTIVE OF THE BP CHURCH?

Salt is a small but potent and precious mineral found naturally in our Earth. If you've ever cooked or baked, you will know that just one pinch of salt will change the flavour of food considerably! If you don't believe so, try food that has no salt at all! Salt is one of the oldest and most indispensable seasonings known to man, and it has apparently more than 14,000 uses. It can clean, disinfect, purify and preserve, and in small amounts it is essential for our health. Wars were even fought over it! Salt can be a remedy for a bland meal, but there is no remedy for unsavoury salt - salt that is no longer 'salty'. With what can you season salt with to bring back its savour, saltiness? Nothing. "Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltiness, wherewith (with what) will ye season it?" (Mark 9:50) It is to be thrown away, out in the street, fit only to be trampled upon. The once precious and potent salt is useless.

Christians are likened to the salt of all the earth. They are it's only salt, and are unique and special. They are Christ's 'antidote' to sin and death. No other religion is true, frees from sin, or leads to eternal life. In obeying Christ's commands, Christians become that sanctifying influence in the world, showing forth a witness and testimony of what it means to be like Christ. However, when they compromise Bible truths, accept sin and embrace falsehood, they lose their savour, and become ineffective witnesses. They are not called to be 'bland' and neutral - by not taking sides and making a stand against compromise and sin. When they become like this, they have lost their 'savour'. What do you do with things that once worked but don't anymore? You throw it away.

The word 'Bible' in Bible-Presbyterian is a clear statement that our Church is a Bible-believing and Bible-honouring Church. It is our faithfulness to the Word of God, not just in knowledge but also in practice, that makes us as salt with savour. Without the love of and defence of the Bible we will definitely lose our savour and be worthless as we slowly but surely depart from the truth and fall into sin and apostasy. Bible-believing and Bible-honouring - this is the defining distinctive of our BP Church.

Thought: Is your life a Bible-believing and Bible-honouring one?

Prayer: May I live a Bible-believing and Bible-honouring life all the days of my life.

WHAT IS PERSONAL SEPARATION?

It is definitely easier to fashion yourself according to the trends of the world (fashion, celebrities, technology, television and film) than to go against them. They are so appealing. Everyone is following them and they appeal to our sinful and carnal nature. But, as Christians, we know we should not. Instead, we should be holy, as our Heavenly Father has called us to be holy. Christ and the life He led should be what we fashion ourselves after. “All manner of conversation” means that every single part of our lives should be clean and pure, not just our verbal conversations. In everything we say and do, we must be holy. This is a command and the source of this command is none other than the Holy Bible itself. We must obey if we are His children.

Sin is an obstacle to holiness and it should not be underestimated. Make no mistake: sin will contaminate a Christian’s life. Hence, personal separation is separation from sin. This is probably the most difficult of the different aspects of separation to live out. It is something you have to consciously do every single day. It is a difficult walk, and a struggle to find balance between being in this sinful world and yet not being of the world. And, as a teenager, often the pressure and influence from peers and parents (for both good and bad) are the greatest. As you strive for holiness, Satan works against you. Don’t underestimate him and the subtle nature of sin. The problem is that we often skirt as close to sin as we can. We tell ourselves, it’s the big things that count. What’s the harm in listening to gossip or ‘news’? It’s nice to be included. Or laughing at a mean joke? Sometimes the meanest things are terribly funny, that’s why we find them and the people who say them so hard to resist.

But as you mature in the faith and knowledge of His Word, you must surely become more sensitive to sin, and so you cannot plead ignorance of sin to justify it. All these things that tempt us are so temporal, fleeting and never truly satisfy. Would you rather not follow after the example of Christ?

Thought: What are the practical things you can do to keep away from things that tempt you to sin?

Prayer: May I strive after holiness each and every day.

WHAT IS ECCLESIASTICAL SEPARATION?

A yoke is a wooden beam that typically joins pairs of animals at the head or neck for the purpose of them working together to pull a load. It's a very close relationship when animals are joined at the head or neck. This is deliberate. The animals have no choice but to work together. Imagine, if possible, if they were joined at the tail? Chances are they would more often than not work at different speeds and in different directions. Another thing we realise about yokes is that one would never join a horse with an ox. The yoke would not fit well, and each animal is designed by God to do different things and each has their own unique temperament and physical build. The farmer would be foolish to fashion such an unequal yoke, for to do this would ensure chaos! The animals might even be a danger to one another. The purpose for a yoke is to join two or more animals that are the same so that together they can pull a greater load than working on their own.

A rhetorical question follows the command not to be unequally yoked, which highlights how believers and unbelievers are the direct and polar opposites of each other: righteousness/unrighteousness, light/darkness. How can such opposing parties form a close relationship that is one of fellowship and communion with involves brotherhood, harmony and unity of a shared purpose?

As Christians, our work is to do the will of God. To *"...teach all nations... Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you..."* (Matthew 28:19-20). It is clear how impossible it would be for Christians and the Church, as a body of believers, to ever work together with unbelievers. We cannot say the 'ends justify the means' because the Great Commission was given to believers not unbelievers. It is not the intent of unbelievers or secular organisations to fulfill the Great Commission. The Apostle Paul's instruction is crystal clear: the Church can never work together with unbelievers, for that would be compromising with the devil! Ecclesiastical separation is thus knowing how to draw the line in not cooperating or having any spiritual relationships with unbelievers and with churches that are doctrinally deviant.

Thought: What reasons do churches give for working together with unbelievers?

Prayer: May I remember that Your work must be done Your way and not mine. May my church and I be obedient and have the faith to accomplish Your work in Your way.

“...that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven”

DO WE NEED TO PRACTISE BIBLICAL SEPARATION IN EVANGELISM?

In this verse, there are two descriptions of Christians: light and a city. The purpose of light is to illuminate darkness. As Christians, we are the light for the entire world, to shine the glorious truth of the gospel of Christ upon a sinful world of unbelief. Thus, we must shine purely and boldly.

A city on a hill is set apart and strong. Its advantageous position gives it a view of all its surrounds and any enemies. Just as it has a view of all around, all around can see it from afar, during the day and at night when it is lit up. In this way, the city cannot be hid.

All eyes are upon Christians as we are light that shines and a strong city that cannot be hid. We have an awesome responsibility to preach forth the pure gospel and to live exemplary testimonies so we do not corrupt the gospel message and cause others to stumble.

Practicing separation in evangelism is a logical extension of personal and ecclesiastical separation. If we are true to the Word, it would be hypocritical, and in practice impossible to work together with neo-evangelicals, Charismatics and Catholics in the work of evangelism and then practice personal and church separation. We are the light for Christ. To cooperate is to expressly disobey His command, mock His holy name and show our lack of faith in Him to accomplish His work.

In our church, we support all missionaries and mission work regardless of denomination as long as they are fundamental. We do not practice separation just for the sake of isolating ourselves. Rather we practice separation because of the Biblical principles that we read of in the Bible. We will work with anyone who preaches the fundamentals of the Bible and does not compromise in any way, and we will separate with anyone or any church that denies Christ or His Word, even though they may call themselves Christians.

Thought: If you went evangelising together with a Charismatic, will both of you be preaching the same gospel?

Prayer: Lord, may I live a faithful and obedient testimony of the gospel's power in my life.

AUG 7

Leviticus 20:26

Memorise Leviticus 20:26

“...for I the LORD am holy, and have severed you from other people...”

WHY IS SEPARATION SO IMPORTANT TO THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH? (I)

The LORD commanded the Israelites to be holy for Him. As His people they ought to be holy as He is. Israel was God’s chosen people whom He severed from all the other people. To sever is to divide by cutting, often suddenly and with great force. God told them that He had already thus separated them away from the world, and unto Himself. Now they belonged exclusively to Him, and were to be holy unto Him.

For us, as the church, we are the body of God’s chosen children. Like Israel, we too have been severed from unbelievers through the gift of salvation, and are called to be Holy unto the Lord. This means that we must be separate unto Him, away from the filth and uncleanness of the world.

What happens if you mix precious clean drinking water, with a small amount of dirty water meant for washing the floor? All the water would be polluted. It would be impossible for it to remain clean and pure for drinking. If you had only one container to keep all the water, would you mix it anyway? Or would you throw away the dirty water even though it seemed a waste?

So likewise, the church is called to be and has been made like this pure and clean water. God has chosen us to be holy and therefore separate from unbelievers and the sinful things of the world. The church belongs to God, not the pastor or the members. It is not up to us to do what we like and feel is best. We exist to glorify God, not God us. Separation from compromising and disobedient Christians, apostasy, other religions, sin and worldliness is critical to the life of the church because it keeps the church holy and separate for the Lord and His work. However sincere, or well-meaning these people may be, just as $2 + 3$ will never equal 4, the holiness of God and His truth are absolute and cannot be compromised. Complete obedience is the only obedience, and the only way for the church to be holy is as God has commanded and has called us to be.

Thought: What is the focus of your walk with God, you or God?

Prayer: LORD, may I be holy unto You.

WHY IS SEPARATION SO IMPORTANT TO THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH? (II)

In these verses, the word ‘witness’ is used twice to describe God’s chosen people. They have been given knowledge, belief (faith) and understanding that there is only one God and one saviour. There was no other nor will there ever be any other. They are witnesses to all of this. God’s witnesses are to honour and serve Him, and to testify to the rest of the world of who He is, that they might know Him.

In a court of law, a lawyer will always choose the best witnesses to testify for his client to win the case. Firstly, the witness must have been at the event and must be able to recall the events that he witnessed as accurately as possible. His knowledge must be sound. Moreover, the witness must also have a good reputation, and be someone who is trustworthy and honourable. These criteria are essential.

Not only has God chosen us to be His witnesses for Him but He has also equipped us. Thus we must fulfill the duty we have been entrusted with. For this reason, however ‘unkind’ and ‘cold’ separation seems, it is essential. When we do not practice separation and instead compromise, the accuracy and trustworthiness of God’s pure testimony is damaged and over time will become more and more tarnished. In a court of law, witnesses are examined, scrutinised, and questioned vigorously. Consider, how a small mistake, or blemish on one’s reputation can destroy the credibility of a witness and their entire testimony. If the church’s testimony is blemished by compromise or worldliness how much good will it do for God? Would such a witness do more harm than good?

Thought: What kind of witness will God declare you to be when you stand before Him one day? Worthy and faithful?

Prayer: May I be a worthy and faithful witness unto You, LORD.

WHY DO WE USE THE KING JAMES BIBLE VERSION (I)?

Of all the English versions of the Bible, the King James Version (KJV) is the only one that stands out in terms of faithfulness to the original Scriptures and precision of translation. This is because the KJV is the only widely accessible English version that is translated from the Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT) and the Greek Textus Receptus (TR). The MT had been carefully preserved by God's providential hand and through the work of scribes who were meticulous with their work of copying the MT, the text which underlies the Old Testament of the KJV. Likewise, early church leaders, guided by the Holy Spirit and the logic of faith accurately identified the divinely inspired NT books. These manuscripts were copied and compiled into what we know as the Textus Receptus – the Greek text underlying the KJV's NT. The translational process resulting in the KJV involved 6 teams of God-fearing theologians who met and did their translative work in Cambridge, Oxford and Westminster. They were theologians and expert linguists who translated the texts using the method of formal equivalence, translating the Bible directly and literally from the Greek and Hebrew words. This faithful method of translation ensures that we have in our hands the very Word of God, not tainted by the doctrinal bias and interpretations of the translator. In contrast to the MT and TR, almost all modern English versions (MEV) today utilise the corrupt Westcott and Hort Text (Westcott and Hort were unbelievers who denied every fundamental doctrine in the Bible). Most MEV translators also used a method of translation called dynamic equivalence. This required the translators to inject their personal thoughts and interpretation into the work, making the translation less faithful. Hence, the MEVs are more the result of paraphrasing corrupt texts rather than that of a faithful translation of God's Word.

The "fruit" test, as stated in Matthew 7:17-18, tells us that nothing good can come from a source that is corrupt to begin with. Likewise, MEVs which derive their texts from corrupt sources, translated by unregenerate men, are themselves corrupt and with error. Only the KJV stands apart from all the other versions in that it is derived from faithful texts, translated by faithful men using a superior translation technique. This is why every English-speaking believer should use the KJV.

Thought: Just as dessert can be laced with poison, MEVs may be easier to read but no less deadly.

Prayer: Thank you Lord for faithful men that You have raised before us to give us Your perfect Word in English which is the KJV.

WHY DO WE USE THE KING JAMES BIBLE VERSION (II)?

Today's Scripture reference describes how the Berean Christians always compared what they heard with the Scriptures to help them discern truth from error. What they did reflects a deep sense of reverence that they had for God's Word. It also showed that they gave God's Word the highest level of regard and authority. Because of their attitude towards it, they were steadfast in the faith.

The KJV translators too were men who had a deep sense of reverence towards God. They cherished every jot and tittle of God's Word and held them in very high regard. They would not and dared not handle God's Word carelessly. In the work of translating the scriptures from the original languages to English, 54 men, many of whom were distinguished scholars and expert linguists, divided themselves into 6 committees which met at Oxford, Cambridge and Westminster to do the work. It was indeed the providential hand of God to arrange such a translational work to take place in that particular era of scholasticism, godliness and devotion.

While it is possible that a revision of the KJV could take place that would replace the KJV as we know it today, the possibility of putting together a task force with people of intellectual and spiritual caliber equal to that of the 1611 translation team in this day and age would be so remote as to render this highly improbable. Such was the quality of the translational work done in 1611 that it might never be replicated.

Dear Teen, it is the responsibility of every English-speaking Christian today who loves God's Word to be as the Berean Christians. We must not only search the Scriptures to know the truth, but also to diligently search out the most faithful English translation of God's Word. The 1611 translators, with God's guidance and providence, took extreme care and caution with translating the scriptures to ensure that the highest level of accuracy was attained without introducing of any of their own personal thoughts or opinions, as taught in 2 Peter 1:20. This is why the KJV is the only English translation that can be considered the very Word of God, the only one worthy to be used by every faithful believer.

Thought: Satan first twisted God's Word in the Garden of Eden. He continues to do so today through the MEVs.

Prayer: Lord, grant us wisdom and discernment such that we Your sheep can know Your voice, always.

WHAT IS OUR VIEW OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES?

There are people who think that the Old Testament is irrelevant and should be dispensed with. Instead, they place greater importance on the New Testament and read the New Testament with more enthusiasm than the Old Testament, which they neglect. The misconception here is that Jesus' coming meant that the Old Testament would be replaced by the New.

Jesus teaches that the Old Testament is neither to be neglected nor trivialised in any way. He says in Matthew 5:17 that He did not come to destroy the law or the prophets but to fulfill them, meaning that He came as God in the form of man to live a life perfectly obedient to God the Father, hence satisfying all of God's requirements according to the law and statutes as recorded in the Old Testament. Far from considering the Old Testament to be irrelevant, Jesus wants us to know that the Old Testament law is so important that anyone who cannot obey it perfectly would be condemned to hell unless they trust in Him to do so on their behalf. It was here that He made the declaration, that till heaven and earth pass, not one jot or tittle shall pass from the law till all be fulfilled. The entirety of God's Word is so important, that God Himself will ensure that His Word is perfectly preserved, such that every generation can have access to it.

Furthermore, Jesus does not want anyone to think that salvation is a license to live as if a lower standard of holiness is now somehow acceptable. Misleading others into taking such an attitude has consequences. Likewise, those who tell others that salvation means having even greater reason to live holy lives on account of their relationship with Jesus while conducting themselves in like manner will have their reward in Heaven one day (v19). In order to know how to live a holy life, we need the complete Word of God, both the Old and New Testament.

The Old and New Testaments are one harmonious whole (J.C. Ryle). Many of the Old Testament prophecies, including those about Jesus, have been fulfilled right down to the last minute detail as recorded in the New Testament. Indeed, Jesus being God Himself would not contradict Himself by favouring the New Testament over the Old Testament as He is the Author of both.

Thought: The New Testament is in the Old concealed. The Old Testament is in the New, revealed.

Prayer: We do thank Thee indeed Jesus for fulfilling every jot and tittle of the law for us, otherwise we would be lost for eternity.

WHY DO WE HOLD TO THE VPP(I)?

The doctrine of Verbal Plenary Preservation (VPP) is not something new or conjured up by someone's imagination. Rather, it is scriptural and supported by verses such as today's reference verses. VPP simply means that every jot and tittle of the entire Scripture has been perfectly preserved. Psalm 12:6 declares God's Word to be absolutely pure. The imagery that Psalm 12:6 brings to mind is that of a very precious substance going through the process of purification through a furnace in which the impurities are removed and then having this entire process painstakingly repeated many times to ensure that the end product does not contain even one speck of contamination. Logically, as God is the One responsible for ensuring that His Word is of the highest standard of purity, it would make little sense for Him to then allow it to suffer the ravages of years of neglect.

God is both Author and Custodian of that which is most precious and needful to man, His Word. The next verse (v.7) reaffirms His providential hand in keeping His Word pure and therefore preserving it for every generation so that anyone who earnestly seeks God can find Him and come to know Him through the Bible.

The present struggle to defend the doctrine of VPP against attack, criticism and unbelief is a spiritual battle in which Satan tries not to undermine Christian doctrines one at a time but to throw doubt on all of God's Word in one fell swoop. Those who were once fundamentalists but now believe that God did not preserve His Word in the copies of manuscripts made through the ages (apographs) even though His inspired Word in the original manuscripts (autographs) were without error are known as Neo-Fundamentalists. They are dangerous as they are devious wolves in sheep's clothes, misleading their congregation into thinking that they are earnestly contending for the faith while sowing seeds of doubt in their minds. Dear Teen, all of God's Word is still available to us today, complete and perfectly error-free, as God took special care to ensure that even those copies of Scripture could not be corrupted even in the slightest.

Thought: No man builds a monument and leaves it to decay through neglect, so why should God treat His Word in like manner?

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for VPP for without it we would have every reason to doubt even the most precious Gospel of Jesus.

WHY DO WE HOLD TO THE VPP(II)?

Psalm 119:89 says, *“For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven.”* This is a strong declaration that the Psalmist makes, to speak of the supremacy and authority of the Word of God. God’s Word is something that is settled, that is fixed and well established, not to be shaken or moved. It is confirmed, not in the changing and unstable realm of man, but in the perfect and immutable abode of God – heaven. Thus we see that God’s Word is not subject to revision or alteration, neither can it be challenged as it is already “settled in heaven” by God Himself.

In “Theology for Every Christian”, Timothy Tow and Jeffrey Khoo state that in order for something to be a supreme authority, it must be existing, present and accessible or else it would be no authority at all (page 97). This means that if God’s Word is the supreme authority that it claims to be, then it must exist in its entirety even today. Since the autographs (original manuscripts) are no longer in existence, it follows that God’s Word must therefore be perfectly preserved with no error whatsoever in the copies of the autographs (apographs) that do exist today. This proves VPP to be true.

To believe otherwise would mean that the authority of God’s Word would have been compromised and undermined. We would have no reason to believe that God’s Word is true, much less submit to it. This is just like institutions asking for certified hard copies of a person’s identification or qualifications. They are satisfied with the person’s details without viewing the original documents because the process of certification ensures that the copy is an exact representation of the original. Thank God that He did indeed preserve His Word for us just as He has stated in His self-authenticating Word - the Bible. We can submit to its authority because we have every jot and tittle of God’s Word kept safe from error and corruption for us to refer to even today.

Thought: What a comforting thought and a wonderful doctrine VPP is, that I can trust God’s perfect Word whole-heartedly.

Prayer: O Lord, we praise and thank You that You love us enough to ensure that Your Word is kept pure for us and our children.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF WE REJECT VPP?

Matthew 4:4 was spoken by Jesus to Satan as He countered Satan's attempt to lure Jesus into sinning. He tried to entice Jesus to end His fast by turning stones into bread – to use His abilities to satiate a physical desire. Jesus quoted Scripture (Deuteronomy 8:3), that it is really not about the physical needs, but the spiritual needs that man needs in order to live. He was careful to emphasise that we need each and every word of God in order to live.

Once again, there would be no reason to hold God's Word in such high regard unless it was authoritative. In yesterday's reading, we saw how it would be impossible for God's Word to carry such authority unless VPP was true – that is, God's Word remains intact, completely accurate and accessible to this very day. Not believing in VPP leads to doubt in the most important message of salvation which the Bible holds for unbelievers. It also leads to compromised standards of obedience, sanctification and holiness for believers. How can a believer steadfastly obey every commandment unless he is certain that “every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” has been kept pure and is found in the Bible which he holds in his hands? He would have doubts as to which part of the Bible was lost, wrongly reproduced or corrupted. This being the case, it would be difficult if not impossible for anyone to trust and obey God's Word to the jot and tittle. The full effects may not be fully seen and felt immediately but the rejection of VPP may lead to unbelief or compromise in future generations.

Our heavenly Father is not a derelict father who gives to man the most valuable gift that ever existed, only to allow it to suffer the effects of human error and satanic influence. He desires that man live by every word that He had recorded in Scripture through the divine inspiration of human authors. It is not in His character to deny man that which He desires man to know, trust and obey. If this were so He would cease to be God for He would be contradicting Himself! But we know that cannot be possible as the God of the Bible is a perfect God who cannot lie and is never wrong.

Thought: To say that God is absolutely trustworthy but doubt the perfect preservation of the source of this declaration makes no sense.

Prayer: O Lord, help me to tell others about VPP not only because it glorifies You but also because it is true.

WHY DO WE BELIEVE IN A PERFECTLY PRESERVED BIBLE?

The quick and correct answer to why we believe the Bible is perfectly preserved is simply this: that God said that He would. Many of the modern critics today point to the manuscript evidences and take pleasure in pointing out every inconsistency and apparent discrepancy in the Bible to prove that the Bible has not been preserved. Yet others would mock at our circular arguments, for they question how one can cite the Bible itself, to prove that the Bible is perfect. They always seem to desire an external validation before they would believe the Word of God in faith.

Let us consider the self-authenticating nature of the Bible. When something is self-authenticating, it proves itself to be genuine as no higher authority exists which can be referred to in order to verify the truthfulness of its contents. For example, God said He created everything. Since only God the Creator Himself was present during creation, no other person's account of this event can be more authoritative than His. Likewise with perfect preservation-the Bible proclaims it and no one can say otherwise because of its self-authenticating nature. What is required here is faith.

Thus our response can only be: God said it, I believe it and that settles it because God cannot lie. Why? Because God said so Himself. This is circular reasoning, but this is valid if the basis for it is true. God promises that all who diligently seek Him will find Him as He had described Himself in His Word-the Bible. He would not have said so if He believed that there would come a day when His Word could no longer be trusted because it is not preserved 100% error-free. It is by faith that we believe that God preserved His Word for us right down to the last minute detail in the copies of Scripture in the original languages that still exist today. It is by faith that we believe that the scribes that meticulously copied God's Word did so without any error with God's help. None of us were around to witness how the scribes actually performed their work. None of us know every event, big or small, which God had caused to come to pass in order that the scriptures would withstand every attempt made to corrupt it. The substance of things hoped for and the evidence of that which is not seen is found in the perfect Bible we still have today.

Thought: I know God well enough through His Word to trust Him fully because I have His perfect Word.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, let us not just rely on evidence but rather strengthen our faith also that we may please Thee.

WHAT IS OUR FORM OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT?

A Presbyterian Church, as its name implies, is run by elders or "Presbyters" (The word 'elder' in the Bible is from the Greek word 'presbuteros'). Church elders are members who are deemed to be the most spiritually mature. They are elected every 3 years by the congregation to form the managing body of the church, the Board of Elders (BOE). The BOE consists of both 'Teaching Elders', who are the pastors, and the 'Ruling Elders' who are laypersons that are likewise tasked with the oversight of the church. The BOE meets regularly to discuss issues related to the spiritual direction and governance of the church. They would be the leaders of the congregation to make decisions on spiritual, theological, moral and visionary matters on behalf of the church. The Pastor is an Elder who has a special role of preaching God's Word to the congregation because of his theological training and his ability to teach and instruct. He is also usually the moderator of the BOE.

The Biblical basis for this form of government comes from Acts 15:6, when the Apostles and Elders came together to discuss spiritual matters which affected believers. They met to decide how to tackle the problem of false teachings that had crept into the church, undermining the faith of the congregation. Likewise, the church Presbyters or Elders are expected to watch over the spiritual welfare of the congregation and to lead, instruct and protect them as per the biblical precedent set in Acts 15:6. Such a system is wise, for in the plurality of elders, there is safety. No decision is made unless there is unanimous agreement from these spiritual men. If they are truly men of God who seek only to obey God's Word and do His will, then the church is in safe hands indeed.

Do you know who are the leaders of your church? Do you trust them and regard them well as men of faith? The Bible tells us that we ought to give double honour to those who rule well, knowing the heavy responsibilities and many duties that they have. On our part, we would do well to pray for them, and assist them in any way possible. After all, as a church, we are one body in Christ, and as members of this body, we all have a part to play!

Thought: Church leaders may be elected by the congregation but ultimately it is God who places and keeps them in their positions.

Prayer: O Lord, thank You for raising faithful men who are empowered by You to lead and protect us.

ARE WE “REFORMED”?

The 16th Century reformation was a series of events in Europe that resulted in a spiritual awakening and the rediscovery of God’s Word. During the dark spiritual ages the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) had a monopoly over God’s Word and forbade laypersons to read the Holy Scriptures on pain of death. Even worse, the RCC taught that to be excommunicated from the church meant the loss of salvation. This made them very powerful.

Pivotal in the 16th Century reformation was an RC monk named Martin Luther who became convicted by the truth of God’s Word. *“The just shall live by faith”* appears 4 times in the Bible. Martin Luther meditated on these verses and wrote his 95 theses refuting the RCC’s theological position. The teachings that came out of this movement are known as Reformed Theology, which holds on to the belief that salvation are found in Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone, according to scripture alone and for the glory of God alone (the 5 “solas”). This movement continued on in theologians like John Calvin and his students who came up with the 5 points of Calvinism, a biblically centered theological perspective focusing on the sovereignty of God, His election, redemption and the security of our salvation in Christ.

As a church after the Reformed tradition, we hold on to Reformed Theology and believe in Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace and Perseverance of the Saints not because of historical heritage or sentimentalism but because it is founded on God’s Word. It shows how utterly helpless we are that we cannot do anything to save ourselves, how utterly dependent we are on Jesus for our salvation and how our salvation is utterly secure in Him.

Thought: The Reformation was a historical event demonstrating God’s love for man by liberating him from spiritual slavery.

Prayer: Thank You Lord for justifying us in Christ. Help us, O Lord, to henceforth live by faith, which is pleasing to You.

ARE WE PRO-ISRAEL?

The people of Israel are God's chosen people. Because God has expressed His love for the nation of Israel (Deuteronomy 7:6-8), we too should lend our support to that which God loves. This is not to say that we must agree with everything the nation of Israel does, or think that the Jews are favoured by God such that they have their places secured in heaven by virtue of their racial heritage or that they are somehow superior to other races or nations. Admittedly, methods that Israel uses in their conflicts with the other Middle Eastern nations are sometimes questionable. No Jew can be saved outside of Christ just like any Gentile believer. Indeed, the nation of Israel as it exists today, is a secular nation of unbelievers with a believing remnant. However, we must recognise that they have a right to exist as a people and nation because God has made it clear that this must be so. Indeed, Jesus (who is a Jew) shall return through the nation of Israel.

Israel rejected Jesus as Messiah and had their privileged position as the visible witness for God removed. This responsibility has now been given to the church, the body of believers. Notwithstanding, God still has a plan for Israel and one day their God-given role shall be restored. God has not rejected Israel just as God does not reject Gentile believers even if they inadvertently bear a poor witness for Him. Indeed, anyone who assumes an anti-Semitist position does so at the risk of being cursed by God (Genesis 12:3). The pro-Israel position is thus one that recognises the role that Israel has in God's eternal plan, in accordance to His revealed will.

If Gentiles could be adopted as God's people even though they were not God's chosen people to begin with, then how much more will God want His chosen people to come back to Him, as wayward as they may be at present (Romans 11:23-27)? The Abrahamic covenant that God will make Israel into a great nation shall be fulfilled just as God has made good on His promise to bless those who support Israel (Genesis 12:2-3). This should give us good reason to support Israel. Let us also be wary of Anti-Semitism as this goes against the will of God.

Thought: Nothing can destroy Israel even though many Arab nations have set their minds against her because God loves her.

Prayer: O Lord, thank You for your tremendous gift of salvation to both Jewish and Gentile believers who now belong to Your family.

WHY DO WE REJECT THE CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT?

The Charismatic Movement was popularly known as the Signs and Wonders movement in the 1980's and 1990's. As foretold by God's Word, there shall arise false Christs *“shewing great signs and wonders that, if it were possible they shall deceive the very elect”*. We reject the Charismatic Movement simply because it is not of God.

Supporters of the Charismatic Movement claim that gifts such as prophecy, tongue speaking, miracle healing and special revelation still exist today. Their own active involvement in these activities are proof to themselves that these phenomena are genuine. However, the Bible says that these phenomena shall cease (1 Corinthians 13:8) as they shall no longer serve the purpose for which God had intended. The Apostles were given such gifts to establish their authority and authenticity to the early church after which there were no accounts of them performing miracles in the Bible. Furthermore, God's Word tells us that these gifts were necessary due to the spiritual immaturity of the believers in those days. However, we are told to put away such childish things as we grow spiritually (1 Corinthians 13:11). As we now have a more sure word of prophecy (2 Peter 1:19)-the very Word of God recorded in Holy Scripture, these signs and wonders are no longer needed.

Dear Teen, do take heed. Those empowered by God to foretell the future did so with perfect accuracy but this is not true of Charismatic prophecy. Likewise with miracle healing – those who were healed in the Bible were instantly and completely healed the first time round. Tongue speaking is not the incoherent babbling observed in Charismatics but the speaking of actual languages by people who have never learnt them before. God no longer reveals extra-biblical information to believers as God's Word is already complete and the Bible carries a warning to those who add to or subtract from it (Revelation 22:18, 19). If you have friends involved in the Charismatic movement, do pray for them and speak to them in love, as you show them the truth of God's Word.

Thought: Let us separate ourselves from those who claim to be believers and yet engage in practices not supported by the Bible.

Prayer: Give us, O Lord, the wisdom to discern that which is of God and that which is not in these last of the last days.

WHAT IS WRONG WITH NEO-EVANGELICALISM?

Neo (or New) Evangelicalism is basically a term given to describe the mindset of churches and believers who claim to be evangelical but refuse to agree with the principle of separation. Previously, the term “evangelical” generally referred to those who preach the fundamentals of the faith, in contra-distinction to the liberals. In other words, they were Bible-believing, conservative Christians. Back then, the lines of distinction were clearly drawn. You were either an evangelical or fundamentalist who believed in the Bible and separated from apostasy, or you were a liberal or modernist who denied the inspiration of the Bible, and many of the truths therein.

However, in the early 1940s, after the dust of the fundamental-modernist controversies had settled, a new generation of evangelicals and so-called fundamentalists arose. They were put off by the militant stance of their forefathers, which often resulted in church splits, fragmented denominations and were often looked down upon by the mainline churches. They desired recognition, unity and peace. Thus arose the mindset of what we would term ‘neo-evangelicalism’. They contended that evangelicals should practice infiltration rather than separation, meaning they should stay in the apostate denominations and organisations and try to change them from within rather than separate from them and serve God in pure churches and organisations. They sought to practice dialogue rather than preach against error and be negative in their message by rebuking and warning the false teachers publicly. They also began to re-examine their idea of worldliness and were not as strict about separating from worldly evils as Bible-believing Christians had been in earlier days.

Whilst these motives might seem to have been good, the methods were in direct disobedience to Scripture. For in so doing, they had gone in the way of men like Jehoshaphat, who had tried to cooperate with unbelievers, and were strongly chastised for it. They were good kings, who had did much to reform their nations. But their problem was their propensity to cooperate with unbelievers, of Asa with the Syrians, and Jehoshaphat with the wicked King Ahab. The warning given to Jehoshaphat was clear: 2 Chronicles 19:2b *“Shouldst thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the LORD.”*

Thought: Leave nothing out when earnestly contending for the faith.

Prayer: Lord, give us courage to share the truth with others and the faith to rely on Your Word as our perfect guide in everything.

WHAT IS WRONG WITH ECUMENISM?

On the surface, Ecumenism or the Ecumenical Movement appears to be a positive move towards achieving world peace and mutual love and respect among people from different cultural and religious backgrounds. After a more careful consideration, however, Ecumenism is merely a perceived or transient sense of peace and unity at the expense of truth. In Ecumenism, differences in beliefs and doctrine thought to be confrontational or divisive are set aside while similarities and common ground are emphasised in order to bring about unity.

Indeed, the Charismatic phenomenon had spread from Pentecostal churches to the Roman Catholic Church and even churches which were previously protestant, fundamental and reformed. Charismaticism is now a common denominator in many of these compromised and apostate churches and serves as a unifying force among them. This, together with the document known as the “Evangelicals and Catholics Together” (ECT) whereby some Protestant leaders opened channels for dialogue and discussion with the Roman Catholic Church (instead of practicing biblical separation from them) who no longer consider the Evangelicals as adversaries but merely “separated brethren”, work towards the objective of Satan and the Antichrist of establishing a one world order with a one world religion. This is as unholy a unity as that of the temple of God (believers) with those idols that God absolutely hates (2 Corinthians 6:16).

There is nothing wrong with world peace and unity. However, this must not be achieved through compromising the truth. If the fundamentals of the Christian faith are made negotiable in order that everyone can be on talking terms, the consequence is that people would all be blissfully on their way to hell hand in hand while believing in a different Gospel. God has foretold that there can be no lasting peace without Him. It is vanity indeed to pursue a lasting peace and happiness that is neither within God’s will nor in accordance with God’s teachings (Ecclesiastes 1:15).

Thought: The only acceptable peace is one in which unbelievers and apostates truly repent, fully accept Jesus and His teachings and unite in truth.

Prayer: Lord, help me change what I can, accept what I can’t, and grant me the wisdom to tell the difference according to Your Word.

ARE WE PRE-MILLENNIAL?

Revelation 20:1-7 speaks of a literal 1,000 year period during which Jesus Christ will reign over the whole world with the saints. This thousand year period is known as the millennium. There are three differing views on the millennium, namely post-millennialism, amillennialism and pre-millennialism, the last being our BP view.

Post-millennialism is the view that Christ will come only after the millennium. Post-millennialists believe that Christians will improve the world, whether through evangelism, politics or other social actions, such that it becomes peaceful and prosperous. The millennium to them is thus an undefined long period of a golden age, whereby the world will become better and better until Jesus returns to rule the world. We reject this view as Jesus proclaimed that the world will only become more wicked in the last days. Amillennialists do not believe in a literal 1,000 year reign of Christ but treat it as a symbolic, heavenly reign where Christ is even ruling the world now from heaven through the Church. We reject this view as the Bible clearly states that Christ and His people will reign on earth (Revelation 5:10) and that this will be in the future. Satan and his devils should be bound during the millennium (Revelation 20:2-3) and we know that this is not true currently.

We believe in pre-millennialism which states that Christ will return before the millennium to judge the world, restore Israel and reign on earth physically. The Bible teaches that the world will become progressively more wicked with the coming of the Anti-Christ and the seven year Great Tribulation period. This period is often specifically referred to as the “wrath” or “orge” in Greek (Revelation 6:17) and is used in 1 Thessalonians 5:9 to show that true believers will be spared from this “wrath” and raptured. After the Great Tribulation, Christ will return to defeat the Anti-Christ at Armageddon and set up His millennial reign on earth. This biblically correct view gives us hope for the future. As we look around at how wretched and depressing this sinful world is, we should not despair but keep our eyes on Christ and His future reign on earth. There will be true peace on earth at last and we will reign with Him as “kings and priests”. Cling on to this blessed hope and persevere to the end!

Thought: Christ is coming soon. Are you ready?

Prayer: Dear Lord, I earnestly await the day when Thy Son will reign on earth as its rightful King. Help me to be faithful to Thee till the end.

WHAT WILL THE MILLENNIUM BE LIKE?

The Bible clearly describes the millennium as a unique period of time where Christ is physically on earth ruling with His saints. Isaiah 65:20 describes a time where Man will live to “an hundred years old” and still be considered a child. This does not refer to the new heaven and new earth described in Revelation 21:1-5 as there will be no more death then and we will live for eternity. It also does not refer to the current time where Man can only live to 70 or 80 years (Psalm 90:10). It therefore speaks of the millennium, a unique time in between our current state and before God creates a new heaven and earth.

There are also many other Bible passages that describe the millennium as being a time on earth which has yet to come. Isaiah 2:2-4 talks of Christ ruling from Jerusalem by giving His law and His Word. It describes how *“He shall judge among the nations, and rebuke many people.”* The result of His reign is peace on earth at last. Zechariah 8:20-22 shows how all the world will come to Jerusalem to seek and worship Christ. Isaiah 65:25 describes how creation will be restored from its fallen state which was a result of the original sin by Adam and Eve. It speaks of how the wolf and the lamb can feed together in harmony and are no longer enemies. It is a beautiful and peaceful time on earth because Christ the true King is ruler of the earth.

There is a monument called the Isaiah wall at the United Nations headquarters in New York City. It bears an inscription of the latter part of Isaiah 2:4, *“and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more”*. It leaves out the first part of the verse which talks of Christ ruling the earth before peace can ever prevail. The world is still trying to use human effort to work towards peace which is unachievable without Christ. We need to reject these ideas and tell people the truth. The world is never going to get better and there can be no peace apart from Christ. This stark reality should urge people to seek salvation in Christ. We need to tell our loved ones to not look to man but to Christ who is the one who can bring peace to earth (Luke 2:14).

Thought: How would you evangelise to someone using the truth of the millennium?

Prayer: Help me to tell others about the peace found in Christ alone.

WHAT ARE THE TWO MAJOR PRE-MILLENNIAL VIEWS?

There are two types of pre-millennialism – historic and dispensational. Both believe in the literal reign of Christ with His saints on earth in the millennium. Historic pre-millennialism is so called because it is the classic form found in the writings of early church fathers. They believe in Replacement Theology which states that Israel has been permanently rejected as God’s people and that the Church is the new spiritual Israel. They quote Matthew 21:43 where Jesus says, “the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof”. They do not believe in the future restoration of the nation of Israel, although they believe that Israelites can be saved. Therefore, there is no need to segregate the Church and the nation of Israel, and the Church will go through the Great Tribulation. Christ will return at the end of the tribulation, and there is no rapture of the Church before that.

Dispensational pre-millennialism is a view held by the dispensationalists. They view the Church and the nation of Israel as two separate entities and believe that God will fulfill all His promises to Israel in the future. For example, God promised David that his son will have a physical kingdom in 2 Samuel 7:12-13 and this will be fulfilled when Christ rules during the millennium. They therefore believe in a pre-tribulation rapture of the Church and the restoration and prominence of the nation of Israel during the Great Tribulation and the millennium.

The nation of Israel was God’s chosen people. They had the privilege of knowing God’s Word and His moral law in the Ten Commandments. However, they rejected and disobeyed God in numerous ways, such as asking for human kings to rule them, worshipping idols and heathen gods, and finally rejecting and crucifying Jesus Christ. As a result, they lost the privilege of being God’s chosen people and the Gentiles, the branches of the “wild olive tree”, were grafted into the Kingdom of God. We must learn from the mistakes of Israel and not take the privilege of being God’s elect for granted. We, the wild olive branches, must always be humble and grateful that salvation has come to us as well and that God is willing to use us to further His Kingdom.

Thought: How did Israel disobey God? What can we learn from them?

Prayer: Keep me always humble and grateful that Thou has saved me.

WHY MUST THERE BE A MILLENNIUM?

This is an intriguing question for who knows the mind of God? Although we can never fully comprehend His ways which are too high for us, the reason for the future millennium can be understood by reflecting on God's faithfulness in fulfilling His promises.

First of all, God promised Israel that they will be saved and restored as a great nation. This will happen during the millennium when Christ comes to reign from Jerusalem. God says in Zechariah 8:13, *"And it shall come to pass, that as ye were a curse among the heathen, O house of Judah, and house of Israel; so will I save you, and ye shall be a blessing: fear not, but let your hands be strong."* Secondly, God also fulfills His promise to the Church that *"if [they] suffer [meaning, to endure], [they] shall also reign with Him"* (2 Timothy 2:12). Revelation 20:6 promises that His saints will reign with Christ on earth and be spared from the second death which is after the Great White Throne judgment.

God also fulfills His promise to creation which *"groaneth and travaileth in pain together"* as it waits to be *"delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God"* (Romans 8:19-22). Creation is restored to its glorious perfect state in the millennium. God's promise to the nations of peace and justice will also come to pass as Christ rules righteously. *"The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea."* (Isaiah 11:9b). Lastly, God fulfills His promise to His Son to give Him *"dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve Him"* (Daniel 7:13-14). Christ who came first as the suffering Servant to die for Man will come again in glory to claim His rightful kingdom as *"King of Kings, and Lord of Lords"* (Revelation 19:11-16).

God never breaks His promises to us. He ever *"abideth faithful"* (2 Timothy 2:13). Although the world seems beyond repair, yet God promises the millennium where all will be put right. Therefore, we should not despair but believe that God will fulfill all His promises to us no matter what, even though it seems impossible to our human mind. Let us learn to take God at His Word.

Thought: What are some of God's wonderful promises in the Bible?

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank You for Thy everlasting faithfulness.

"I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery..."

WHAT IS OUR BP PERSPECTIVE OF DISPENSATIONAL PRE-MILLENNIALISM?

Most conservative denominations adhere to historical pre-millennialism. However, our BP denomination believes in dispensational pre-millennialism, yet we are not dispensationalist but covenantal or reformed in our theology. This means that we believe that from the Fall in the Garden of Eden and all through the Old Testament and the New Testament, God has instituted a covenant of grace by promising a Saviour.

Dispensationalism believes that the Bible is divided into seven dispensations: (1) Innocence (Genesis 1:26-3:24), (2) Conscience (Genesis 4:1-7:24), (3) Human Government (Gen 8:1-11:26), (4) Promise (Genesis 11:27-Exodus 18), (5) Law (Exodus 19-Acts 1:26), (6) Grace (Acts 2:1-Revelation 19:21), and (7) Kingdom (Revelation 20:1-22:21). As a result, they have a discontinuous view of the Bible. For example, they believe that Israel was under the dispensation of law and so those in the New Testament under the dispensation of grace will not find the Ten Commandments applicable. Covenantal theology instead sees the Bible as one continuous work detailing God's salvation plan and therefore, sees the Ten Commandments as applicable today as it was to Israel in the Old Testament.

Due to the clear segregation of Israel and the Church, dispensationalists believe that God will deal with the Church and Israel differently during the End Times. Historic pre-millennialists take all mention of "Israel" in End Time prophecies as spiritually referring to the Church and not literal Israel. We believe that the dispensationalists are correct in their belief that Israel will be restored by God into His kingdom. We believe that although Israel was cut off by God, "*God is able to graff them in again*" as natural branches of the olive tree (Romans 11:23-24). God has promised that "*all Israel shall be saved*" and He will keep His promises to restore Israel.

However, we uphold covenantal theology. It is indeed wonderful to see how God's magnificent salvation plan unfolds throughout the Bible. From the promise of a Saviour immediately after Adam and Eve's sin to Israel's sacrifices that pointed to Christ and to Christ's death and resurrection, we see how God's ultimate goal is the salvation of Mankind for His glory. How blessed are we to be a part of His amazing salvation plan!

Thought: What are the implications of believing in dispensationalism?

Prayer: Thank You Lord for giving us Your Son to save us from sin.

WHAT IS OUR BLESSED HOPE?

1 Corinthians 13:13 says, *"And now abideth faith, hope, charity"*. Faith, hope and charity (love), have been the hallmarks of Christianity with the most emphasis on love. We look now at hope which is "elpis" in Greek, meaning to expect or anticipate with confidence. Our Christian faith is filled with hope. Through salvation in Jesus, death is not the end. We know that we will see our loved ones again in Heaven. In Titus 2:13, we read of our *"blessed hope"* which is *"the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ"*. This is a future event which is repeatedly mentioned in the Bible. Revelations 19:11-21 describes in detail Jesus' triumphant second coming as the true ruler of this world to defeat the Anti-Christ and his armies at Armageddon.

Jesus' second coming is indeed a *"blessed hope"* to us. The world now is in such a wretched state of sin that it is impossible to feel optimistic at all about the future. There is no peace as countries are at war or on the verge of war with one another. Homosexuality and fornication are rife and seen as acceptable ways of life. Crime is everywhere as human beings harm and hate one another. Injustice prevails. Natural calamities and pestilences occur on a daily basis as the earth further degenerates. One can have a sense of how deplorable a state the world is in now just by reading the newspapers every day. It is a sad state to be in. Yet the Christian has hope in the future. When Christ comes again and ushers in the millennium, the world will be restored. Christ will rule with righteousness and perfect justice. Peace and love will finally reign on earth. Creation will be restored to its perfect state. It will be the complete opposite of how the world is today. How wonderful and joyous to just sit and think about it!

Do you feel the same way about the millennium? Are you looking forward to Jesus coming again? Or are you so comfortable in the ways of this world that you do not want things to change? Are you indulging in the lusts of the flesh and carnal ways of life that you rather not say *"Come, Lord Jesus"* (Revelation 22:20)? Can you really say that Jesus' second coming is your *"blessed hope"*? Honestly examine your heart as Jesus is coming again very soon. A true believer will be filled with the utmost joy and hope at the thought of Christ coming again. Are you?

Thought: Think about how wonderfully different the millennium will be.

Prayer: Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

WHY A BIBLE COLLEGE?

As early as 1954, there was already a vision for a Bible College to train workers both for the expanding ministries of the B-P Churches and for the propagation of the gospel and defence of the faith throughout the Far East. To this end, Rev Timothy Tow took the opportunity to study for a higher Master's degree, back at Faith Seminary, to equip him better for the teaching ministry.

He wrote of his burden in *The Malaysian Christian* “The Trend is Toward the Trained” – “Hitherto we have sent some of our young people to the West for theological training. But if the Lord will call another half dozen, how can we afford to send them all? The solution to training future ministers of the Gospel, I believe, is the founding of a Bible College in Singapore. Yes, a Bible College, a College that reverently teaches the Bible to be the infallible, inerrant Word of God, that seeks to obey all its commands, that will make no compromise whosoever with the subtle forces of Satan that are so actively undermining theological institutions everywhere today.”

“We need to found a Bible college that will nurture the future leaders of our churches, who will be able to stand in the gap in an evil day, and advance the work of the Lord by opening more and more preaching centres that the Kingdom of God might be extended to the uttermost part of the earth.”

In 1962, the foundation stone of the College was laid. Six months later, the College was built and opened. Today, the College has trained over 700 workers for the harvest field. In 2012, it celebrated its Golden Jubilee, firmly resolved to contend for the faith till Jesus returns.

Dear teen, it is said that, “Without the Bible College, the Church would die.” The Bible College is vital to the BP Movement in Singapore. Pray for FEBC, and pray for more young men and women to heed the call to serve God full-time. Will you be one of them?

Thought: FEBC is often likened to a spiritual SAFTI.

Prayer: Our Father in heaven, thank You for raising a Bible College like FEBC to train workers for the harvest field.

DO YOU HAVE EARS TO HEAR?

Through this series, we have learnt many things about the Bible Presbyterian movement. We have had a look into its history, doctrines and practices. We have read of the many battles that have been fought through the years, as we earnestly contended for the faith, all done in a bid to ensure that our church is found faithful in the sight of the Lord.

In the past few days, we have read of examples of real churches in the past that have come under the spotlight of Christ’s piercing gaze, and seen the verdicts that Christ has passed upon them. Some had excellent reports; others had mixed reviews, whilst some were utterly condemned by the Lord. And so in studying all these seven churches in Revelation 2-3, what are your thoughts? Do you realise the great value that these letters have in helping us to order our church lives and also our personal lives? Do you appreciate the valuable glimpse that we are given into the mind of Christ, and see what it is that He expects of His church?

If Christ were to write a letter to you, or to your church, where do you think you will stand? Will it be words of loving commendation, or will it be strong words of rebuke? As you ponder back on the many things that the BP church has done through the past, and how it continues to fight for the Word of God today, do you think that these are necessary things that the church has to do? Are you thankful for the ways in which our forefathers have raised the banner of God’s truth, and stood valiantly in defending God’s Word?

The Lord’s call comes ringing clear to us: He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. We have heard, but will we have sincere receptive hearts that truly desire to hear and receive what the Lord wants us to hear? Will we answer the call of Christ, and also have a fervent desire to serve Him? Will we be serious about our faith, and also desire to earnestly contend for the faith, just as our forefathers have? The future of the BP churches and of fundamental conservative Christianity hangs in the balance, and it is only if the future generations like you answer the clarion call of Christ, and faithfully continue to fight the good fight of faith!

Thought: Not just ears to hear, but hearts to receive, and hands to do!

Prayer: Lord, I pray for the future of the BP church, that it will continue to remain strong, standing upon Thy Word of Truth.

UNDERSTANDING TULIP (I)

Reformed Theology follows after the teachings of John Calvin. John Calvin was a sixteenth century Reformer who formulated the biblical theory of salvation. The teachings of Calvin, often called "Calvinism", encapsulate the true Gospel of salvation and presents its elements in a very systematic manner. The five points of Calvinism are represented by the acronym TULIP. 'T' stands for Total depravity, 'U' for Unconditional election, 'L' for Limited atonement, 'I' for Irresistible grace and 'P' for Perseverance of the saints.

Total depravity teaches us about mankind's depravity. The whole of mankind has fallen into sin. This is because of the guilt of Adam's first sin, which is passed down to all his posterity; Adam being our representative for the human race. As a result, all of us are born with a corrupt and sinful nature (Romans 3:23). All of us are born sinners without any exception (Psalm 51:5). On our own, we will not seek after God (Romans 3:10-12). We are all dead in our sins (Ephesians 2:1). Because of our sin and guilt, we are all deserving of God's wrath and eternal punishment. If we die in our sins without accepting the Lord Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour, we will end up in hell and the lake of fire.

Unconditional election means the salvation of man cannot be achieved by his own will or choice. The salvation of man is also not based on man's merits. Salvation is not conditioned upon God's prior knowledge of faith or repentance of a person, but upon His grace and love. The salvation of man is the prerogative of God; He chooses whom to save. Because of our depraved and sinful nature, we can never be saved by our own willful choice. Salvation can only come to us because God has graciously chosen us even before the world began (2 Timothy 1:9).

Dear Teen, do you think you are able to save yourself by good behaviour, by doing good deeds or attending church, etc.? Remember that if you have not accepted the Lord Jesus, you are still a depraved sinner. You will not be able to save yourself as any deeds that you do which you deem as good, are still "filthy rags" in the sight of God (Isaiah 64:6). Are you thankful to God for sending the Lord Jesus Christ to die for your sins?

Thought: As an unbeliever, I was once totally depraved and unable to save myself.

Prayer: Lord, I thank Thee for saving a depraved sinner like myself and choosing me to be saved even before the foundation of the world.

UNDERSTANDING TULIP (II)

In yesterday's devotional reading, we learnt about the first two points of TULIP, total depravity and unconditional election. Today's reading will focus on the three remaining points of TULIP.

Limited atonement means salvation is only for the elect. Election alone is not enough to save us by itself. God is a holy and just God and he will not let sin go unpunished. The word “atonement” means reconciliation. In order for us to be reconciled to God, someone must pay the price for our sins (Hebrews 9:22). This points to the very heart of the gospel, that God sent His Son, the Lord Jesus, to be offered as sacrifice for our sins (John 3:16, 10:11). Although Christ's redemptive work is sufficient to atone for all the sins of man, it was intended to save only the elect (Matthew 1:21).

Irresistible grace means God's call to the elect is effectual and they will surely be saved (Romans 8:30). For those whom God has elected, they will according to His timing, come to salvation grace. As the elect hear the gospel, the Holy Spirit will use the Word of God to convict their hearts of sin and their need for the Saviour. The Holy Spirit will give them the faith to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Saviour and they will be saved. The elect will never be able to resist or reject the grace of God that is given to save them.

Perseverance of the saints means the elect will never lose their salvation because God preserves them to the very end (Hebrews 7:25). The perseverance of the saints depends on the unchangeability of God's decree of election. This means once a person is saved, he will always be saved.

Dear Teen, are you thankful for God's great plan of salvation? God has elected some from the very beginning to be saved. He has given them the faith to believe in the gospel so that they can be saved. God has also given them the assurance that their salvation is safe and secure in His hands.

If you have not accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Saviour, will you make the decision this day to accept Him? He loves you and is waiting for you.

Thought: Am I thankful to God for saving me and giving me the assurance of salvation?

Prayer: Lord, I thank Thee that once saved and I am always saved.

HOW WERE THE BP PASTORS SUPPORTED?

Would you like to be a pastor? Some people think that pastors have easy lives! Isn't it very easy just to go up to the pulpit and preach a 45-minute sermon once a week? What does the pastor do the rest of the week, while the adult members are busy working in their secular jobs and the younger members are busy studying?

I just came across a question posed by a Christian – “why do churches pay preachers to preach or pastor a church? Why does a pastor even take money to preach?”

How would you answer this question? How about this answer? – “Spiritual leaders can best serve when they are fully dedicated to the work of the Lord—to the study and teaching of God’s Word and ministering to the needs of the body of Christ. If a minister has to work a job to provide for his family, then he will be distracted from ministry and forced to divide his priorities, leaving less time to adequately shepherd his flock”.

This is not only common sense, but also supported by the Bible. The verse today (1 Corinthians 9:14) says, *“Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel”*. Read also 1 Corinthians 9:9 and 1 Timothy 5:17-18. In the Old Testament, the Levites and the priests were similarly supported financially by members of other tribes.

Would you like to be a pastor? I've asked myself this question, and my answer is no! – unless I'm sure that God has called me! I know what great responsibilities are expected from pastors! A good pastor, as a good shepherd, has the great responsibility of the spiritual health of the church and all her members upon him – just like the apostle Paul (*“Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches”* – 2 Corinthians 11:28) – teaching them, caring for them, praying for them!

Dear Teen, do we have such a pastor in our church? If so, does he deserve our support (both emotional and physical/financial)?

Thought: A true shepherd is one because *“the love of Christ constraineth me”* (2 Corinthians 5:14)

Prayer: Pray for the Pastor.

HOW DID THE BP CHURCHES GROW? (I)

Today's verse comes from the Book of Acts, which some people also call "The Acts of the Holy Spirit"! So we have the answer to our question, "how did the BP churches grow" – by the power of the Holy Spirit!

If you read the history of the BP church, you'll see that during its initial years, its remarkable expansion is unparalleled – starting from a small church (Life BP) in 1950, to more than 50 churches, not only in Singapore, but also in Malaysia, Indonesia, Burma, Australia etc over just 20-30 years! You can see the work of Rev Timothy Tow, our founding pastor, and his many students and disciples. But look beyond the people, and you see the Holy Spirit.

However, sadly, many of the BP churches have fallen away. At the beginning, all the BP churches were united in a "BP Synod". But some pastors became neo-evangelicals (eg. associating with Charismatics, diluting other aspects of the faith), and the disagreement was so profound that the Synod was dissolved in 1988.

Does this surprise you? You shouldn't be. Throughout history, we see many churches which began well, but departed from the faith over time.

The important thing is not growth in number, but holding on to the true faith. If God wills, the number will increase. It will not be because of our human ability and endeavor, but by the power of the Holy Spirit who will bring souls out of darkness and into the light of God's truth.

Dear Teen, do you think you have a role in the growth of the church? Don't you wish to witness to your non-Christian friends? Then remember Acts 1:8 *“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me....”* May we all be filled with the Holy Ghost, that we will be able to go out and preach the gospel to our friends and loved ones around us.

Thought: *“Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.”* (Zechariah 4:6)

Prayer: Pray that our church will remain faithful and depend solely on the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

HOW DID THE BP CHURCHES GROW? (II)

In the early years of the BP church, there was a strong evangelistic work, both in Singapore, and also up in Malaysia. The work in Malaysia was directed through a body known as the “Malaysia Pioneer Mission”. This name was chosen because they wanted to reach the unsaved in Malaysia. At that time, there were many new villages and towns that were spouting throughout Malaysia, and thus a concerted effort was made to bring the gospel there. Prior to the BP missionaries moving in, these regions were completely untouched by the gospel. Thus the word “pioneer” was chosen to remind themselves of the importance of reaching out to unevangelised regions, in accordance to Paul’s words in Romans 15:20: *“Yea so have I strive to preach the gospel not where Christ was named”*.

And so in the 1950s, this work began, and very quickly, 60 of the new villages were reached with a hundred gospel tracts. The mission report reads as such: “Almost every village we visited was virgin soil for the Gospel seed. Crowds gathered in curiosity around two Big Town gentlemen. Some asked to buy Tiger Balm, taking us to be Chinese medicine hawkers, others remarked we were vanguards of a theatrical troupe, ‘coming to town’. But they were none the worse when we gave them instead the water of eternal life from the fountain of Jesus Christ. Everywhere we went the Lord opened a wide door of opportunity. Particularly glad were we for the generous cooperation extended by principals and teachers of the village community schools. We were not hindered from preaching to two to three hundred school children at a time...”

Through these early efforts, mission stations in Malaysia were established, one example being the Kelapa Sawit Mission Church, and relationships formed with other churches in Muar and Johor Bahru.

Dear Teen, don’t you wish you have a part to play in this exciting venture? The gospel work continues, and our commission to preach the gospel both near and far has not been rescinded!

Thought: Do you know your gifts? Are you using it for God’s glory or for your own enjoyment?

Prayer: Pray that we have visions beyond our own selfish desire, and that we’ll always pray for the church, which is His body.

“How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity”

HOW DID THE BP CHURCHES GROW? (III)

The psalm today is not only one of the shortest, but also one of the loveliest psalms! Verse One speaks about the unity of brothers and sisters in Christ, and this is not only “pleasant”, but also “good”, including being good for church growth. This unity in faith was one important reason why the BP churches grew so well during the first few decades from 1950 onward. This happened when the members (especially the leaders) were united in their faith in God and love for His Word. With such blessed unity in place, all the leaders and the congregation members would be able to work together with one accord, all striving together for the faith for the gospel. That is what the Psalmist also realised, when he penned this Psalm, as he knew that such unity was something indeed so rare and precious. It was like the precious anointing oil that they used once a year to anoint the High Priests, but yet so wonderfully fragrant and refreshing. It is as valuable and life-giving as the snow that melts from Mount Hermon up in the north, which then flows down through the rivers to give life to the lands round about. This is the effect that true unity can bring, and is what we too should strive towards.

Unfortunately, the serpent crept in and sowed discord in the churches, and now we see many of them falling by the wayside. Through the years many problems arose in the BP church, as leaders could not get along, and doctrinal differences pushed churches apart. The blessed unity that they once shared was shattered. We must realise that such unity cannot come at the expense of truth. True unity only comes when every party is in complete agreement one with another. We cannot for the sake of unity, dispense with the truths of God’s Word. It is only when we are in complete unity, that there can be true spiritual blessings and growth in the church.

Yes, unity must be unity in God’s truth, and not an artificial human unity, sweeping problems under the carpet. When we have this true unity, then the church can grow with the blessings of the Lord, just as the dew from Hermon can grant life to the land.

Thought: We may be saddened by the problems in the church, but we should learn to see these problems in the right perspective.

Prayer: Lord, may Your children in Calvary Pandan and other faithful churches remain in unity in love for You and faithfulness to Your Word.

HOW DID THE BP CHURCHES GROW? (IV)

Read the three verses today, right at the end of the Gospel of Matthew. We call this “The Great Commission” – the instructions that Jesus gave His disciples before His ascension. This is the blueprint for church growth!

The BP churches started with one church – Life BP Church, founded by Rev Timothy Tow. He split off from the mainline Presbyterian Church because he found that it was becoming too liberal and ecumenical! He called it the Bible-Presbyterian Church because he knew that we should obey God in whatever we do, including building churches – and that God has given us instructions in His Word – the Bible!

God blessed the BP churches in the initial decades of their existence because of this obedience – to go (all over Singapore, and beyond), to teach (make disciples through preaching the truth), and to baptise (showing the commitment of the members to the church of God). These were amazing years!

But the Great Commission does not just stop there. It continues on with verse 20 which calls upon us to continue to teach the whole counsel of God. It is not enough to just evangelise and bring people to church. After they have been saved, we must continue with the ministry of follow-up and discipleship, whereby we teach the new converts to obey the Lord in all things.

This is therefore the two-fold purpose that the church has, in evangelising to the lost, and then the edifying of the saints. We must have a good balance of both, all the while relying on the presence of the Lord who promised to be with us always, even until the end of the world.

Through the years, the BP Church held to this blueprint, through the simple preaching and teaching of God’s Word, and that is how the church grew!

Thought: Am I obeying the Great Commission?

Prayer: Lord, open my eyes that I may have the mind of Christ.

WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF EXPOSITORY PREACHING?

What is expository preaching? Simply put, it is a form of preaching where the preacher focuses on a certain passage or verse of the Bible and explains it comprehensively. The meaning of the text is brought out with reference to the context in which it is found, and the listeners are able to gain a thorough understanding of the text. Perhaps it can be said that expository preaching is one of the hallmarks of a sound BP church.

After the Israelites completed the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem, they gathered for a sort of dedication service, during which Ezra, along with several other leaders brought the law of God before the people. We observe firstly that “they read in the book in the law of God distinctly”. The word “distinctly” here carries the idea of declaring and specifying – they recognised that the Word of God is to be given special significance and declared with authority and reverence. Secondly, they “gave the sense”. This suggests that, besides reading the Bible, they also explained the passages in a way that gave the listeners not just an intellectual knowledge, but also deeper spiritual insight into the Word. The result of this is that they “caused them to understand the reading”. The Word of God did not fall on deaf or ignorant ears, but into receptive hearts that were led through the teachings to embrace the truths of Scripture. How important it is that we have a thorough and faithful explanation of the words of Scripture, for without it we would be left with a very shallow understanding of the Bible. We would never really delve deep into rich truths contained in every line, every word. Non-expository preaching tends to take verses out of context, by focusing on just one or two words or ideas without regard for the context in which they are based. At best, we would remain ignorant of many things taught in the Bible; worse still, a malicious preacher might twist the words of the Bible far away from the context, simply to promote a certain erroneous view or to suit his particular agenda.

Dear teen, are you glad to be able to benefit from week after week of expository preaching? Are you thankful for faithful preachers who explain the Word of God clearly and thoroughly? Or do you find yourself bored by the seemingly “cheem” explanations of Scripture? May you grow to love the deep expositions of the Word.

Thought: Every sermon ought to be expository!

Prayer: Lord, open my eyes that I may see, glimpses of truth thou hast for me.

ARE CHURCH BIBLE CAMPS IMPORTANT?

The annual Family Bible Camp is certainly a much looked-forward-to event on every teen’s calendar. Some enjoy hanging out with their friends at camp and staying up late every night to talk and have fun. Some may even see these camps as a way of having a cheap holiday in Malaysia! What about you?

Going back to the same chapter in Nehemiah, we read in today’s passage that the people “gathered themselves together as one man”, awaiting the preaching of God’s Word. Ezra read from the book of the law “*from the morning until midday*”, literally from sunrise until noon – a good 6 or so hours! And it was not just the adults – besides the “*men and the women*”, there were also “*those that could understand*” i.e. some children who were old enough to also understand the preaching. Doesn’t that sound like a sort of church camp? At camps, the entire church assembles in one place, as one body in Christ. We enjoy a spiritual buffet throughout the entire day – morning devotions first thing in the morning, messages and group discussions after that, Bible quizzes and other activities in the afternoon, another message at night followed by more fellowship activities, before we retire for the night. For 5 days in a row! And since it is a family camp, the entire family is involved, from adults to children, youths and teens, babies and grandparents, etc.

Truly what a tremendous blessing church camps are! Far beyond just a holiday or a time of relaxation, it is a wonderful time of spiritual feasting and blessed fellowship with likeminded brethren. There is much value in a purposeful setting aside of time for an in-depth and continuous study of God’s Word, within a gathering of fellow believers who all have this shared desire and focus. Being immersed in God’s Word, among God’s people, to do God’s work – some have described church camps as being a foretaste of heaven, and I’d tend to agree!

Dear teen, do you look forward to church camps? If yes, why? What are your motivations for attending camps? If no, why not?

Thought: What you long for reveals your soul. Do you long for church camps?

Prayer: Lord, let me have the right motives and attitude when attending church camps.

WHO MUST DEFEND THE FAITH?

The book of Jude is a book that warns strongly of the false teachers and apostles that will creep into the church. It also issues a strong clarion call that we must earnestly contend for the faith that was once delivered unto the saints. We often hear this phrase over the pulpit, and hear the call to rise up and defend the faith. As youths in the church, do you take this call seriously? Or do we dismiss it and assume that it is something that our church leaders and the adults of the church ought to be involved in, but not us? Do we think that perhaps we are too young to have any role in the defense of the faith?

We must remember and realise that this letter was not just addressed to church leaders, but all Christians! Saints, who have been sanctified, preserved and called. Thus the whole gist of the letter, to contend for the faith and to know about the enemies to the faith is the responsibility of every Christian. In fact, Jude shares with the readers how he first desired to write of the common salvation, perhaps to encourage them in their walk with the Lord, and instruct them more concerning the salvation that they had received. However, as he wrote, there was a compulsion, a burden from the Holy Spirit that moved him to shift to pen a more apologetical and polemical letter. He thus exhorts his readers to earnestly contend for the faith, and then explains why there is such a necessity, giving a brief description of 'certain men' who were attacking the faith. Jude understood the needs of the times, and thus wrote to all believers urging them to be serious about defending the faith.

As faithful believers who love God, we must have a care and concern for those who malign the name of Christ and deny our only Lord God. We are not to retreat into our shell and say that this is only for the leaders of the church to contend with. We cannot just relax in our pews and seek only words that touch and encourage our hearts and just desire the 'feel good' effects of God's Word. We too must know and realise the significance of the whole counsel of God, and be willing to strive for it as well.

Thought: *"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear"* (1 Peter 3:15)

Prayer: Lord, pray that I'll know Thy Word well so that I can defend Thy truth.

HOW DO WE DEFEND THE FAITH?

The call to defend the faith, is a call for all to “*earnestly contend for the faith*”. The word ‘earnestly contend’ comes from the Greek word “*epagonisomai*”, which literally means to agonise intensely, to struggle and put in great effort on behalf of something. Thus it has this idea of fighting hard for a cause or a purpose.

This phrase is often used as a clarion call for us to be defenders of the faith, soldiers of Christ to earnestly contend for the faith! It is the duty and responsibility of every Christian to be zealous and fervent to oppose all who shame the name of Jesus. The word used here is a very strong word that gives the idea of a very active, invigorated and spirited struggle. Our Christian faith is not something that we can afford to be lackluster or apathetic about. We must earnestly contend!

This contention is not just a onetime affair, but a continuous battle which Christians through all the ages will have to participate in. The verb is given in the present tense, emphasising the continuous nature of this purpose clause. Thus it is an exhortation to continue to always contend for the faith, from the time that you become a Christian, until your work on Earth is done.

Looking through the history of the Church, one would see that all through the ages, there have been countless attacks on all fronts on the Faith, both from outside and inside the church. In this epistle, Jude addresses both parties, but chooses to concentrate on the attacks from within, as he will elaborate on in the next verse. For now, in verse 3, his main point is that we must all be actively and continually engaging in this spiritual conflict. It will be agonising, difficult, and oftentimes discouraging. Yet we must, because it is not for ourselves, but for our God, and for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

Dear teen, are you ready for the fight?

Thought: It takes courage and love (love of God and His truth) to defend the faith. Do you have them?

Prayer: Lord, teach me not only to know the faith, but to contend for it too.

WHY DO WE HAVE INFANT BAPTISM?

As Bible-Presbyterians, one of the practices we have is to baptise infants. If you have friends from other denominations, you may know that some, like the Baptists do not practise this. They might even go so far as to say that this is an unbiblical practice that is related to Roman Catholicism. So we ask, what is its biblical basis, and why do we practise it?

First of all, we must understand that God is a covenantal God. In Old Testament times when God instituted His covenant with Abraham, His promise of blessings extended not just to Abraham personally, but to his children and descendants through all generations. To Abraham, God said that the covenant was “between me and you”. But He didn’t stop there – God went on to say that it was also to “*thy seed after thee*” (v. 10)! That is why God instituted the rite of circumcision, for it was to be a sign that children were most certainly included in His covenant. In the New Testament, baptism has taken the place of circumcision, but the principle remains the same. When Christian parents bring their children before the Lord to be baptised, they are claiming God’s covenant blessing for their children. It is a sign of faith in God’s promise of blessing. This is clearly taught in 1 Corinthians 7:12-14. The presence of a believer in a household has a sanctifying effect on the rest of the family members, even if they are not yet saved.

Another reason why we practise Infant Baptism is because it signifies a commitment on the part of the parents to bring up their children in the fear and knowledge of God. When they bring their children for Infant Baptism, they are presenting their newborn infant before the Lord and making a promise to do all that is within their power to instruct him in the teachings of the Bible.

Dear teen, if you have been baptised as an infant, may you come to understand the significance of it. At the same time, be reminded that just because your parents are Christians doesn’t mean that you are one too. Salvation is still always about a personal relationship with God. When the time comes for you to seek reaffirmation of your faith, may you be ready to do so.

Thought: Infant baptism is a sign of God’s covenant with His people.

Prayer: Lord, thank You for being a covenantal, promise-keeping God.

IS EVANGELISM IMPORTANT?

There are some churches which believe that there is no need to evangelise. Their basis for this belief is that, since God has already predestinated those who will be saved, there is no point in sharing the gospel – those who are elected will ultimately be saved somehow; while those who are not elected will never be saved no matter how many times they hear the gospel.

This teaching is most unbiblical indeed. We see in today’s reading Christ’s clear command given to His disciples before His ascension. We are commanded in no uncertain terms to go – to go forth into the world and bring His Word to all nations. What exactly does this entail? Firstly, the command in verse 18 is to “teach all nations”. The word ‘teach’ here means ‘to make disciples of’. The ultimate goal of every evangelism effort is to have the hearers become the disciples of Christ, i.e. for them to be saved and follow after Him. Next, the command in verse 19 is to be involved in “teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you”. The word here for ‘teaching’ is a different Greek word which refers to teaching in the sense of give instruction and imparting knowledge and understanding of the Word of God.

William Carey, the famous missionary to India, also faced much objection when he desired to bring the gospel to the heathen. An elderly pastor sought to discourage him by saying, “Young man, sit down; when God pleases to convert the heathen, He will do it without your aid and mine”. Such was the prevailing mindset at that time, and sadly it still persists in certain circles even today. But if neither you nor I are to be God’s hands, feet and mouthpiece on the earth, then who will be?

Dear teen, there is therefore no excuse at all not to be involved in evangelism. While it is true that God has His elect already foreknown to Him, on our part, we have to put in the effort too to bring His Word to those still lost in sin. For if Christians do not preach the Word of God, how else will unbelievers come to the saving knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ? May you therefore heed the command of Christ, and allow yourself to be used of Him to bring the wonderful good news of salvation to all who are around you, and even to the regions beyond.

Thought: All Christians are called to be evangelists.

Prayer: Lord, use me to bring Thy Word to a lost soul today!

HOW MUCH IMPORTANCE DO WE PUT IN BIBLE STUDY? (I)

As a student, you probably spend a large part of your time on your studies. 6-8 hours in school every day, 3-4 hours for completing homework and assignments when you get home in the evening; even more so when examinations are around the corner and you have to burn midnight oil in order to learn as much as you can. But how about your studies as a student of God's Word? If you reflect upon it honestly, you will probably have to admit that the amount of time spent on studying God's Word pales greatly in comparison to the amount of time you spend on earthly studies. Is this right? Why is it that the things of great eternal value are relegated to just an afterthought in our lives, whilst the temporal concerns of our secular studies seem to consume the bulk of our time?

In today's reading, we see 3 key reasons why it is so crucial that we place great importance on the study of God's Word. Firstly, we are to study to *"shew thyself approved unto God"*. To be *"approved"* is to have been tried and shown to be genuine, and worthy of God's approval and blessing. When we are faithful in seeking the Lord through His Word, He sees and He knows, and He is pleased to see His children diligently seeking Him. Next, when we study, we will become *"a workman that needeth not to be ashamed"*. A worker who is lazy or incompetent surely has much to be ashamed of before his master, for he has nothing to show for his labours! Likewise, we who are workers in God's field must certainly work diligently. When we show a right understanding of God's Word and His will as revealed through His Word, there would be no shame when we stand before God.

The ultimate aim of our study is so that we are able to *"rightly divide the word of truth"*. The word *"divide"* here refers literally to making a straight cut or dissecting something. It is something that must be done with much care and precision; at the same time, it must be done decisively and without hesitation. All children of God should be able to handle His Word correctly and skillfully. Dear teen, have you been a diligent student of God's Word? If not, why not start today?

Thought: All Christians must be diligent students of God's Word.

Prayer: Lord, help me to see the importance of studying Your Word!

HOW MUCH IMPORTANCE DO WE PUT IN BIBLE STUDY? (II)

Yesterday, we learnt about the importance of studying God's Word. In today's reading, we see a practical example of a group of people who were indeed serious and earnest in their study of God's Word.

The Christians in the church at Berea approached the Word of God with great excitement. First of all, they "received the word with all readiness of mind". Their hearts were prepared to receive the Word. Unlike many of us today, they did not drag their feet, nor were their minds preoccupied with worldly cares or vain thoughts. They came joyfully, eagerly, with hearts that were well prepared and focused on the things of God. The "readiness of mind" here can also refer to an attitude of humble submission, of readiness to apply the Word into their lives, and willingness to be doers of the Word, not just hearers.

Next, they "*searched the scriptures daily*". Their diligence in studying the Word of God is truly an inspiration to us. They did not merely 'read' the scriptures, or 'browse' or 'flip through' the scriptures – rather, they 'searched' it, as one would search for something truly precious and of great value. And this they did on a daily basis – not just once a week or once in a while, but daily! The purpose of their repeated and continuous searching was to determine "whether those things were so". They did not simply accept what they heard. Rather, they would always go back to the Bible as the ultimate authority of their faith, and not the words of man. Without a proper understanding of the Word of God, how easily our undiscerning minds would be swayed by false doctrines and vain preaching!

Dear teen, are you a "Berean Christian" too? Truly it is important that we take the study of the Bible seriously, for it is only through a regular study of God's Word that we can truly grow and progress in our faith and knowledge. We need much diligence in doing it on a consistent basis, and we also need much discernment in order to have a correct understanding of God's Word. May you persevere in your study of the Bible, and place it as a priority in your life.

Thought: Diligence and discernment are key ingredients in Bible study.

Prayer: Lord, help me to be a good student of Your Word.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF FELLOWSHIP GROUPS? (I)

In today’s reading, we read of the beginnings of the New Testament church. The day of Pentecost had just taken place, where the Holy Spirit had filled and empowered the disciples to gather together in Jerusalem. Peter had just delivered a stirring sermon, 3,000 souls were added to the kingdom of God. Did it end there? No, this was but the beginning!

Verse 42 tells us that the new converts *“continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine, and fellowship...”*. We see something very interesting being described here – not only did they persevere in the apostles’ doctrine (i.e. the Word taught to them by the apostles), they persevered also in their fellowship. The word “fellowship” here is a very meaningful word that carries the idea of having communion with one another because of a common interest. And what was this common interest which the new Christians shared? The Word of God, of course! Because of their constant diligence in studying the Bible, they were able to partake of true fellowship with fellow believers. At the same time, it was also this mutual communion with one another that provoked them to continue to be fervent in seeking God through His Word, and to persevere in their study of the truths contained in the Bible.

In today’s context, too, we continue to see how the ministry of the Word and fellowship groups works hand-in-hand for the benefit of the saints and to the glory of God. Each fellowship group in church is definitely centred on the Word – the Word is taught to the members, and the Word is what guides each decision that is made. At the same time, the fellowship groups provide the structure through which the Word of God is taught. The common bond that members share help to draw them together and to persevere in their walks with God. Dear teen, may you therefore always be found in the fellowship of likeminded brethren, that you may be much aided in your study of the Word.

Thought: To fellowship around the Word is such a great blessing!

Prayer: Lord, may I grow in Thy Word through the fellowships.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF FELLOWSHIP GROUPS? (II)

Today, we continue to study the topic of fellowship groups. Your church may have fellowship groups, catering to the teens, youth, young adults, adults, and maybe to the seniors as well. What is the purpose of having all these groups? How do they help to contribute to the church as a whole?

We go back to the same passage as yesterday's reading for more instruction. Here, we see a snapshot of the activities of the early church. The Word of God was taught; the people were engaged in fellowship; they kept the sacraments; and they were always in prayer. In fact, that sounds pretty much like our church today, too! But now, imagine if the element of fellowship is removed from the picture. Yes, the Word of God could continue to be taught, and the people could continue to partake of the Lord's Supper and to be faithful in prayer, but they would be missing out on a very important element of Christian life. While they might be individually living godly lives and walking with the Lord, there would be no communion, no interaction, no mutual help and encouragement. The church would just be made up of a bunch of strangers gathered together to hear God's Word, rather than a congregation of brothers and sisters in Christ who are able to share in and bear one another's burden.

The unique thing about fellowship groups is that they cater to specific age ranges. By interacting with people of the same age, it would be a lot easier to share common struggles, and to be encouraged by each other's testimonies. Fellowship groups transform the church into a far warmer place where brethren cares for brethren. Of course, the Word of God should and must not ever be compromised or relegated to an unimportant position; but we must also recognise the value of fellowship groups in increasing the vibrancy of the church.

Dear teen, have you now come to see the importance and value of fellowship groups? You would probably be still involved in the Teenz fellowship at present. As you grow up, you would be exposed to different fellowship groups. May you always treasure these times of fellowship, that you may be able to experience the full abundance of your Christian life.

Thought: The Christian life is made more abundant through fellowship.

Prayer: Lord, teach me the joys of true Christian fellowship.

HOW VITAL IS THE CHURCH’S PRAYER MEETING?

In today’s reading, we see a rather remarkable account of what is perhaps one of the first recorded instances of prayer meetings held in the early days of the church. The Apostle Peter had been cast into prison because of his testimony for the Lord Jesus Christ. As one of the key leaders of the church, surely his incarceration caused many of the early Christians much anxiety and worry. Did they simply wallow in despair and despondency? No! The way in which they responded to this trial is commendable – *“prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him”*.

First, we see that *“prayer was made”*. The church knew that this was a spiritual battle, and therefore spiritual weapons were required. Rather than relying on their own strength or on earthly methods to secure his release, they turned to what is surely the most effective means to deal with any problem. Next, we see that prayer was made *“without ceasing”*. It was not just a once-off, perfunctory prayer; rather, the people prayed with great intensity and fervency. They persevered in prayer, day after day, trusting that God would show Himself in His own perfect timing. And thirdly, we see that prayer was made *“of the church”*. It was not just one or two of the believers, or only the leaders – no, the church as a whole rallied together before the throne of grace, as one body and in one spirit. And what was the result? In a most miraculous way, and in answer to the prayers of the whole church, Peter was delivered from prison. An angel appeared, his chains fell off, and he walked out a free man.

Truly, how powerful a church can be, if only its members would be found always praying together without ceasing. Of course, it is not that, the more people pray, the more likely God will answer. When a church comes together to pray, it is clear evidence that the church is faithfully seeking the Lord and striving to do His will. Will not God honour the prayers of His obedient children?

Dear teen, have you attended the church prayer meeting before? If not, why not start today? For it is truly most needful and such a blessing to all who attend.

Thought: Prayer is the powerhouse of the church.

Prayer: Lord, help me to see the importance of prayer meetings.

MUST WE ENFORCE CHURCH DISCIPLINE?

“God is a loving God who has forgiven us of all our sins; therefore we should also forgive any brethren who has sinned”. This is an argument commonly raised by some Christians. But is this the right attitude to have? Is this how the doctrine of God’s forgiveness should be applied?

Today’s reading gives us the biblical method to deal with any brethren who has sinned. It is important to note from the outset that it is sin, i.e. a transgression of God’s law, that we are concerned with here, and not any petty personal quarrels.

The step-by-step guide is provided very clearly and logically. The first step is to point out the fault privately to the brother who has sinned (Matthew 18:15). If he stubbornly refuses to accept it, we are to confront him with 1 or 2 witnesses (Matthew 18:16). If he still refuses, then we are to escalate it to the church level (Matthew 18:17a). There are several things we can learn from this. First, the purpose of church discipline is always with a view for repentance. We point out the sins in our brother not for the sake of putting him down or with a holier-than-thou attitude, but only so that the brother may repent of his sin and turn back to the Lord – in that sense, we would have *“gained thy brother”* (v. 15). Second, we see that there must be accountability. Jesus taught us that *“in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established”*. By having witnesses around when a brother is confronted with his sin, this would ensure that things are done in proper manner. Third, discipline is to be carried out at the church level. When it reaches the point that the brother continues to deny his sin or to refuse to repent, the leaders of the church must be involved. We should not take matters into our own hands, for the leaders have been placed over the congregation by God and they are in the best position to deal with such problems. Neither should we let it slide and simply sweep it under the carpet, for we would be doing more harm than good to the person! Sin that is not dealt with and nipped in the bud will only continue to grow and fester, leading to even greater and more serious sins.

Dear teen, may you thus understand the importance of church discipline, and be willing to submit to the leadership of the church in such matters.

Thought: Discipline is a necessary part of church life.

Prayer: Lord, teach me the right perspective on church discipline.

WHAT IS OUR STYLE OF WORSHIP? (I)

In the past few decades, the styles of worship in churches have changed tremendously. Not too long ago, our Christian parents worshipped in churches that used the traditional organ and piano. Today, the majority of churches not only use different instruments, they also seem to sing and even pray differently. The music used is very contemporary, and appeals to the new, younger generation. The atmosphere, lighting and setting seems designed to create a certain feel and ambience. Messages are shorter, light-hearted, and tailored to entertain and amuse. Churches that adopt these worship styles seem to find good success, at least numerically speaking.

We must thus ask: is this recent shift in worship styles one that is good in the sight of the Lord? Is He pleased with it? Many have stated that these changes are just a matter of preference. They claim that it is just a reflection of the times. There is no good or bad, for everything is relative, and it is simply a matter of tastes and preferences. How do we know if these changes are okay? Do we ask church leaders? Do we ask psychologists? Do we look at numbers? Where can we turn to find the truth?

Thank God that He has given us His Word. God has not left us helpless, unable to find His will for us. Even in the matter of worship, God has given us clear instructions found in His Word on how He is to be worshipped. How we worship God cannot be decided by man. Only God can decide that. He made this very clear in the example of Nadab and Abihu. As priests, they were supposed to represent the people in worshipping God. However, as they gathered for the very first act of worship in the newly constructed tabernacle, they concocted their own brand of worship, thinking that they could offer ‘strange fire’ to the Lord. God judged them instantly, and they died because of it. The lesson that we must learn from this incident is that God rejects wrong forms of worship. Yes, there is such a thing as a wrong form of worship. It is not a matter of preference. There is a right and a wrong way and God has taught us from Scripture what is the right way. What we can also glean from this incident is that God is deeply serious about this. Nadab and Abihu paid for this mistake with their lives. God expects nothing less from us today.

Thought: Why has God not dealt with people who worship wrongly likewise?

Prayer: Father, teach me to worship You in a manner acceptable to You.

WHAT IS OUR STYLE OF WORSHIP? (II)

The scriptural passage for today sums up God's requirement on how we are required to worship Him. Remember, man cannot decide how he wants to worship God. When man worships God, he must do so on God's terms, not his own. Man, in his vain imagination thinks that he can decide on a form of worship that he likes, and then expect God to accept. Is that true? Does God accept just any form of worship? The answer is no. He has clearly revealed His will to man through His Word. The style or manner of worship is not something man has to discover for himself through trial and error, nor can it be up to his whim and fancy. Man is not to invent and imagine for himself ways that God should be worshipped.

In looking at the incident of the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4, one lesson that we can learn is how God wants us to worship Him. Christ taught “*God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth*”. The key portion we should focus upon is the phrase “*spirit and truth*”. To worship God in the spirit means to do so with sincerity, from the heart. Only a spiritual man, a born again Christian can have this sincerity. It is not just about the emotion or the feeling, but it is about the spiritual relationship that a believer has with God. There are some churches who, in defense of their variant styles of worship, contend that God only sees the heart, and the form of worship is not important. They are only partially correct, for they have not considered the other half of this requirement: which is we must worship God “in truth”. What this means is that worship must also be done according to God's revealed truth. We have to worship God in a style or manner that He has determined for us, not the other way round. Hence, both spirit; (sincerity) as well as truth (God's way) must be fulfilled for God to accept our worship and be pleased with us. Many of the churches who have adopted a contemporary style of worship have erred in the part of truth. They have not worshipped God in a manner that is acceptable to Him as revealed to us from His Word. God will never accept such worship and is in fact angered by false worship. For us, we must ensure that our worship is done not just sincerely, but also in the truth of God. We must therefore search the Scriptures diligently, to find out the right manner which God wants us to worship Him.

Thought: Does the Spirit prick your heart when you worship in a manner contrary to His Word?

Prayer: Father, teach me to always go to Your Word for the truth.

WHAT IS WRONG WITH CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN MUSIC? (I)

Christians today follow Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) stars like the unbelievers following the celebrities of the world. The style of music is so popular that many churches have incorporated CCM music as part of their worship repertoire. Churches today have replaced traditional instruments with modern pop instruments like rock drums, electric guitars and keyboards. Worship services resemble secular pop concerts. Is there anything wrong with that? Can we say that some music is good and some not? Or is music just a matter of benign preference? As in all things spiritual, we must apply right biblical discernment (1 Thessalonians 5:21) in our choice of music in worship.

Understand that the essence of music lies in its ability to create emotions in people. Just as words can affect the mind, music reaches the heart. Music can make one happy or excited. It can lift up one's mood when one is down. Few will deny that music is powerful. As we recognise this fact, we must also understand that the emotions that music induces in people are not always harmless. Some music is capable of creating sinful emotions. We recognise that music is not created randomly. Music composers are skilled and talented individuals who know precisely how to create music that induces specific reactions and emotions in its listeners. If a composer wanted to write music that helps someone feel peaceful, he will use specific melodies and chords to create that effect. On the other hand, if he wants to create music that induces pleasurable and lustful emotions in people, then he will employ particular harmonies and rhythms to suit his purposes. Hence, the motive of the music composer matters and has direct relationship to the type of music he creates.

The next question we should then ask is what motivates the composer? For the pop composer, is it not fame and fortune? For him to be successful, he must produce songs that his paying audiences want and use music that appeals to the masses. And what do people want? Scripture tells us that the heart is desperately sinful and wicked (Jeremiah 17:9). As such, they will want sinful things and reject things that are holy.

Thought: How do you know when your emotions are sinful?

Prayer: Lord, teach me to be more discerning.

WHAT IS WRONG WITH CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN MUSIC? (II)

We have understood yesterday that music composers have a great control over how their music affects their audience, especially in terms of the emotions that their music induces. Also, we made the connection that how composers write their music is dependent on their motives and what they want to achieve. Today, we want to understand what “pop” or popular music is about. As the name suggests, it is music that is designed to appeal to the majority of people. Pop music artists aim to sell as many records as possible. Who buys such music? It is the world. What is the nature of the world? God’s Word tells us it is a sin sick world. For pop music to appeal, it has to provide the kind of sinful emotions that sinful people desire. This is really what pop or popular music is about. It is an instrument to appeal to the carnal desires of sinners so as to enrich its creators with filthy lucre. It is nothing short of an instrument of Satan. We must reject it!

What we may not realise is that CCM is actually categorised by the music industry as a genre or type of pop music. We can all hear and see the similarities. CCM uses the same kind of musical “tools” that worldly pop music uses. These tools create the same kind of sinful emotions that pop music is designed to induce. If CCM uses these sinful techniques, why then are God’s children using the same tools of Satan to worship a Holy God? Will God ever accept this kind of music in worship? Of course not! In fact, God is greatly angered. It is akin to offering “*strange fire*” like Nadab and Abihu in Leviticus 10:1. God requires holiness. As Christians, we are told in no uncertain terms that we must never love the world, neither the things that are in the world. If we love the world, we show that we do not love God (1 John 2:15-16). Pop music, and by extension, CCM, is music that is of the world. What should we do then? We must reject CCM for worship, even for leisure.

We should instead return to the music of the Reformers; hymns, psalms and spiritual songs which were written of old by godly men and women. These men of God were used to create music that is reverential, somber and beautiful. It is music that God has given mankind that will help us worship Him correctly. It is music that will help us draw closer to Him.

Thought: Can worldly music be used to worship a holy God?

Prayer: Lord, help me to take a stand against CCM.

WHAT WAS THE FIRST CHURCH LIKE?

After Peter’s first sermon at Pentecost, three thousand souls were saved. Whilst many of them were from other regions and spoke different languages (Acts 2:9-11), there were also many of them who were from Jerusalem itself. These Jewish converts thus became the nucleus of the first church that was ever established. Under the charge of the Apostles, they quickly became a very vibrant and faithful community of believers. How they conducted themselves thus become a very good guide as to how every church ought to be like.

There are a few things that we can observe about this first church in the passage from Acts 2:41-47. It was certainly a most joyous and vibrant time, where men and women gladly received the word of God and were baptised. They were fervent and steadfast in the Word, and faithful in their prayers and keeping of sacraments. They truly feared God, and wanted nothing more than to serve Him faithfully. As such, the Lord blessed them richly, and added to the church daily such as should be saved.

The young congregation was also closely united, and spent much time together in blessed communion. They were all of one accord and of one mind actively caring for each other’s needs. Many even sold their possessions and goods in order to care for others in their midst who had certain financial struggles. They did not just meet once a week to worship, but continued ‘daily with one accord’, and went from house to house to break bread and have fellowship.

Indeed what a beautiful scene we see painted before us, as we witness the wonderful sanctifying effect that the Word of God and the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ had upon this group of believers. There is no evidence of any disunity, dispute or conflict within this church. They all loved the Lord fervently, and as such they had very good relationships one with another. Such bonds can only come through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. As believers in this present age, we too have experienced the same salvation. We too ought to love the Lord and love our fellow men with equal fervency, doing all we can to further the cause of Christ.

Thought: Is my church like the early church in Acts?

Prayer: Lord, may You help me to do my part to make my church one that worships You and serves You.

WHAT ARE THE 7 CHURCHES OF REVELATION?

In Revelation 2-3, we read of 7 letters written to seven different churches in seven different cities scattered throughout Asia (modern day Turkey). These cities are also listed in Revelation 1:11, and they are namely Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. These were real historical cities with churches that the Lord was addressing directly. They were epistles that came directly from the Lord to them, both commending them for the ways in which they had done well, and rebuking them for the sins that they were involved in.

In Revelation 1, the vision that John received was that of the Lord Jesus Christ, pictured as great, powerful and fearsome, walking through the midst of the 7 churches with his feet like fine brass burning in a furnace. At the same time, the Lord was also pure, holy and wise, with eyes that discern all things, and wield complete authority and jurisdiction over all the churches.

The churches are depicted as seven candlesticks (Revelation 1:20), as lights that ought to be shining for the Lord, burning brightly as a testimony for Him. The Lord thus asked John to pen down the messages that He has for these churches.

In studying the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3, we can see both positive and negative examples. We can learn from them, to examine our own churches and our own conducts in the light of what they have done, to see if we too are guilty of the same sins that they were accused of, and to see how we can emulate the ways in which they pleased the Lord. Through these 7 short letters, we can learn of what Christ expects of His church, and what promises He has for those who overcome, and are able to do things in accordance to His holy will.

Thought: If the Lord were to write a letter to us today, what would He say about our church?

Prayer: Lord, help us to remember our calling to be lights shining for Thee in this dark world.

"I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love..."

HAVE YOU LEFT YOUR FIRST LOVE?

The city of Ephesus was a prominent and prosperous city known as the 'metropolis of Asia' during biblical times. It was a self-governing free city that also housed a large Jewish population. Out of all the seven churches, the church at Ephesus was probably the most well-known, and also most often referred to in the Bible. It was at Ephesus where Paul spent the bulk of his third missionary journey, and had a very successful ministry (Acts 19). He would later return and have a very tearful farewell with the Ephesus Elders (Acts 20), and write the whole Epistle to the Ephesians. Later on, Timothy (1 Timothy 1:3), Tychicus (2 Timothy 4:12), and according to church history, the Apostle John himself also spent a long time pastoring this church. Thus this was a church that was rich in history and heritage, having had many great men of faith ministering to them in their midst. They were well-grounded in the Word of God, and had shown themselves to be faithful in the past.

Now, it was about 40 years since Paul first stepped foot into the city of Ephesus. The previous generation had passed, and the next generation of leaders had taken over. The Lord commends them for their works, labour and patience, and how they continued to fight the good fight of faith. They were spiritually discerning, and were standing firm against apostasy. However, the one major problem that the Lord had against them, was that they had left their first love. In the midst of them contending for the faith, they had forgotten the most fundamental component of their relationship with God, and that was their love for Him. They were faithfully and actively serving, doing all the right things, but had forgotten the real reason as to why they were doing all these things. They were perhaps just going through the motion, doing all that their previous generations had taught them, but were not doing it in love.

This was indeed a serious problem, and so the Lord called on them to repent! They were to go back, to do the first works and remember the zeal for the Lord that they had as new believers. They were to turn from their lack of love and to remember how their simple relationship with the Lord was when they first believed in Christ. Dear teen, do you face a similar problem as them? Repent, and remember.

Thought: What am I, if I do not have love?

Prayer: Lord, help me never to leave my love for Thee.

WILL YOU BE FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH?

Out of all the seven churches, there were only two churches that did not receive any rebuke at all from the Lord – Smyrna and Philadelphia. These two churches serve as good examples for us to emulate.

Compared to Ephesus, Smyrna was a relatively less well known city. It was known for its strong allegiance to Caesar, and even had a temple built to worship the Emperor of Rome. It was a matter of great pride to the people of Smyrna, and compelled all of them to be involved in this cultic practice of Caesar worship. Anyone publicly refusing to do so would be put to death. As you can imagine, this would have resulted in a huge problem for the Christians in Smyrna. Christians would refuse to worship Caesar and would not be able to hold any public jobs. They would have been greatly persecuted for their faith, and have to endure much sufferings and persecutions. It was in this city of Smyrna, that the Bishop Polycarp (69-155AD), leader of the church there, was martyred for refusing to swear to Caesar for reviling Christ.

To these persecuted Christians, Christ encouraged them with an exhortation to not fear, but be faithful to death. He does not promise that their persecutions would cease. Instead He warns that they would have to suffer even more in the days to come. However, the requirement that Christ had for them was to just remain faithful. Christ knew exactly what they were going through, and that they would be able to endure the blasphemy of those of the Synagogue of Satan.

Till today, the church continues to face persecutions. We may not experience the same difficult and trying conditions the Christians at Smyrna had to face, nevertheless, we must be like them and be faithful unto death. We must remain steadfast in the Lord Jesus Christ, even if it means that we might have to suffer ridicule or scorn before our friends, or that we might have to be inconvenienced or even harmed in some way because we refuse to compromise. No matter what happens, we must never fear, but always remember to trust in the Lord.

Thought: What would it take to cause me to stop being faithful?

Prayer: Lord, may you grant me the courage and boldness to be faithful even unto death!

ARE YOU CONCERNED ABOUT FALSE DOCTRINE?

Similar to Smyrna, Pergamos was also a center of great religious idolatry. Pergamos had an immense altar of the Greek god Zeus, a temple to the goddess Athena, and also a temple of the Caesar Cult. In fact, the imperial cult of Caesar dominated the religious scene in Pergamos, and was known as the capitol of Caesar worship. In the midst of all this heathen worship, the church at Pergamos was actually not doing too badly. Despite dwelling in 'satan's seat' – referring to the fact that they were in the midst of such idolatry and wickedness, they continued to hold fast to the name of Christ and had not denied His name. The church of Pergamos was also known for the heroic martyr Antipas, who stood firm against persecution, and died for the faith.

However, there were some things that were not right about this church. Despite their strong resistance to attacks from the outside, for refusing to yield to the influences of idolatry and pagan worship, yet they had a problem with compromise from within. There were certain false doctrines that had arisen from within the church, and they were not doing anything about it. The Lord was displeased, for they were harboring known apostates within their midst – namely those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, and the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. What were these doctrines? The error of Balaam is elaborated in verse 14, whereby it was out of greed and selfish ambition that Balaam sought to curse the children of Israel (Numbers 22-24). When that failed, he taught Balak to send women into their camp to seduce them, to cause them to commit fornication and worship their false idols. Such a mindset is one that promotes compromise, sin and friendship with the world. It is our modern day equivalent of liberal antinomianism, which teaches that we should not be so concerned about keeping the law and having high holy standards. The Nicolaitans were similar, teaching them to have lives of unrestrained indulgence.

To such, Jesus warns them to repent, or else He will come to judge them, to fight against them with the sword of His mouth! Realise that the Lord cares about every aspect of our church. Just because they were doing fine in one area (for standing fast and not denying the name of Christ), does not mean they are perfect in every aspect. Because they tolerated these false doctrines, the Lord warns that they too will be judged!

Thought: Friendship of the world is enmity with God!

Prayer: Lord, may I never be tempted to compromise with the world.

DO YOU TOLERATE SIN IN YOUR LIFE?

Thyatira was a prosperous city famous as a commercial and manufacturing hub. One unique aspect of this business oriented city was the guild system that they had established. In order to be part of the guild system, and thus be successful in the commercial world, one had to take part in their festivals in honour of the pagan gods that they worshipped. This required them to eat meals in their temples, indulge in their immoral licentious practices and pagan worship. Non-compliance to these rules meant expulsion from the guilds, unemployment and poverty. It was in such a city, that the church at Thyatira was struggling for existence.

Understandably, it would be very hard to be a Christian in such an environment. Yet despite all that, the Lord commends them briefly for their charity, service, faith, patience and works. As a whole, the church has done a few good things, showing a semblance of faith and order. Perhaps they had a core group of faithful believers who were active in service, and that was what kept this Christian community growing.

However, a very strong damning indictment is given to them from verse 20 onwards, where the Lord rebukes them for allowing this wicked woman Jezebel, who was a false prophet, to teach and lead their members astray. She was an immoral, sinful woman who was teaching in the church, and seducing the believers to commit fornication! Perhaps she was a member of one of the commercial guilds, and was trying to teach them that it was okay to be a part of the guilds as well, and engage in their promiscuous fornications and idolatrous worship. This was indeed a terrible influence in the church, but yet they did nothing about it. The Lord therefore warns them that if she does not repent, then she and her followers will all be judged harshly. This shows us the stern and strong stand that God has against sin, and those who tolerate sin in their lives. There may have been aspects of their church life that was good, but because they did nothing against the wicked influences of Jezebel, the Lord warned that they would be strongly judged. Dear teen, are there sins in your lives that you are harbouring and not wanting to let go? Read the strong word that the Lord has against such practices.

Thought: Why do you think the teachings of Jezebel were attractive?

Prayer: Lord, give me the strength to hold fast till You come!

IS YOUR CHURCH SPIRITUALLY DEAD?

As we move down the list, we see the state of the churches described getting worse and worse. The church at Sardis received almost no commendation at all, but only very strong words of rebuke. The Lord tells them that He knows their works, and that they are nothing more than an empty shell of a church. They might seem to have a name, a sort of reputation in the past, but at the present, they were just dead. They may have been strong as a church once, with vibrant activities and a strong gospel influence. They may have had past accomplishments, and established a name for themselves, that perhaps even continued to the present. However, the Lord sees and knows exactly what is going on, and His verdict of them was that they were dead. Spiritually dead. Useless for Christ. They were but a shell of their former glories. No longer vibrant, no longer growing. They were like fossilised remains of a church. They still had a name to show that they were a church, but really there was nothing more than that.

The reason for this state, was the Lord did not find their works perfect before God (Revelation 3:2b). What this meant was that for all that they were doing, all their works really amounted to nothing before God. Perhaps as a church they were still going through the motion, in having a weekly church service, a few faltering ministries, but nothing much more than that. There was absolutely no spiritual life in all that they did, they were like zombies – dead, but apparently still moving. How sad isn't it!

Yet we do see examples of dead churches all around us. They call themselves a church, on the surface, they seem to be doing what churches usually do, but inwardly there is nothing. They claim to be serving the Lord, but they are in actual fact servants of Satan. They teach a false gospel, they have no regard for holiness, they have a low view of Christ and His Word. The truth is not preached in these churches, and people are not being saved! This is indeed a terrifying state to be in. If you find that you are in a spiritually dead church, it would be best that you leave and find a place where the Word of God is taught, and God approves of.

Thought: What would cause a church to become dead?

Prayer: Lord, may You protect my church, and help it never to become a dead church, useless for Thee.

WILL YOU HOLD FAST?

After Smyrna, Philadelphia was the second church to have a clean record, with no rebukes but only commendations. Whilst Smyrna was commended for the way in which they remained strong under the severe trials and afflictions that they were facing, Philadelphia was praised for their faithfulness and service.

As a city, Philadelphia was strategically situated along a major trade route, and was initially established as a dissemination point for the Greek language and culture to penetrate into the eastern provinces of Asia. Like the city, that was the reputation that the church in Philadelphia went on to have. It was a church that the Lord had set an open door. What is an open door? Often times we use this phrase to describe an opening that we think God has given to us, be it in terms of schools or courses to study, job openings etc. However, throughout the Bible, it is always used to describe opportunities for gospel ministries (ref. Acts 14:27, 1 Corinthians 16:9, 2 Corinthians 2:12). It was a great privilege given to a church, to say that the Lord has opened a door of missionary endeavor to them, that they would have the wonderful opportunity to go and be witnesses for the Lord. This privilege was extended to them, because of their faithfulness to the Word of God, and they had not denied the name of Christ. Because of their zeal for the Lord, they were rewarded with opportunities for greater service!

With this open door before them, the Lord promises that as He is the one who sets it before them, man will not be able to shut it. Thus the Lord's assurance to them is that even those of the Synagogue of Satan would come to believe, and that the believers in Philadelphia will be kept from the hour of temptation. The church was to keep holding firm to the Lord, and never let go. They were to continue to be faithful, continue to be fervent in service, and persevere in their allegiance to God and His Word. Can we do this too?

Thought: If God sets before us an open door to serve Him, will we not seize every opportunity to do so?

Prayer: Lord, may you help me to always hold fast to Thee and Thy Word.

ARE YOU LUKEWARM?

The city of Laodicea had a very unique system to supply their water. Because it was not near any natural water sources, the city had to pipe in water through an underground aqueduct. Whilst it may have been a technologically advanced system for their time, and rather innovative, the result was not as good as one might expect. By the time the water from the rivers or natural springs arrived at Laodicea, they were foul, dirty and tepid. It was lukewarm, and neither refreshing nor therapeutic. It was not like the waters from the hot springs of nearby Hierapolis, nor was it the cool refreshing streams of Colossae about 10 miles southeast from them. All they had was the barely useable water from its aqueduct.

It was with such a setting in mind, that the Lord rebuked the spiritual state of the church at Laodicea. Like Sardis, this was also a church which received no commendation, for the Lord only had strong words of condemnation against them. The main problem, was their spiritual lukewarmness. This meant that they were spiritually uninterested, apathetic and lackluster in their attitudes. While, they were not spiritually dead or completely nil (ref. Matthew 24:12), in that they still did call themselves believers, and claimed to worship God, they were not hot and zealous for the Lord (ref. Romans 12:11, same root word for 'hot' is translated as 'fervent'.) What they had was a false sense of security in their religiosity. They thought that they were spiritually alright, when in fact they were just superficial, nominal Christians who may not be saved in the first place! That is why the Lord found them so repulsive, that He wanted only to spit them out of his mouth.

The reason for this lukewarmness is given in verse 17 – it was due to their material riches. Their life was too comfortable, and had need of nothing. In the midst of their opulence they became spiritually complacent, and saw no need for God in their lives. To them, their involvement in church was really a 'by the way' sort of thing, and held no value in their lives. To them, the Lord calls for them to be zealous and repent. They were to realise the sinfulness of their ways and return to the Lord, for the Lord was standing at the door and was asking to be welcomed back into the church. In all that they had done, they had rejected the very one whom they claimed to worship. How sad!

Thought: Have I allowed myself to become spiritually lukewarm?

Prayer: Lord, help me always to be fervent in spirit, zealous for Thee!

Notes

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