

JANUARY - MARCH 2002

MITA (P) NO.378/03/2001

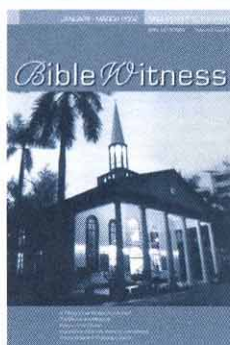
ISBN: 0219-5364

Volume 2 Issue 1

Bible Witness



Is Tithing a Law for the Church Too?
The Church and Missions
Images of the Church
Importance of Church, Worship and Holiness
Wrong Criteria in Choosing a Church



Editor

Prabhudas Koshy

Publishing & Circulation Co-Ordinator

Lok Kwok Wah

Technical Editors

Adrienne Foo, Carolyn Koshy,
Jenny Lok, Lok Kwok Wah
& Mah Lean Choo

Cover Design & Layout

Casey Chen

Illustrations

Melissa Neo

Publisher

Bible Witness Literature Ministry of
Gethsemane Bible-Presbyterian Church,
Singapore.

Printer

Chung Printing

Contact Information

By mail:
Bible Witness Literature Ministry
P. O. Box 369
Singapore Post Centre
Singapore 914013

Tel: (65) 741-1910 Fax (65) 741-1016

Web-site: www.biblewitness.com

E-mail: editor@biblewitness.com

CONTENTS

CHURCH

- Is Tithing a Law for the Church Too?** 3
Timothy Tow
- The Church and Missions**..... 4
Tan Eng Boo
- Images of the Church**..... 6
Bob Phee
- Importance of Church, Worship and Holiness**..... 7
Philip Heng
- Wrong Criteria in Choosing a Church**..... 9
Errol D. Stone
- Church Purity**..... 11
Jeffrey Khoo
- Essential Elements for the Best Functioning of the Church**..... 12
Prabhudas Koshy

HANDLING DISPUTES IN THE CHURCH

- It is Divine to Forgive**..... 15
Tow Siang Hwa
- The Contention Was So Sharp Between Them**..... 16
Tan Kian Sing
- Admonishing One Another** 19
Prabhudas Koshy
- Gossip, A Terrible Spiritual Malady** 21
Prabhudas Koshy

MINISTRY TO THE AGEING

- Ageing and Its Challenges to the Church**..... 24
Peter Chua
- Ageing - The Spiritual Perspective** 25
Lim Yew Cheng

CHRISTIANS' SUFFICIENCY IN GOD

- The Sufficiency of Scriptures**..... 26
Ronny Khoo
- Trusting God at All Times** 28
Cheong Chin Meng
- Our Forgiveness Fully Purchased**..... 29
Quek Suan Yew
- Our Lasting Inheritance**..... 31
George Foong

SUBSCRIPTIONS INFORMATION

1 year subscription (4 issues)
All rates inclusive of postage.

Singapore: S\$12.00

International

- Surface Mail: S\$14.00
- Air Mail: S\$20.00 (Asia),
S\$26.00 (All Other Countries)

International bank draft, money order or postal order drawn on a Singapore bank in Singapore dollars may be made payable to "Bible Witness".

LOVE-GIFT

Bible Witness Literature Ministry welcomes love-gifts from our readers to meet the cost of publishing and distribution. The subscription rate is kept below the publishing cost in order to make the magazine affordable to our readers. The Ministry also plans to send the magazine free to churches in poorer countries. Hence your support is much needed and greatly appreciated.

USE OF ARTICLES

The articles may be freely used for non-commercial purposes, so long as they are quoted exactly, and the writer as well as the source identified.

Is Tithing a Law for the Church Too?

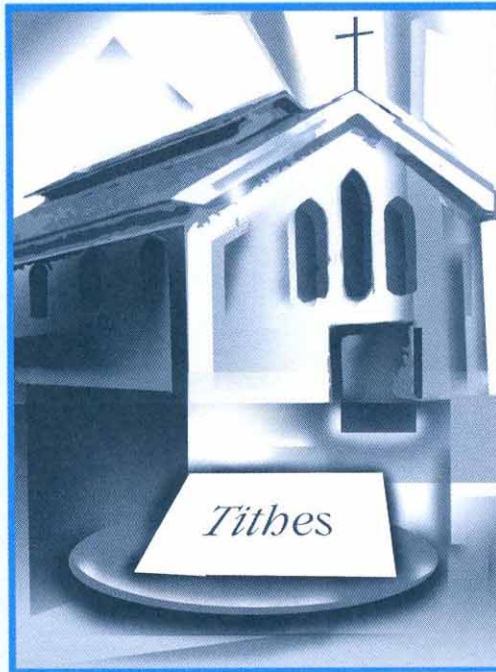
Timothy Tow

"Is tithing a law for the church too?" "Isn't tithing a law for the Jews only?" Those who ask these questions are influenced by what is known as "dispensational" teaching. They are under the notion that being saved by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ in New Testament times, they are no more under Old Testament law. Thus, to tell the congregation, citing Malachi 3:10, to tithe is preaching an abrogated Old Testament law. "Tithing is a Jewish law no more binding on Christians," so say these "dispensational" teachers.

Now our answer comes from a more integrated study of Scripture. It is true that tithing is a Mosaic law given to the Israelites (Leviticus 27:30-34). So are the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:3-17), and the Ceremonial laws such as circumcision (Exodus 12:48) and the animal sacrifices (Leviticus 1-7). Now we all know that the Ceremonial laws of Moses, for example, circumcision and the animal sacrifices were abrogated after Christ came. But the Ten Commandments, which are moral and unchangeable, remain for our correction and guidance.

Now tithing, which is giving proportionately and adequately to God, comes under the Eighth Commandment, the withholding of which is declared to be "robbing God" (Malachi 3:8). It is a standard of giving for any age or "dispensation". Before Moses' Law, Abraham gave tithes (Genesis 14:20). So did Jacob his grandson (Genesis 28:22). When Jesus came, He kept the Law of Moses to fulfil every righteousness for our sake. He spoke on tithing, and while He stressed the importance of greater things of the Law such as judgment and mercy, He nevertheless declared that they were "not to leave the other (tithing) undone"

(Luke 11:42, Matthew 23:23). Jesus' exhortation, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35) certainly supports tithing and does not abrogate it. And inasmuch as giving is loving, it is a standard set to measure our love for God. Giving less than the tithe falls short of that minimal loving expression God rightly expects of us. Giving \$5 a month out of a pay packet of \$800 or \$1,000 to feed an aged father would be condemned by any standard of filial piety. Giving nothing beyond putting a dollar in the Sunday collection by one earning hundreds or thousands a month falls short of the standard of giving, viz., the tithe.



Because the Jews neglected to tithe, God commanded Malachi to call them to their godly duty. Because Christians neglect to tithe, the church must remind its members to bring their tithes. As members of the Body of Christ, who love to see His Kingdom extended, we would want to see our Church's annual budget grow year by year. Such a desire and commitment is conducive to the growth of faith and love of our members.

If You Want Increment, Put God First in Your Monthly Budget!

The widow of Zarepheth made a cake first for Elijah the man of God, and thereafter she and her son had food to eat for the remaining days of famine. If you want increment, prosperity, give God first His due in your monthly budgeting! (Or do you give Him haphazardly, and only the odd dollars and cents left over?) A small number only in each Bible-believing church practise tithing, but this small number is the most well-off spiritually, mentally and materially. If you want to be so blessed, try tithing! Malachi 3:10 says that He will open the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing, that He will keep

the fruit of your labours from being eaten by the “devourer”.

Unwholesome Offerings

Let us never offer to God the blind, lame and sick (Malachi 1:8). “But cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing...” (Malachi 1:14). Do we vow to give God our best, and then substitute with the worst?

The Israelites were told not to offer any bullock or lamb that had any blemish (Deuteronomy 15:21), and those who did (Malachi 1:8) or withheld from offering (Malachi 3:8) were cursed with a curse. God cannot prosper those who offer their unrighteous gain, or bless those who try to gain unrighteously by not offering.

Rev. Dr. Timothy Tow is the pastor of Life Bible-Presbyterian Church and the principal of Far Eastern Bible College.

The Church and Missions

Tan Eng Boo

The Missionary Task of the Church

World evangelism is the imperative of the New Testament. “And the gospel must first be published among all nations” (Mark 13:10). The church is the divinely chosen agency for this proclamation. This is a sobering and scriptural assertion.

The New Testament uses the word *ekklesia* to convey the concept of the church. The word itself is a compound taken from *kaleo*, “to call,” and *ek*, “out from.” The compound verb therefore means “to call out from,” and the noun should mean “the called-out ones.” The word *ekklesia*, which always has a positive implication, refers to an assembly of people who are related to God and obey God.

The Lord has His purpose in saving us, and calling us out of darkness into His marvellous light. We are “called unto” the task of fulfilling the Great Commission. We are a people who have been given a mandate to fulfil. Therefore, the church and missions cannot be divorced.

Jesus said in Mark 16:15, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” This saying of our Lord teaches three major elements of missionary task. Firstly, it prescribes the method of missions as preaching. Secondly, it spells out the scope of missions as the world. Thirdly, it declares the message of missions as only “the gospel.”

I do not doubt that most, if not all, Christians understand this mandate. But the tasks of missions have always been a great struggle in the church. Most Christians would gladly support missions with

their prayers and giving, but hardly by going. It is only a few who have been called and have a burden for missions that are at the forefront of the mission field. This is in direct contrast to the Lord’s mandate. How can the church overcome this problem?

Obstacles to the Church’s Missionary Task

The Fear of Missions

What can cause fear in the hearts of believers when it comes to missions?

Listening to missionaries relating their harrowing experiences can strike fear in the hearts of believers. The near-death experiences of some missionaries, their poverty stricken lifestyle, the treacherous journeys, the harsh living conditions, etc., may pose a negative outlook on missions instead of encouraging Christians to consider the mission field. How the missionary relates the stories and experiences can have a great positive or negative influence on the hearers.

Learning a new language is a daunting task for most people as it requires much discipline and concentration.

The Comfortable Lifestyle We are Enjoying Here

It is not easy for Singaporeans to uproot themselves and family from a comfortable Singapore to a third world country. Now, what if you are called to a mission field like London or Canada or Australia, etc.? Would it be a more comfortable mission field to be in? It is important that we learn the truth of the hymn that says, “If Jesus goes with me, I’ll go anywhere! ’Tis

heaven to me wherever I may be, If He is there!"

The Lack of Passion for Lost Souls

This may be, perhaps, the most important reason why missions is the least considered ministry for many Christians. In the first place, they are not winning souls in Singapore (their home mission field). How could they be concerned for foreign missions? Most Christians today are so busy with their work, studies, business, career building, etc. Their hearts care little for the salvation of souls.

The Church's Role in Missions

Each church is unique. While the Great Commission is always the same, each church would have to think through ways and means of reaching out to the unsaved (home and foreign missions). While one approach may work well for a church in its outreach, it may not work for another church. We can encourage the church to do the following to stir up a desire for missions in the church.

Mission Trip

A short mission trip is always good for church members. They get to see the missionary they are supporting in the mission field as well as to participate in a little of his/her work, like preaching, teaching, etc.

Such a trip may open the eyes of members to have a better understanding of missions and the mission field itself. If the church does not have a missionary or a mission field, the church should organise a mission trip with another church. Members should try to go on such trips.

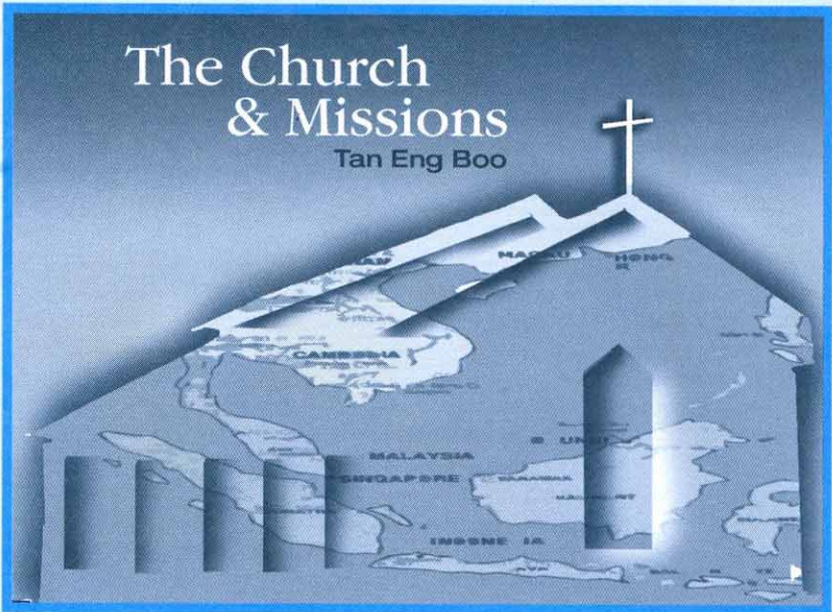
In Singapore, we have so many people going out of the country for their holidays. What about planning to go on a mission trip with your church in the near future?

Short-Term Missions

A six-month to a year missions ministry would also be an appropriate way to excite church members to a life-time of missionary work. If you can take a "sabbatical" to do your studies, etc., why not think of a "sabbatical" in the mission field? I was in Cambodia recently (29 September – 3 October 2001) with Rev

Timothy Tow to visit Rev David Koo, a missionary from Korea and a graduate of FEBC. He told us that he needed more helpers in his mission work in Kompong Som. He said, "Send some people here for 3-6 months to help us in the kindergarten, Bible school ministry, etc." He also needed people who can teach computers or repair computers.

I was in the mission field for one year in 1974-5, and the Lord called me to the full-time Christian ministry on the way back to Singapore. Now this may not happen to you, but the exposure to the mission field, will surely open your hearts to do the Lord's will willingly.



Be a Missionary at Home First

"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me in ... Jerusalem..." (Acts 1:8). Get involved in soul-winning at home first. Reach out to our non-Christian loved ones, relatives and friends. There is much work to be done at home.

The church and missions are both intertwined. We cannot separate the two. As long as the church exists in this world, missions will always be a part of the church's ministry, whether it is at home or abroad. Jesus said, "... as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you" (John 20:21).

Rev. Tan Eng Boo is the pastor of Grace Bible-Presbyterian Church.

Images of the Church

Bob Phee

A warped view of the church as a social institution that is only good for helping the poor and needy is often found in newspapers and other media. Some people have the impression that the church is meant for the rich and affluent, where the gospel means wealth and health. Today, the youths are given a different notion of the church – that it is a place where spirituality blends easily with worldly fun and materialism. But all these are wrong images given to people, or imbibed by many churchgoers.

In one of the largest churches on our island, magic show is made a part of the worship service. In modern days, many churches go wayward from the Scriptural teachings on the church. What are some of the images of the church of Jesus Christ given in the Bible?

Church, the Bride

Firstly, the church is portrayed as a bride, chaste or without blemish. Paul refers to the church as the bride of Christ when he talked about the relationship between a husband and wife (Ephesians 5:32). He also refers to the church at Corinth as a bride engaged to her husband-to-be, the Lord Jesus Christ: "For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy; for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2). As the bride of Christ, the coming bridegroom, she must keep herself undefiled in the world in doctrine and practice. The leaders of each church must ensure that all programmes and activities of the church are focused on the spiritual growth of worshippers, in preparation for the coming of Christ. Christ and His message must be the content of the sermons. The church must carefully avoid the use of worldly gimmicks to draw in the crowd. The church is in the world, but not of the world. Is today's church presenting herself as the bride of the coming Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ?

Church, the Body

Secondly, the church is viewed as the body of Christ, and the members of the church are likened to the "ear," "eye" and other members of the body (1 Corinthians 12:16-17). In the twin epistles of Ephesians and Colossians, Paul also uses the body metaphor in reference to the church where Christ is

the head and the church is seen as the rest of the body. "But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love" (Ephesians 4:15-16).

The image of the body of Christ illustrates the interconnectedness between all the labourers and helpers of the church that they ought to work in harmony to achieve the highest efficiency. The body image also portrays solidarity of God's people as opposed to isolation of individuals in the assembly of Christ. The body is a composition of many parts and yet a unified body. In the church of Corinth, there was disunity (1 Corinthians 11:17-19). That was not to be so as all believers were baptised by one Spirit into one body. Paul encouraged the believers with these words concerning the body of Christ: "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptised into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:12-13).

The body of Christ encompasses all believers universally. It cuts across all nationalities, having all barriers removed. This kind of universality of the church is encouraged when Paul says, "Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all" (Colossians 3:11). Everyone is treated equally with no colour or class distinctions.

The body metaphor also characterises genuine fellowship. The church is not merely a place of social interaction, but an assembly of believers where they care, encourage and bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2).

As the body of Christ, the church is to carry out the ministry of our Lord as He gave the Great Commission before He ascended to heaven. All

authority in heaven and on earth has been given to our Lord. He sent His disciples to evangelise, baptise and teach all nations. As members of His body, we are assured that He will always be with us even to the end of the world (Matthew 28:19-20).

Church, the Family

Thirdly, the church is viewed as a family. Paul urged Timothy to treat all church members as if it were a large family: "Rebuke not an elder, but entreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren; The elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity" (1 Timothy 5:1-2). We have God as our heavenly Father and all the believers as His sons and daughters as it is written, "And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters" (2 Corinthians 6:18; cf. John 1:12). Those who received Jesus as their personal Saviour and Lord are brothers and sisters in God's family (Matthew 12:49-50; 1 John 3:14-18). The fellowship in church can sometimes be deeper and more meaningful than the relationship among siblings. The spiritual bond in many ways goes beyond the biological kinship of one's own brothers and sisters.

Other Images

Some other images of the church include branches on a vine (John 15:5), an olive tree (Romans 11:17-24), a

field of crops (Matthew 13:1-30; John 4:35; 1 Corinthians 3:6-9) and a building (1 Corinthians 3:9). The church is also described as a new temple not built with stones but by the true believers who are "living stones" (1 Peter 2:4-5). It is built upon the "corner-stone" who is Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:4-8). These images elucidate the life and power of the church of Christ on earth.

When Jesus said, "upon this rock I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18), He was saying that He founded the church on Himself, the spiritual rock in this sin-infested and fallen world. All those who thirst after God's Word and hunger for the truth will be able to find them in a Bible-believing church where the genuine gospel is proclaimed. Hence, every church must keep herself separated, chaste, undefiled and pure from the corrupt and devious influences of this world. By being faithful in upholding the truth of God's Word, we will ensure that the doctrines taught and worships offered are truly acceptable to the living and true God.

Rev. Dr. Bob Phee is the pastor of Moriah and Sembawang Bible-Presbyterian Churches.

**"Service means the activity of the spiritual life.
It is man's spontaneous love offering to God."**

- Sadhu Sundar Singh

Importance of Church, Worship and Holiness Philip Heng

Church is a Must

Thank God for church. Church is such a happy place where we meet each week to worship God, to sing His praises, to hear His Word, to pray, to fellowship with brethren of "like-precious faith", to exhort one another in well-doing and to serve God together. What does church mean to you? Is it merely a building where you come each week to pay respect to God? Is it a place where you meet with fellow Christians and worship together? Or is it merely a fellowship of believers like a social club? The word "church" has many meanings. It could be a building, an occasion of worship, a collective body of believers, a denomination or a religion. To me as a child, church meant a building

where I worshipped God. Later, church meant a gathering of friends with whom I worshipped God. Still later, church was the place where I worshipped and trained to serve God. But now, I thank God for the believers I can relate to and with whom I can worship and serve God together. How about you? What does church mean to you and how are you related to the Church of Jesus Christ?

We ought to have a high regard and respect for the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ. Church is a house of worship where we honour God, pray and relate to Him. Do not come merely to relax, to pass the time, to seek out business prospects or a social

relationship. Church ought to mean the priority of worship especially on the Lord's Day. Except when you are sick or travelling, or on necessary duty due to employment, may I encourage you to be in the Lord's house. God commands us not to forsake "assembling of ourselves together...but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25). There are some on shift duty on the Lord's Day [such as doctors, bus-drivers, life-guards, etc.] and seemingly "unable to attend church." But in Singapore, we have Worship Services ranging from 7:00 am to 8:30 pm. You can still worship the Lord on Sunday at the Lord's House by choosing an appropriate worship time.

Worship is a Must

Beloved, are we honouring God on the Lord's Day, or are we doing things on the Lord's Day that we ought not? God says in His Word: "...them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed" (1 Samuel 2:30). The Shorter Catechism [Question 60] tells us: "The Sabbath is to be sanctified by a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days; and spending the whole time in the public and private exercises of God's worship,



except so much as is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy." Question 61 also tells us: "The Fourth Commandment forbiddeth the omission, or careless performance, of the duties required, and profaning the day by idleness, or doing that which is in itself sinful, or by unnecessary thoughts, words, or works, about our worldly employments or recreations." Christians are to worship and rest on the Lord's Day. The only exceptions are "the works of piety, necessity and mercy."

Holiness is a Must

As we engage in the work of God's House, let us be reminded that God expects His people to be in the right frame of mind, of the right attitude and behaviour. When God gave the Ten Commandments and instructions to build the Tabernacle, the Jews were

told to sanctify themselves. "The LORD said unto Moses, Go unto the people, and sanctify them to day and to morrow, and let them wash their clothes. And Moses went down from the mount unto the people, and sanctified the people; and they washed their clothes" (Exodus 19:10, 14). "Let the priests also, which come near to the LORD, sanctify themselves, lest the LORD break forth upon them. And Moses said unto the LORD, The people cannot come up to mount Sinai: for thou chargedst us, saying, Set bounds about the mount, and sanctify it" (Exodus 19:22-23). The people were reminded again and again that God is holy and they were to sanctify themselves before the Lord.

Whenever we serve Holy Communion to a shut-in old lady, she wants to know when we are coming so that she could take a bath and prepare herself. She wants to be clean before the Lord. However, more important is the inward spiritual cleanliness. King

David was denied the privilege to build God's temple, as he was a man associated with blood. Instead, the honour went to his son, Solomon. King David said, "As for me, I had in mine heart to build an house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and for the footstool of our God, and had made ready for the building: But God said...Thou shalt not build an house

for my name, because thou hast been a man of war, and hast shed blood" (1 Chronicles 28:2-3).

Building or serving in God's house is a privilege and honour not to be treated lightly. God Himself prescribes: "Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation" (Psalm 24:3-5). May God help us to be sanctified even as we work in His house.

Rev. Philip Heng is the pastor of Galiilee Bible-Presbyterian Church.

Wrong Criteria in Choosing a Church

Errol D. Stone

Choosing a sound church is very important for the spiritual well being of a person, for it has far reaching consequences, both on earth and in eternity. It is not a matter of feelings, emotions or experiences, but sound theological principles and obedience to God's Word. The Word of God says, "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:4). There are many who say they love the Lord but walk in disobedience, thus showing that they do not have the truth in them but are liars. They do not have the indwelling love of God in them, for the manner of examining whether one is in the faith is firstly the moral test of obedience and secondly the social test of love.

As Rev Quek Suan Yew wrote, "If we are children of God and attend a false church, then we worship the wrong God. We also allow our God-given money and time to be used for the promotion of the kingdom of the enemy of Christ. More frightening still is that our children will be fed another gospel, believing that they are saved when in reality they are not. 'Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity' (Matthew 7:21-23). Much is at stake if we choose the wrong church. The danger is very real in these days as we all live in a global village."

Below we examine some of the common criteria used by people which are wrong.

Wrong Criteria

Born into a Church

Some people have attended the same church since birth, and even though the church has become liberal, ecumenical or apostate, they still remain there. The Word of God says, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers... Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord" (2 Corinthians 6:14, 17).

Comfortable in an Environment

Lot, was knowingly living in a place of debauchery, and although he knew it was wrong to remain in Sodom, he stayed, even when he was vexed in his soul daily as recorded in 2 Peter 2:7-8, "And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds)." Many today are disobedient to God's Word and would rather experience vexation of spirit, than do what is right and pleasing in God's sight.

"My girl friend is in the Church"

As a preacher said, "the girl friend then, is his god." Such a man will do anything for the girl, to please her. The outward form of spirituality is nothing but a sham. Where the girl goes, he goes. His life revolves around her rather than around God. God's Holy Word categorically condemned this sin in Exodus 20:3, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." How often do we see people making a profession of faith to lure a girlfriend into marriage and then admitting sometime after marriage that it was not genuine. We need to be very careful that God is not mocked. This is a 21st Century form of idolatry.

Self-gratification

The church makes us feel good and it does not challenge us of our sins. We feel comfortable. This is a self-centred and sinful reason for attending church. This kind of self-gratification will inevitably breed more self-centredness. The moment their "reason" for attending church is realised, they will soon leave the church. If they stay, they will become stumbling blocks to others in the church.

Personal Benefits

Some people see the church as a "what-do-I-get-out-of-it" place. They will not give their tithes and offerings, and when they do, they will make sure all know about it. They will boast and brag and delight in being the centre of attention in every function. They will complain when they do not get what they want. They are the troublemakers in the church. Such kind of members, the leaders of the church can do without. Their god is their own belly. "For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly;

and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple" (Romans 16:18).

A Friendship Club

The church is very friendly and appears to some as a friendship club. This has been a very appealing reason to many for joining a church. "The members make me feel so at home. I am a stranger and they took me in so readily." On the surface there does not seem to be anything wrong. But on closer examination, we see that this is similar to the previous problem of self-centredness. This is another anthropocentric criterion that we must avoid.

It is true that a godly church ought to be friendly but not all friendly churches are godly. The criteria we use must not be subjective but biblical. Satan and his followers are very friendly. If they were not, how could they succeed in their deception? The Word of God says, "And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14).

The Church is Wealthy

Often there is a lure to a church that is large and rich. Large and rich churches should never be used to verify whether a church is God-honouring or not. In this age of world-wide democracy and people power, it is very tempting to use this as one of our criteria for choosing a church. How could so many be wrong we ask? But, why not? Truth cannot be voted upon. Did Jesus not say that the way to hell and destruction is a broad way and the gate into it is also very wide? "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat" (Matthew 7:13). Some churches seem so glamorous and clean on the outside yet sin is not addressed. The Word of God says, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness" (Matthew 23:27).

The statement that, "More money in the offering bags means God is showering us with blessings," is a figment of man's worldly imagination. This is far from the truth. The life of Paul was a life of poverty and testing upon testing. He had to fast many times because he had no food. It was a life of counting the cost of discipleship and carrying the cross. "In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness" (2 Corinthians 11:27). Was this not the life of our Lord too? The Word of God records, "And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Matthew 8:20).

Conclusion

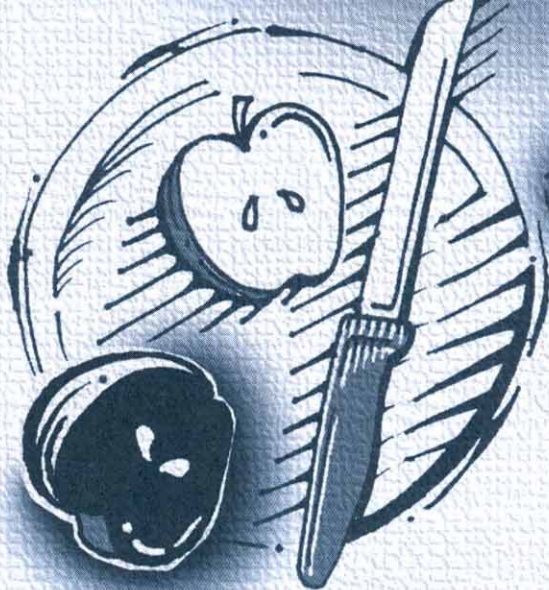
Doctrinal integrity is the true mark of a godly and biblical church. The only objective measure of a true church is the Bible. They must fear God and not man. The usage of doctrine to evaluate teachings is commanded in the Bible. "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed" (2 John 9-10). Here we are commanded not to bid someone God speed, that is God's blessings, if they do not abide in the doctrine of Christ.

It is also important that we check whether the leaders practise what they preach. Once doctrinal integrity has been established, we must evaluate and see if the leaders of the church practise what they preach. Examining the churches' notice boards and reading the church's weekly bulletin will reveal if they encourage members to evangelise. Planned fellowship programmes and Sunday school for building up the faith of believers, prayer lists and mid-week prayer meetings will show whether they trust God or man in their work.

Rev. Errol D. Stone is the pastor of Faith Presbyterian Church-Perth, Western Australia.

"Church WHICH POSSESSES TRUE SANCTITY: Its members are all holy. They are not merely holy by profession, holy in name, and holy in the judgment of charity; they are all holy in act, and deed, and reality, and life, and truth. They are all more or less conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. No unholy man belongs to this Church."

- *The Nature of the Church* by J. C. Ryle



Church Purity

Jeffrey Kho

The Christian Church today is under attack like never before. There is a need to protect the Church from the subtle attacks of the devil. God has placed a defence mechanism for the Church, and that is the doctrine of separation. The doctrine of separation is a doctrine of church purification and preservation.

The Church which is the bride of Christ must present herself pure and chaste when she meets her Bridegroom. She must be holy. The Bridegroom demands it. There is a lesson to be learned from Israel—the Old Testament Church. God commanded Israel time and again, “Be ye holy as I am holy.” God says in Leviticus 20:26, “And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the LORD am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine.” God says “I have severed you from other people;” that is separation.

God also told Israel to be separate because they were His evangelists. Isaiah 43:10-12, God told Israel twice, “Ye are my witnesses.” Witnesses of what? Witnesses of this fact, “I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour” (verse 11). Separation is part of evangelism. The Israelites were to bear witness that there is but one living and true God, and He is Jehovah—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Israel was the Lighthouse of God’s Truth. Israel was required to shine the Gospel Light brightly and clearly so that the Gentiles who lived in darkness might see the Light, and be drawn to Jehovah for salvation.

What applies to the Old Testament Church applies to the New Testament Church as well. New Testament believers are also called God’s witnesses. Jesus commanded in Acts 1:8, “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and

in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” To be His witnesses, we must practise separation. We must not live like the world, behave like the world, think like the world, talk like the world, do business like the world. Separation is one form of evangelism. We separate in order to evangelise. The Gospel is declared through our lives. Jesus said, “You are the light of the world.” Lighthouses stand quite alone and quite apart from their surroundings. This is so that the light from their beacons might be clear and distinct, and not hidden or blurred.

The clearest New Testament proof-text for separation is 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1. The Apostle Paul commanded the Corinthian brethren three times to be separate. The first is, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers” (6:14). The second, “come out from among them, and be ye separate” (6:17), and the third, “let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (7:1). In many churches today, such a message is seldom preached. What we hear very often today is love and unity. Love and unity are good and important, but they must be found within the boundaries of Truth—the Holy Scriptures. 1 Corinthians 13:6 says, “Love rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth.”

Separation is God’s method of purifying and preserving the Church. The doctrine of separation is the immune system of the church body. The fundamental doctrines of the Christian Faith—the inerrancy of Scripture, the virgin birth of Christ, the miracles of Christ, the substitutionary atonement of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, etc—are just like red blood cells which supply oxygen to support life in our body. The fundamental doctrine of separation, on the other hand, is like the white blood cells. White

blood cells function to protect our body from all invading bacteria and viruses. If a man has red blood cells but no white blood cells, will he live for long? He will be like a person suffering from AIDS. If a church believes in all the life-giving doctrines of the Christian Faith, but rejects the protective doctrine of separation, it is committing ecclesiastical suicide.

Apostasy in the Christian Church is rampant today. Unity at the expense of Truth betrays the historic Christian Faith. This is seen in the Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT) documents of 1994 and 1997. In a joint declaration on Reformation Day, October 31, 1999, the Lutheran World Federation told the RCC—we are the same as you. Ironically, they signed it on Reformation Day, October 31, 1999 was thus not Reformation but Deformation Day.

What is the God-honouring response to such apostasy? We must declare and defend the Truth. We must do the work of the Cross. The Cross is a Salve that saves. Jesus Christ is the only way by which man can escape from the judgement to come (John 14:6). The Cross is also a Sword that divides. We must separate ourselves from all forms of unbelief and compromise.

There are many Christians out there who do not know the doctrine of separation. They were never taught. There is a need to reach out to them. How? Gently and patiently, share with them this vital truth through careful Bible study. Separation is taught from Genesis to Revelation (see my book, *Biblical Separation: Doctrine of Church Purification and Preservation*, obtainable from FEBC Bookroom, <http://www.lifefebc.com>).

Dr Arthur Steele—president emeritus of Clearwater Christian College—has rightly advised that soldiers of Christ, in contending for the faith, must be armed with these two things: not guns and grenades, but Scripture and evidence.

Biblical separation is a vital pillar of the Christian Church. Remove it and the Church will collapse. May we never remove this vital pillar from our faith system. May we never despise it. May we never be ashamed of it. May we never take it lightly. There needs to be a 21st century Reformation. We who are sons of both the 16th and the 20th century Reformation must bear the light and carry on the fight into the 21st century, till Jesus returns. May we not fail Him!

Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Khoo is the academic dean of Far Eastern Bible College.

Essential Elements for the Best Functioning of the Church

Prabhudas Kos

Why do many churches that seem to have able leaders, gifted and zealous groups of believers, and plenty of resources fail to function at their best for the Lord's glory? Why are some churches marred by lack of co-operation, indifference and bickering?

People in the church should not be doing things because they are required to follow a programme. We can have all kinds of programmes, but if they are done without the right attitude, the church will soon become a group of legalists. Many worshippers engage in doing good things but often with a bad attitude.

A church can work effectively only if it has correct spiritual attitudes. It is of utmost importance that every church works to develop right attitudes among its people. The worshippers in the church must be encouraged constantly to yield to the Spirit that they may serve in the church with the fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, longsuffering, etc (Galatians 5:22-23). If we develop the church ministry upon these spiritual virtues, the church will naturally reflect the glory of the Lord in all its ministries.

In this article, some of the very essential spiritual virtues needed to establish and maintain a well-functioning church are considered. They are obedience, humility, love, unity, forgiveness and joy.

h
hy



Obedience to God

"To obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Samuel 15:22). Trying to serve without a spirit of obedience is meaningless. Inner obedience is better than any external act of worship. Obedience is the all-pervasive attitude that makes all other spiritual virtues possible. An obedient person does whatever God commands. He does not compromise. If God says something, that's it – there is nothing to argue about. When God speaks, he obeys; and he does not act according to his feelings. This will eliminate every selfish, emotional outburst.

It is sad that when some people are confronted with divine truth that convicts them of something in their life that is not right, they still continue in their pattern of disobedience. If you hear a sermon about forgiveness, or unholy courtship/marriage, or worship, you must check your life and forsake the unbiblical behaviour, and yield to do the biblical admonition. But if you push that sermon out of your mind and continue to be bitter and unforgiving, or to date a non-Christian, or to neglect worship for work or entertainment, you have become disobedient. It is antagonistic to all that God wants to accomplish in your life.

When you're confronted with conviction, apply the sermon to yourself. We cannot be ignorant of God's

commandments. John said, "Whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him" (1 John 2:5). The Apostle Peter said, "As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance" (1 Peter 1:14). Do not live like you have lived before.

Jesus said, "Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it" (Luke 11:28). Paul, commending the Roman Christians, said, "Your obedience is come abroad unto all men. I am glad" (Romans 16:19). May you live to obey the Lord according to all that He has said in His Word. That will make you special, effective and a blessed member of the church.

Humility of Heart

The second spiritual virtue each one of us should have is humility. Let us remember that we did not become Christians because God needed us; but because we needed God. Some people behave as though they are indispensable in God's work and everyone must bow to their personal opinions and wishes. God did not choose us because we have something to offer on our own. All that we have is from above; so there is nothing to be proud of. In other words, when we come to God's kingdom, we come as destitute beggars. We come to be filled. Matthew 5:3 says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for

theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Each one of us must remind ourselves constantly that “I cannot take any credit for what I am; I must give God the glory. I have no reason to be proud. Everything I offer to God is what He gave me. I serve the Lord in the church because He enabled me with His gift of salvation and Spirit.”

We are called by God to be sacrificial and humble. In Philippians 2:3 we read, “in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.” If the people of a church are self-assertive and quarrelsome, the church will be full of troubles and chaos, obstructing the progress of the work. No ministry of the church can progress by one man’s effort; it requires co-labouring. Without humility among its people, co-labouring and progress are impossible. Rudeness and discourtesy hinder effective service.

Some people wrongly think humility requires that they don’t serve in any responsible position in the ministries of the church. Humility does not mean “to undervalue ourselves.” We are priceless to God because we are redeemed and sanctified by the blood of His Son. This knowledge should never result in arrogance but in humble service. We serve because He has saved and strengthened us.

Love for Others

True spiritual love originates from humility. It is because love does not seek for oneself but for others. Love flourishes only when there is humility.

Biblical love is not just emotion as the world understands it. Love can be expressed in truth only by action. This is a virtue that sets Christians on the course of service. The words used to describe “charity” in I Corinthians 13:4-7 are all verbs. Therefore, love is an act of service that flows out of a humble heart. Biblical love meets people’s needs. True love will cause us to look into the needs of others just as we look into our own matters. Jesus said, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Luke 10:27). We should meet other people’s needs spontaneously and voluntarily.

People who visit us in church and at home must feel that we are a loving people. They should be able to see Christ’s love in us because Christ has taught us to love one another just as He has loved us (John 13:15). Let us put love in action for it is Christ’s commandment. Do all things in love and humility.

Unity Among Brethren

Unity is an important ingredient of a fruitful church life. Jesus prayed to the Father in John 17:21 that all

believers would be one just as He and the Father are one, so that the world would know He was sent by the Father. Jesus wants us to have unity in the life and purpose of the church. The Apostle Paul told the Ephesians to endeavour “to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3).

The strength and effectiveness of a church are very much dependent on the unity its members cultivate. Unity honours God and brings God the glory. Satan constantly attacks it in order to make the Church ineffective. He is incessantly trying to divide churches. Nevertheless, the believers should get on their knees together and seek to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

No one is perfect – there are always going to be little things people are unhappy about. People may do things in a different way from what we have been hoping for. But let us remember that only when we stand united for the cause of the truth of God’s Word, can we become an unstoppable force in the spreading of His kingdom. Paul with all sincerity and passion wrote to the Corinthians, saying, “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (I Corinthians 1:10).

Forgiving Readily

The Church cannot function if there is no forgiveness among its members. It is an important attitude because we all sin and hurt one another. People do fail. If we cannot forgive one who sins, especially the one who sins against us, then the church is going to be a place of many quarrels and divisions.

Christ has taught us to pray, “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Matthew 6:12). He also said, “If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:14-15). If we do not forgive other people, God will not forgive us. We need to have a forgiving attitude if we want to have pure, blessed fellowship with God and fellow brethren in Christ.

We can always expect someone to do something that will irritate us or cause problems. Therefore, the church needs to be filled with forgiving people. Ephesians 4:32 says, “Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.” Let us forgive one another because God has forgiven us. How can we who have been forgiven so much, forgive others so little? Harmony and peace will remain if we forgive

the offender speedily. We will also be freed from bitterness. As a result, when there is forgiveness, the people will experience the calm and blessed gentleness of our Lord in the church. Forgiveness will make room for encouragement, thus causing others to grow together with us in the grace of the Lord and His service.

Joyfully Serving

Joy is an outward exuberance of the heart's response to one's relationship with Jesus Christ. At all costs we must endeavour to cultivate the Christian joy as each of us serves in his congregation.

Life is full of anxieties and sorrows. People are constantly at war with the unpleasant things in life, such as sickness, death, family problems, work problems, financial difficulties, etc. But at the same time, we are to be filled with joy. We have knowledge, deep in our soul, that all is well and that ultimately everything will be glorious.

If we are without joy, we can hardly do anything. Murmuring and unhappiness are enemies of effective service in the church. So we are exhorted to "rejoice in the Lord always" (Philippians 4:4). Romans 14:17 says that the kingdom of God is "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

We should be happy when the Lord gives us opportunity and strength to serve Him in the church. It is when we get involved in serving and using the gifts God has given us that we experience satisfaction and fullness of joy. People who are overly introspective will become sad as they try to meet their own needs and solve their own problems all the time. Self-contemplating people are truly miserable human beings. Psalm 100:2 says, "Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing."

Rev. Prabhudas Koshy is the pastor of Gethsemane Bible-Presbyterian Church.

HANDLING DISPUTES IN THE CHURCH

It is Divine to Forgive

Tow Siang Hwa

Forgiveness is with God

"If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" (Psalm 130:3). One of the most touching and soul moving Psalms is the Hundred-and-thirtieth. Only the sinner, sunken in despair and weighed down with sin, feels with the Psalmist in his opening words:

"Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD. Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications" (Psalm 130:1-2).

At the very heart of the Gospel message is verse 4: "But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared."

Turn our eyes back to the dawn of Creation. There in the Garden, Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord, behind aprons of fig leaves and the foliage of trees. That did nothing to take away their sin and guilt, and their mortal fear.

Our God had to intervene. "Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them" (Genesis 3:21). Here was the first act of divine forgiveness:



the Lord God clothed the guilty pair with garments of salvation and robes of righteousness (Isaiah 61:10), foreshadowing the sacrifice of God's own Son, the Lamb of God which taketh away our sins, and gives us forgiveness.

Our Lord from the cross uttered words of timeless truth, mercy and hope: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34), even for those who had killed the Prince of Life.

David, who had received much forgiveness from the Lord, wrote the best loved Psalm 103. Read the whole Psalm and feel with the writer. For our encouragement, just four opening verses would suffice:-

"Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.
Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits:
Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases;
Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies."

Our God's forgiveness overflows with goodwill beyond comprehension: it demands our lifelong remembrance and gratitude, and a willingness to forgive.

Do we?

The Lord's Prayer Says, "Forgive"

Our Lord's wonderful prayer has a powerful message of healing for the church: that was His purpose when He taught the disciples. What lesson?

"For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14, 15).

The spirit of bitterness is an unforgiving spirit which lurks in many hearts. Our Lord knows our hearts best, better than we know ourselves. To drive home the point, He told the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18:23-35. Again, the reader is urged to look up the passage for himself. The parable exposes the ugly spirit of unforgiveness within the church – members as well as leaders, who grieve the Spirit, dishonour the Lord, and eat into their own souls.

The question we should ask ourselves is this: If my Lord has forgiven me ten thousand talents, can I not forgive my fellow-member an hundred pence? Translated to current values, my Lord has cancelled my debt of a million dollars, but I am not willing to cancel a debt of one hundred dollars!

Such an unreasonable and unforgiving spirit deserves only the "tormentors" (verse 34).

The Contention Was So

The Apostle Paul and Barnabas were missionary partners. In Acts 15:36-41, it is recorded that a contention arose between the two of them. Why did the Holy Spirit inspire the writer, Luke, to record in His inspired Word this contention between two of God's faithful servants? It is certainly for us to consider and deliberate upon.

"And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do. And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought it not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. And the contention was so sharp between them,

that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches" (Acts 15:36-41). This is the record of the private quarrel between two ministers, no less men than Paul and Barnabas. It is important for us to take note that their quarrel did not compromise their work in the Lord, for by the providence and sovereign control of the Almighty, they ended well in God's purposes.

The Spirit of God has taken good care to record this account of sharp contention between his faithful servants so that it may act as a warning for us. On the other hand, it would also prepare the minds of

"So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses" (Matthew 18:35).

"In Spirit and in Truth" Means "Forgive"

Recall our Lord's teaching in John 4:24: "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

How do you understand this verse? It is oft-quoted in prayers from the pulpit, and at times misquoted. To worship the Lord "in spirit and in truth" requires of the worshipper a forgiving spirit, surely. But our Lord knows our hearts and spirits. So He spoke those words in Matthew 5:22-24:

"... whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment ... Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." To worship the Lord "in spirit and in truth" means reconciliation with men before coming to worship God.

The Apostle Says ... "Forgive"

Paul the founder and pastor of many churches has practical instructions for the church in his letters to the churches at Ephesus and Colosse. Heeding and

obeying the holy injunction would heal many a needless discord.

"And grieve not the holy Spirit of God... Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:30-32).

"Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful" (Colossians 3:12-15).

"And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace" (James 3:18).

Rev. Dr. S. H. Tow is the senior pastor of Calvary Bible-Presbyterian Church.

Sharp Between Them

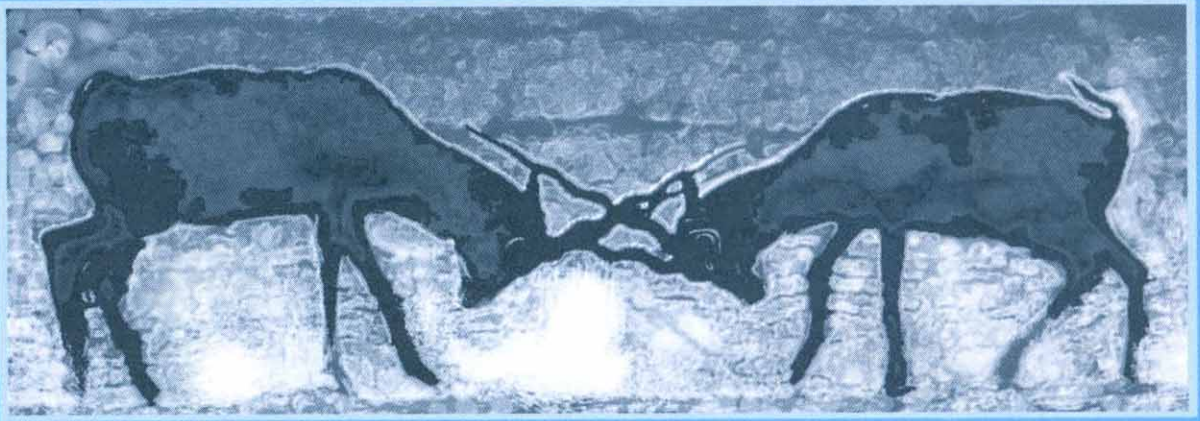
Tan Kian Sing

the children of God for the fact that even the most blessed men may have their difficulties and differences. We, therefore, must not be downcast if we were to meet with anything of the kind. This is not in any wise to make light of such disagreements, but sadly, we know that these things do arise.

Both men disputed the point till there was a paroxysm between them. Yes, this is indeed the word used; they were irritated and provoked by one another, and were so warmed and heated on both sides that they departed asunder one from another. Well, though we would expect peace to be made in the church, the fact is that differences do arise among the children of God who are men of like passions. However, as in the case of Paul and Barnabas, it is

not easy to say who was to be blamed more in this contention. Perhaps there were faults on both sides, for the best men are not without their failings. Yet the wonderful thing is that this matter was overruled by the providence of God, for the spreading of His Gospel, and the enlargement of His interest. We read that when these two great and good men parted from one another, they went to different places, preaching the word of God.

Does it then mean that contentions among Christian brethren are necessarily good and beneficial for the Church? The word used for "contention" here in Acts 15:39 is the Greek word, *paroxusmov*. It is from this word which our old English word "paroxysm" is derived. Paroxysm is used only twice in the New



Testament (here and Hebrews 10:24), and it is from the Greek word *paroxunw*, which means to sharpen as of a blade and of the spirit (Acts 17:16; 1 Corinthians 13:5). Paroxysm may thus denote any excitement or impulse of mind, and is used in a good sense in the word "provoke" in Hebrews 10:24: "And let us consider one another to provoke (*paroxusmov*) unto love and to good works." The word "provoke" has its original meaning as 'to arouse', 'to excite', 'to call into action', and it is used in this sense here. The Greek is, literally, "unto a paroxysm of love," and the idea is that Christians are to endeavour to arouse or excite each other in the manifestation of love. There is no danger that Christians will ever be excited to love each other too much, or to perform too many good works. In Acts 15:39, the word "contention" means, evidently, a violent noisy argument or disagreement that resulted in the separation of Paul and Barnabas for a time. Nevertheless, it still resulted in their engaging in different spheres of labour for the Lord with the furtherance of the Gospel. No one was laid aside or did lay himself aside in the work of the ministry of the Lord.

Contentions among ministers and Christians often show their spiritual weaknesses and are exceedingly injurious to the cause of Christ. However, sometimes, as in this case, they are manifestly overruled to the furtherance of the Gospel and can possibly result in the wider and more rapid extension of His kingdom. God uses the faults of His servants to the profit and building of the Church. Yet we have to take heed and cannot excuse ourselves and let our anger overflow in sharp contentions.

Both Paul and Barnabas were in great heat, but in this we have to consider the power of God's counsel. The Lord had His purpose in letting it be, for by this means it came to pass that the Gospel was spread to many places. They were certainly both at fault to be so heated up as to let the contention be sharp. It could

possibly be that they exchanged some hard words. They were so stubborn as each stuck resolutely to his opinion, and neither yielded to the other. It is a pity that they did not refer the matter to a third person, or that some friend did not interpose to prevent its coming to an open rupture. We must admit it was their infirmity, and that this is recorded for our admonition. But it is not that we must should use of it to excuse our own unreasonable and uncontrolled passions. We must not say, "What if I was in a passion, were not Paul and Barnabas too?" God forbid. The Holy Spirit's purpose is that this account will serve to help us check our censures of others, and moderate them lest we judge another brother wrongfully in our outrage. When we are having a sharp contention with another, we need to always seek repentance. Repentance teaches us to be severe in reflections upon ourselves. On the contrary, charity teaches us to be honest in our reflections upon others.

Let us not think it strange if there be differences among Christian brethren. Such offences would come, and here is an instance of it. Even those that are united to one and the same Jesus, and sanctified by one and the same Spirit, do have different apprehensions, different opinions, different views and different sentiments in points of prudence. It will be so, while we are in this state of darkness and imperfection. We shall never be all of one mind till we get to heaven, where light and love are perfect. But as for now let not charity ever fail. Look upon Jesus and see if all our contentions with another will grow strangely dim.

References: Barnes' NT Notes, John Gill's Expositor and Matthew Henry's Commentary

*Mr Tan Kian Sing ministers in
Berean Bible-Presbyterian Church.*

Admonishing One Another

Prabhudas Koshy

What Does the Scripture Mean by the Term 'Admonition'?

Admonition in the original Greek text comes from the word *nouthesia* (1 Corinthians 10:11; Ephesians 6:4; Titus 3:10), which refers to counsel or instruction given for the purpose of teaching correct behaviour. It can be done in the form of encouragement, warning or reproof; but its one goal is to persuade a person to amend his behaviour in the light of what is said to him.

Who Admonishes Who?

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Roman and Colossian believers encouraging them to admonish one another (Romans 15:14c; Colossians 3:16). Believers are to admonish one another.

It is not right for a Christian to leave a brother in his sin without making any attempt to restore such an one. Paul said in Galatians 6:1, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one..." It is the duty of every Christian to try his utmost to deliver a brother from the snares of sin to which he is heading or in which he is already trapped. This responsibility rests on every spiritual man's shoulder. A spiritual man is one who walks according to the Spirit, producing the fruit of the Spirit. The spiritually and morally strong has a responsibility for the spiritually and morally weak. "We then that are strong," the Apostle Paul wrote, "ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves" (Romans 15:1).

Instead of warning and correcting an errant believer, many a Christian engage in unscriptural practices of gossiping and complaining. This general attitude of Christians must change. Christians must learn to take the responsibility of admonishing one another according to the guidelines given in the Scripture. Pushing it aside as the duty of pastors and other leaders is wrong.

How Should We Admonish One Another?

There are three important aspects to the ministry of admonition which every Christian should observe

diligently. These aspects are clearly explained in the Scripture. They are spiritual preparation, right attitude, and right approach.

Spiritual Preparation

As we have noticed earlier from Galatians 6:1, the ones who admonish are the spiritual believers. Spiritual men are those who submit to the Spirit and the Word. Self-righteousness and hypocrisy must be eliminated.

Jesus taught us, "First cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye" (Matthew 7:5). The scribes and Pharisees failed in their spiritual admonitions because they could not really be of help to those who had sinned, as they themselves were blinded by grievous sins. They were not only unable to restore the errant ones, but were destroying people with their self-righteous condemnation and wrong application of the Scripture.

As Christians, we must not live in sin and self-righteousness. There must be constant self-examination, confession of sins, true repentance, consecration and sanctification of our minds and bodies. Otherwise we cannot be of spiritual use to other fellow believers. If our lives are not committed to constant renewal unto holiness, we will not be able to provide right wisdom and help to an erring brother that he may live rightly. We must constantly grow in our spiritual life like the Roman believers who were commended by Paul - "I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another" (Romans 15:14).

Right Attitude

Admonition must be done with gentleness. A Christian who is judgmental and critical as he attempts to help a fallen brother or sister does not really show the mercy and lovingkindness of our Lord. Therefore, Paul reminds in Galatians 6:1 that restoration of a fallen Christian must be done in the "spirit of meekness." Christian admonition is not to punish or destroy a Christian who has sinned, but to reinstate him to the right spiritual place where he actually belongs.

When the scribes and Pharisees brought to Jesus the woman caught in adultery, they told Jesus that according to the law of Moses she ought to be stoned to death. But He stooped down without answering them and pretending to write on the ground. In response to their persistence He replied, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." And when they heard it, they began to leave one by one, "beginning at the eldest, even unto the last." When Jesus looked up He saw none, except the woman caught in sin. Jesus then asked her, "Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee?" She answered, "No man, Lord." Jesus in His great love and gentleness admonished her, saying, "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more" (John 8:3-11).

Unlike the Jews, Jesus was not interested in destroying that woman, but in helping her out of her sin. This must be our attitude to fellow believers. 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 exhorts us, "If any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." Gentle attitude does not mean that we should tolerate sin and say nothing against the error. Rather, we must speak firmly against the sin committed, and dissociate from the person if he continues to engage in sin. Yet we must prayerfully seek ways and means to deliver him from his sin and disobedience and then restore him gently.

The attitude of every Christian must always be the attitude of Jesus. When a believer needs to help in disciplining a sinning brother he should ask for a special portion of Christ's love and gentleness.

Right Approach

The Scripture speaks not only of the right attitude but also about the right approach. How should we carry out our admonition? There are those who rush into confronting sin without carefully following the right approach that the Bible teaches. A wise course of action would be to follow the directions which Christ has provided in Matthew 18:15-17.

In Matthew 18, Jesus outlines four basic steps to correction: (1) Personal confrontation or reproof (2) Witnesses' reproof (3) Public announcement (4) Excommunication. It is important that in our admonition of a sinning Christian we follow this procedure step by step with great sensitiveness, love and gentleness as Jesus Himself has illustrated in His handling of the woman caught in adultery.

What should you do when faced with personal confrontation? Jesus said, "If thy brother shall

trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother" (Matthew 18:15). It is important that you first go and correct the fellow believer who has offended you or has been caught in a fault (Galatians 6:1). You should take great care not to let the issue become public before you have had a private meeting with the offender. In the meeting with the offender you must clearly "tell him his fault." You must be sure that you have not misconceived his action. In order to avoid misconception, it is important that you gently clarify the matter with the person concerned before making an accusation. If you have strong evidences, then you can firmly tell him why you think he is sinning. You must also be ready to explain from the Scripture why his action is a sin. It is also important to make it clear to the erring person that your real intention is not to harm his reputation or integrity, but to see to the good of his spiritual life. If the offender accepts your admonition and repents, then you have won him over from sin.

But if he ignores your admonition, what should you do? Jesus said, "If he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established" (Matthew 18:16). If there are others who have witnessed his sin, they must be called to impress upon the errant person the seriousness of his sin. This must not be perceived as a means of threatening the person, but a sincere attempt to bring to his attention the seriousness of his sin. With more brethren admonishing him, he may see the danger of his sin more clearly.

What if he is unwilling to listen to the witnesses as well? Up to this point, the disciplinary procedure has taken place in private. But an unresponsive attitude from the offender requires stronger action. The third step in the process of admonition, as set forth by Jesus, is revealed in verse 17: "If he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church." The refusal of a sinning brother to acknowledge his sin requires that the matter be made public by bringing it before the church. How the matter should be brought to the congregation must be left to the discretion of the church leaders. Regardless of how the matter is brought before the church, it should be done in such a way that people will be encouraged to pray for the sinner, to avoid a critical spirit, and to beware of pridefully thinking, "that would never happen to me." The emphasis of such a public announcement should be that God hates sin but loves sinners who repent.

What if the public announcement fails to bring the sinner to his senses? There is one final step which

Jesus mentioned: "If he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican" (verse 17b). The reference to "a heathen man and a publican" is illuminated by the Jewish setting of Jesus' time. They were considered by the Jews as outsiders with regard to God's blessings on Israel. The essence of Jesus' saying is that the impenitent must not be any more considered as a member of the church. The ecclesiastical term for this fourth step is 'ex-communication.'

Needless to say, the process of admonition is not

always easy. The many difficulties must be carefully handled with much prayer and love. If the person returns with true repentance after the ex-communication, he must be received with gracious forgiveness. The church as a whole must prepare the way to spiritual healing and restoration to a fruitful life and ministry.

Rev. Prabhudas Koshy is the pastor of Gethsemane Bible-Presbyterian Church.

Gossip, A Terrible Spiritual Malady

Prabhudas Koshy

A Grim Picture: Gossipers Among the Reprobates

"Whisperers," people who engage in malicious gossips, are grouped in the Bible together with the reprobates. In Romans 1:28-32, the Apostle Paul paints a grim picture of reprobates – those who have rejected the Lord and have embraced a lifestyle of sin. "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them."

In this list of abominable evils of reprobate men, we not only find what we normally regard as gross sins: greed, deceit, adultery, murder and so forth but also what many sometimes view as a "small problem," namely, gossip and slander. Does this come as a surprise? Paul said that gossips and bad-mouthers were in the same league as God-haters, sexual perverts and murderers.

The commonly used term "gossip" is derived from a word with the idea of "whispering." It means "to indulge in idle talk or rumours about others, or spreading of sensational stories." It can also mean "idle or malicious talk about others."

In the Bible, "backbiter" and "slanderer" are from the same word from which the word "Devil" originates. A slanderer is one who defames, or talks maliciously, or spreads damaging information, or speaks ill of others. Slander is the work of the Devil. In fact, the Bible says that Satan is the "accuser of our brethren" (Revelation 12:10). If you are a whisperer or accuser of the brethren, even though unintentionally, you are an agent of the Devil! Those who slander are on his team!

As we can see, gossip is a close cousin of slander. God's Word places both in the same cupboard as murder and other wickedness – sins worthy of death. According to the Scripture, anyone whose mouth is out of control does not have a right relationship with God. "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain" (James 1:26).

As a Christian, do you occasionally slip up and commit a murder here and there? Or do you occasionally burglarise a home or steal things from

the store? You may think this is silly to ask. Of course, a Christian does not behave that way. Then, just as we are not to commit murder or theft, we are also not to gossip or slander. According to Romans 1:28-32, gossip is as worthy of divine judgment as murder.

Like Paul, the Apostle Peter brings to our attention a sin that often goes hand in hand with the sin of "gossip." "But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters" (1 Peter 4:15). Notice that a "busybody" is placed in the same company as "murderers, thieves and evildoers." A busybody is a meddler, a person who seeks confidential information about others, a snoop and a nosy person.

A busybody is another close relative of the gossip - a person who meddles with the affairs of others. He is like a peeping-tom who snoops and spies. A busybody is the investigator for gossipers and rumour-mongers, seeking to uncover sensational details and to whisper the latest news. Sometimes busybodies are persons who have too much time on their hands, with nothing better to do than to talk about matters of others. "And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not" (1 Timothy 5:13). The modern explosion of communication technology, such as telephones, e-mails, etc., has made this evil even more frequent and intense!

Not A Little Bad Habit, But A Smoking Firewood!

By now you are aware that anything which is placed in the same category as murder and other gross sins must be a serious sin – something that should not be taken lightly. But unfortunately, Christians do not usually consider gossip and its related activities as sin.

In a decade of pastoral ministry, I have encountered Christians who live like they are obsessed busybodies, whisperers and bad-mouthers. Such people cause irreparable damage to the body of Christ. "The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly" (Proverbs 26:22). Mean, vicious accusations and rumours have ripped out the heart and soul of many fellow Christians and leaders, draining them of their love, enthusiasm and desire to live for God. They have split churches, created strife, and promoted division and turmoil.

A church can be free from wild and destructive strife only when its members carefully avoid any conversation which is gossip or slander, and also

cease from being busybodies. "Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth" (Proverbs 26:20).

A Serious and Subtle Sin

This serious malady is a very subtle and ambiguous one. We must learn to differentiate a constructive and good conversation from gossip; otherwise it would be most unfortunate.

For instance, a discussion between two church leaders about a problem concerning a church member should not be considered gossip, especially, when they discuss the issue for corrective purpose. But they must take special care not to spread the "news" to others under the pretext of "concern."

If a person continues to indulge in destructive sins or to teach harmful doctrines, even after he has been lovingly warned, it may become necessary for him to be exposed for the good of everyone else. The Bible does not categorise the act of exposing unrepentant characters as gossip. Paul, who warned against gossip, exposed publicly several ungodly characters in the church — "Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works" (2 Timothy 4:14). Another time he wrote, "And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some" (2 Timothy 2:17).

A gossip occurs when negative "information" is given about someone who is not present in that conversation. Whenever one speaks of another person in less than a favourable way or in a manner that is fault-finding, slandering, or finger-pointing, he engages in gossip. It is generally a negative conversation, which focuses on nothing good or constructive, only bad feelings about the person discussed.

Many a time gossips begin like this — "I hate to say anything about this to you, but I'm 'concerned' about so and so." At other times, the gossipers will seek you out as their "confidantes" to unload their "heavy hearts" about their concerns. "I'm very troubled about so and so and I don't know who else I can share this with."

In reality, the gossip is not sincerely concerned about solving the problem, only in talking about it, or stirring up a conversation about someone's weakness. "A froward man soweth strife: and a whisperer separateth chief friends" (Proverbs 16:28).

A sound conversation should always be directed towards solving a problem rather than aggravating a problem, though in certain circumstances a good solution may not be achieved quickly.

Any person who is genuinely concerned about solving a problem should go and confront the person privately and express his concern. Or else he should go privately to the pastor in order to seek his help to deal with and settle the problem. In all these, we must keep a loving spirit which is willing to forgive one another, esteem one another, restore and renew the brotherly relationship.

Gossip thrives on the negative, the controversial and the sensational. Going around and telling others about someone else's fault or problem, before or during the efforts to solve the problem, is harmful and does not help to resolve the problem. It will only cause us to gossip further and to sin.

Things to Remember About Gossip

- Unrepentant and persistent habit of gossip is a clear sign of the unregenerate spirit of a man. He faces the same consequence as a murderer unless there is repentance (Romans 1:32). God holds you accountable to your words (Matthew 12:36-37).
- The person who gossips to you about others, also gossips to others about you.
- Gossip and slander disqualify a person from spiritual leadership (1 Timothy 3:11; James 3:2).
- Gossip often masks itself as pretentious concerns for others.

- Gossip often thrives upon secrecy. Where secrecy is removed, gossip is hampered.
- Gossip always contributes to a problem and never to a solution.
- Gossip always distorts and exaggerates, and is never a reliable source of truth.
- Those who gossip and slander are not in right fellowship with God (Romans 1:28-32). Those who gossip will rarely get answers to prayer, and often face persistent, unexplainable problems (Psalms 66:18; Proverbs 21:23; Proverbs 6:12-15).

What to do about Gossip

Though the sin of gossip is subtle, it must be recognised, acknowledged and confessed as sin. Then we must seek the Lord's forgiveness. Repent by surrendering our tongue to Christ. And never gossip or bad-mouth again (1 John 1:9; 2 Corinthians 7:10).

If you can't say something good or encouraging about others, then keep your mouth shut (Ephesians 4:29). If you find any error in a person, tell him to his face with an intent to help. If he listens to your advice, let that matter be forgiven and forgotten.

Criticism can never be "constructive" if it is expressed to anyone else other than the one who is being criticised. If your "friends" start bad-mouthing others to you, stop them in their tracks. Refuse to be a partaker of their sin. Avoid association with people who gossip. "He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets: therefore meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips" (Proverbs 20:19). It is better that you suggest to the person who brings juicy or even provocative news that he should discuss the matter with the "accused" person before he takes it seriously.

If all of us do this, we can avoid breaking long-term friendships or creating unnecessary strife. Many long-term friends and co-workers have been separated by talebearers. Don't trust a gossip at all, he will betray you later - "A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter" (Proverbs 11:13).

Expose gossip, a work of darkness, by reporting it to the pastor or elder that they may confront and offer correction. Gossip should be treated as any other vile sin. "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Ephesians 5:11).

May we all resolve within our hearts like the Psalmist, "I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me" (Psalm 39:1).

The Editor

"When God wants to do his great works he trains somebody to be quiet enough and little enough, then he uses that person." – Hudson Taylor

Ageing and Its Challenges to the Church

Peter Chua

Rapidly Ageing Population

The trend throughout the world these days, both in the West and Asia, is a rapidly greying population. For example, in Singapore, in 1970 only 5.7% of our population was aged 60 years and above; by 1990 the figure was 9.1%; and it is projected that by the year 2030, the figure will leap to 26.1%. By then, one out of every four Singaporeans will be 'an aged person'. The reason for this trend? People are going to live longer primarily as a result of better health care services available to them.

The Changing Scene in the Church

Where this trend is apparent, there will be an impact on the church: The Christian population is 'greying' like the general population! Already in Singapore many of our Chinese-speaking churches especially the dialect-speaking congregations have a very high proportion of members who are older adults. It is expected that by 2010 there will be an annual increase of almost 5,000 people in our churches who will turn 60 and have perhaps still another 20-30 years to live.

Changing Demands and Opportunities

It is imperative for the church to be sensitive to the changing demographic trends both within the church and in society at large. The preaching and teaching ministries of our churches need to be relevant to the life experiences and situations of older adults. These 'seniors' also need to be trained to face the many challenges in order to live fulfilling and meaningful lives.

The retirees can be a new source of manpower for the ministry of the church if they are encouraged and equipped. It is timely now to develop a new educational ministry within our churches which will reflect this particular need among our members.

Older members should not be seen as liabilities or passive recipients of ministry, but rather as tremendous assets who can be active providers of

ministry. In other words, we may need to think not so much about ministering to the ageing, but ministering with them!

The many losses in later life – for example deterioration of health, lessening of disposable income, death of spouse and friends, and even questioning the meaning of life – are realities which older adults have to confront. Dying and death are not remote possibilities, but fast-approaching certainties. Our ministries of pastoral care need to be refined in such a way as to reflect an awareness of these realities among this older age group.

Given the increasing proportion of older people in our population, we need to re-consider the strategies for evangelism. Although future cohorts of older people will be better educated, they will still need Christ. How can we witness to them effectively? What style of presentation of the Gospel will be most relevant to them?

Checking Our Attitudes

What will your attitude be when you have reached old age? Most people are content to sit back and take it easy. We should never entertain this thought for there are many opportunities open for Christian service (Psalm 92:12-14).



George Whitefield was known for his unwavering faithfulness in the Lord's service. One day, after preaching several times, he went to his room completely exhausted. As he was preparing for bed, he was informed that a large crowd has gathered and wanted him to speak just once more. Summoning his remaining strength, he took a candle with him and said he would preach till it burned out. The taper flickered its last about an hour later, and Whitefield closed in prayer and went inside. The next morning found him on his knees beside his bed – the flame for his earthly existence had died. George was faithful unto death even though he died at the age of fifty-five.

Rev. Peter Chua is the pastor of Sharon Bible-Presbyterian Church.

Ageing - The Spiritual Perspective

Lim Yew Cheng

"The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness" (Proverbs 16:31).

The greying landscape of Singapore's population is an unstoppable phenomenon. Presently, about 7% of its population are above 65 years but by 2030, this figure will almost treble to 19%! This trend is inevitable as improvement in nutrition and healthcare continues. With it comes the degenerative diseases of the aged – arthritis, heart diseases, stroke, cancer and what have you. Even if one is spared these problems, there are still the daunting telltale signs of ageing – weight gain, wrinkled skin, weak muscles and bones, failing memory, lethargy and decreased sexual function to reckon with. They only point, menacingly, to the day when one is even incapable of activities of daily living, like dressing, feeding, mobility, toileting and washing.

There is an air of despair. Small wonder man enters into an anti-ageing frenzy. To remain eternally young, we resort to age reversing formulae, like oil of 'delay', human growth hormone (HGH), cosmetic face lift and perhaps, even gene manipulation. These are but the resort of the destitute. Amidst apparent doom and gloom, let us return to the Word of God. Clearly the Scriptures tell us that:

- Ageing is a progressive reality. It cannot be forestalled. Our years of decline are poetically painted for us in Ecclesiastes 12. "Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern" (Ecclesiastes 12:6).

- Death is inevitable, for it is "appointed unto men once to die" (Hebrews 9:27). God has set up the bounds of our habitation over which we may not pass (Acts 17:26).

- Death makes it a zero sum game. With death we return to the Maker. "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it" (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

But the Scriptures also tell us not to sulk and grow old in the way described for us in Ecclesiastes 4:13-16. It was D. L. Moody who commented: "It does not pay to get sour as you get old. I pity a man who lives in the past. He lives on stale manna. He gets stunted." Neither must we despair, for it was Paul, the aged, who inspired by the Spirit, wrote, "For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16).

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we experience this daily renewal, enabling us to live graciously, regardless of our age. We no longer fight or resist it but rather welcome, much in the way Solomon, dignified it as a crowning period of glory, with longevity refutive of a godly life. "The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness" (Proverbs 16:31).



Grandpa Moses blazed the trail, leading the Hebrew children out of Egyptian bondage at the grand old age of eighty. Albert Sweitzer ran a hospital in Africa at the age of eighty-nine and Rev Timothy Tow, principal of Far Eastern Bible College, who at the age of eighty remains steadfast for the Lord. It was Rev Tow who said, "In the Lord's work there is no retirement." Such a work culture value is diametrically opposed to the "you're tired today and retire tomorrow" philosophy. Anna, the prophetess, daughter of

Phanuel stands out as a paragon of such virtue. She was "... of a great age, ... a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day" (Luke 2:36-37).

She remained in the Lord's work all the days of her life just as we should. How is this possible? Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the famous US poet, gives us a glimpse of it. When asked how he remained so optimistic and enthusiastic in writing such beautiful poetry when he was already getting on in years, Longfellow replied, drawing truth in nature, "Look at that apple tree across the yard. It has been there a long time, and yet, I've never seen prettier blooms on it than right now. I am told that the reason the blooms come back each year is because the tree grows, and there is new wood on the tree each year."

How true! We ought to allow a little new wood to come out on us each year so that we can continue to bloom and blossom and our lives may be a blessing to others. The Psalmist endorses it (Psalm

92). In an obvious reference to old age, he urges us to thank the Lord for old age (Psalm 92:10-15). In living for Christ, we certainly shall be able to exude the fragrance of freshness (Psalm 92:10).

"I shall be anointed with fresh oil" – flourishing (Psalm 92:10).

"The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree" – fruitfulness (Psalm 92:12).

"They shall still bring forth fruit in old age" – faithfulness (Psalm 92:14, 15) "to shew that the LORD is upright."

May we live with such holy aspirations, remaining "stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Elder Lim Yew Cheng is an elder of Calvary Jaya Bible-Presbyterian Fellowship, Malaysia.

*"A faithful and good servant is a real godsend;
but truly it is a rare bird in the land."*

- Martin Luther

CHRISTIANS' SUFFICIENCY IN GOD

The Sufficiency of Scriptures

Ronny Khoo

The Assembly of The Church of Scotland met on 27th August 1647 and approved what is known as The Westminster Confession of Faith – a detailed statement of Reformed Evangelical belief. Chapter 1 section 6: The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life is expressly set down in Scripture or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture, unto which nothing at any time is to be added whether by new revelation of the Spirit or by traditions of men. If one proclaims that the Bible is inerrant and infallible, the Word of God, in God's authority and also claims extra biblical revelations then one is saying that the Bible is insufficient to guide us in life.

From 2 Timothy 3:16-17 we see that (i) There is no Scripture given not for these purposes (ii) All the Scriptures that are given are all that are necessary to make a man perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

Deuteronomy 4:2 and Revelation 22:18-19 tell us of the sufficiency and the finality of Scripture for man. And the Lord hath in His wisdom and goodness caused the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ in the earlier century to recognise the Scriptures as distinct from good Christian writings, etc. and to separate them so that we have, preserved for us, today, the Holy Bible consisting of the 66 books of the Old and New Testament. The hedge has been set. Scriptures

are Scriptures. They are the Word of God to man. God's authority is inherent in every Scripture.

When we say Scripture is sufficient, we do not mean that the Scripture will teach us everything about everything, or else scientific research should stop and we can study the Scripture alone and go in to take the examination on physics and do well. This is not the purpose of Scripture. It also does not mean that the Scriptures will teach us everything about the subjects upon which it does speak. For example, the Bible speaks about business dealings (James 4:13), building construction (Matthew 7:24-27), farming (2 Timothy 2:6), shepherding (John 10), etc. but it does not say everything we need to know about them. The Scripture is sufficient for the special purpose for which it was written, that is, to teach us all we need to know about God and ourselves and the reconciliation through the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ with all its implication and consequence (with all its attendant blessings and chastening, etc.).

It tells us about God, creation, man, about why man was created, where and why man has fallen, how he must be put right, the only way of salvation and sanctification and service through Christ, and glorification and the world to come.

The Bible leaves no area unclear that we need to know and believe concerning God, man and salvation. It is sufficient to teach us how to live our lives in relation to God and man.

Where there are no specific statements to govern a particular situation there are general principles that we can apply. These principles are found in the Scriptures and can be worked out in many different circumstances.

It must be remembered also, that there are many things the Bible does not reveal. We do not need to know them. We must not try to know them. These are the secret things that belong only to God

(Deuteronomy 29:29).

We now must consider how some Charismatics view the Scriptures. There are those who belong to the Charismatic Movement today who deny the sufficiency of Scriptures. They believe in its authority and its inerrancy but deny its sufficiency. One Charismatic pastor does not even carry a Bible when he preaches at the pulpit!

Charismatic Christians lay great emphasis upon "an experience" of the Holy Spirit after conversion which they call "the baptism of the Holy Spirit." This baptism is supposed to open the way to exercise certain spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament, for example, tongues-speaking, the interpretation of tongues, prophesying, etc.

For some, prophecy and the interpretation of tongues are taken as God-given messages and can be placed alongside the revealed truth of Scripture. These are supposed to be God's method of speaking to modern Charismatics. Catherine Marshall represents this kind of Charismatics. In her book "Something More," she interprets John 16:13a as "howbeit when He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will guide you into further truth (in place of all truth)." She said in page 281 of her book, "in fact it seemed to me that Jesus' promise of further truth gives us clear reasons to believe that not all the truth and instruction Christ has to give us is contained in the canon of the Old and New Testament." Thus, she denies the sufficiency of Scripture.

This is surely a departure from the "Sola Scriptura" of the 16th Century Reformation. It is a departure from the Scripture testimony of itself. If we depart from the principle of the sufficiency of Scriptures, we will soon be ushered into a darkness that will be darker than the dark ages.

*Rev. Ronny Khoo is the pastor of
Tabernacle Bible-Presbyterian Chapel.*

"As an aside, no music is more sweet to a gospel preacher than the rustle of Bible pages in the congregation. Many times when I have been in the pulpit and I have read a passage of Scripture, nobody has followed me to see if I was quoting correctly. I strongly urge you to take your Bibles with you when you go to church. What is the best way of hearing the Word? Is it not to search and see whether what the preacher says is really according to the Word of God? Thus, I entreat you to search the Scriptures to see if what is being taught to you is true."

- C.H. Spurgeon

Trusting God at All Times

PSALM 46

Cheong Chin Meng

This was Martin Luther's favourite Psalm. In 1521, on his way to the Diet at Worms to answer the charge laid against him by the Roman Catholic Church because he spoke against its heresies, he wrote his famous hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God." This hymn, which is widely sung by Christians today, is based on the above Psalm. In the darkest times he used to say, "Come, let us sing the 46th Psalm, and let them do their worst." He further exclaimed, "We sing this Psalm to the praise of God, because God is with us, and powerfully and miraculously preserves and defends His church and His word..."

We in our times need to trust God no less. Yea, even at all times. What are our present concerns of which we have lost sleep over? Is it concerning our job? Is it concerning a loved one? Is it concerning our health? Is it concerning our future? What about the Psalmist? What is it that is alluded to in the Psalm that could have tried his trust in God to the core? In verses 2 and 3, the terrestrial upheavals brought about by great earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tidal waves, etc. would have put any mortal man to great fright but not the Psalmist who has made God his trust.

Trusting God Because

He is Our Refuge

A refuge is a place of security, a shelter. The Psalmist affirmed, "God is our refuge" (Psalm 46:1). Psalm 91:1, 2 state the same truth, "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in Him will I trust." The safest place for any child of God amidst the surrounding dangers and troubles is in our Almighty Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ. Jonathan

and Rosalind Goforth learned this precious truth. Despite the very difficult circumstances they were in as pioneer missionaries to China, they affirmed that "the safest place was the path of duty." Their primary concern used to be their children. But trust in God eventually took paramount importance above all other considerations.

The Christian's greatest enemy is Satan. And with him to do us woes are his demons. Luther's trust in his God was such that he said though there were as many demons as tiles on the roofs at Worms, he would be there to be a witness of God's truth. He had made the almighty God his refuge, and therefore, he feared not. What he and we cannot lose? It's our eternal security. Our Lord Jesus assures all who are His, "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" (John 10:28).

He is Our Strength

"God is our...strength" (Psalm 46:1). What can weaklings do to stand up against the might of the

opposing forces of the evil one? The people of God can be strong because their God can strengthen them. Remember the Scriptures, "Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall; But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint" (Isaiah 40:30, 31).

On the one hand, we are to realise that we too are weak in some ways, but on the other hand, let us learn as did the apostle, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13). We can be strengthened by our God not just in "some things" but in "all things," at all times, and in all places, to do that which He has for us to do. The Lord has



need of you to serve Him. He will strengthen you and give you sufficient grace to do it. Likewise our Lord will see us through our daily work, take care of our family and help us to face the future with His strength.

He is Our Help

"God is our...very present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1). To restate two of these words – "very" means "abundantly;" and "present" means "available." That is, God is a sufficient, abundant, available help to us at all times, especially, in times of trouble. Although it is true that "a brother is born for adversity" (Proverbs 17:17), God is our primary focus as the fountain of all graces and blessings. To Him must be given all praise and glory for He alone has enabled; He alone has endowed His church with spiritual gifts; and He alone is sovereign over every heart.

He alone is God and there is none else. Have we looked to our God to help us? And to bless us? He will because He is our God. He will stand with us, strengthen us and help us through from day to day. His help is sure, steadfast and sufficient. Remember the widow of Zarephath in dire circumstances during Elijah's time? Her barrel of wheat was never empty. Although it was not overflowing, yet daily there was sufficient for all. We are reminded of the prayer the Lord taught His disciples to pray, "Give us day by day our daily bread" (Luke 11:3). Our God will help us. Let's trust Him to see us through in every situation.

What are Trustful Christians to Do?

Fear Not

"Therefore will not we fear..." (Psalm 46:2). What is

alluded to in verse 2 is far reaching in any circumstance a Christian would ordinarily face. The phenomenon of earth-shaking events, the roaring of the great waters, etc. If the Psalmist could trust God even under those fearsome circumstances, then surely we too should learn to trust God in our present daily life. What should the right response always be? Fear not, for our God is with us (verses 7 and 11).

Why the Psalmist feared not even under those times? Because he knew his God. Because he trusted in his God. Because he committed himself to his God. Like a young child in the bosom of his parent, he feared not despite the fact that he may be in unfamiliar surroundings because he is in the presence of his parent. Our God is able to calm the greatest of storms. If He could reign over the power of nature, so can He the storms in our lives.

Be Still

"Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth" (verse 10). "Be still," that is, wait upon God, let go and let Him take charge, and by implication, submit ourselves to His sovereign lordship over our lives. It is God who shall work out all things for our good. It is He who shall open doors for us. It is He who is sovereign over every heart. It is He who controls all His creatures and all their actions. Let's be still and let Him take charge of our lives and circumstances. Let's trust Him at all times. God will help us.

Rev. Cheong Chin Meng is the pastor of Gospel Light Bible-Presbyterian Church.

Our Forgiveness Fully Purchased

Quek Suan Yew

Hebrews 9:22, "And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission."

"To err is human, to forgive, divine" is a true saying. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" is the declaration of the Bible. Man needs to have his sins cleansed, for in sin, man will not be able to see God. All men who die in their sin will end up in hell forever. This is the judgment of God upon

all mankind.

But God in His infinite mercies sent Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, to die on the cross of Calvary for our sins. God accepted His sacrifice fully by raising Him from the dead on the third day after Jesus Christ died and was buried. Anyone who puts his faith and trust in Jesus Christ as the One who died for him will be saved is the promise of the Bible. Romans 10:9, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord

Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

God can save us through Jesus Christ because we have been justified by His death. In other words, Jesus paid the penalty of sin on our behalf. All our sins can be forgiven by God because the price paid for all our sins was Jesus' own precious and priceless blood, the blood of the Son of Man and Son of God! Since the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, God has shown man that "without the shedding of blood there is no remission [of sin]." Our forgiveness from God cost God His only begotten Son and Jesus Christ His life's blood. Matthew 26:28, "For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." And in Romans 3:25, "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God." Blood was shed that I may receive forgiveness from God!

The Christian's salvation and all the richness that comes with this same salvation are irrevocable because they are sealed by the blood of Jesus Christ. No man can snatch us out of our Father's hand is the promise Jesus Christ made to all His disciples. Does it mean that all mankind is saved? No. We know that many will end up in hell. Matthew 7:13, "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat." The reason is that forgiveness has two parts. God is ever ready to forgive anyone who comes to Him in sincere heart repentance. He will not cast anyone away is His promise! John 6:37, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." This is the heart and attitude that God has toward all. The other side of the coin is that man must come in repentance in order that he may appropriate the benefits and blessings of forgiveness. Confession and repentance must come from the sinner or else forgiveness from God would not be experienced by the sinner. 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Salvation is freely made available to all who would come but it was not cheap. It cost Jesus Christ His priceless and precious blood. 1 Peter 1:18-19, "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."

Based upon this experience of receiving God's forgiveness, we are not only duty bound but as an evidence of our salvation, to forgive all who come to us in repentance. Whatever sins they may have sinned against us, we must forgive them from our hearts as long as they say "I am sorry, please forgive me." This we must do all the time with an ever ready attitude to forgive. Matthew 18:21-22, "Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven."

Whether the sinner is genuine in his repentance is not the issue. The issue is that we cannot read hearts but the command from God is that we must still forgive from our hearts. Just as the benefits of our salvation from God is dependant upon our confession, so is the benefit of the Christian's forgiveness. Regardless of the sin against us, we must forgive. Not to forgive is to say to God that what they have done to me is more costly and precious than the blood of Jesus Christ that was shed for me. But nothing on earth and in this life or the life to come can ever be more precious than the blood of Jesus Christ that was shed on Calvary for us. So if we have really tasted the forgiveness of God, from our hearts we must forgive all who come to us in repentance. Matthew 6:14-15, "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." May God help us to forgive all who come to us in repentance. Amen.

*Rev. Quek Suan Yew is the pastor of
Calvary Bible-Presbyterian Church (Pandau).
He is also a lecturer at Far Eastern Bible College.*

*The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to
anger, and plenteous in mercy.*

King David (Psalm 103:8)

Our Lasting Inheritance

George Foong

There is our earthly inheritance, first willed to us and then received at the demise of a loved one. We do not ask for it, nor do we work for it, though some might have come into it through much plotting and scheming. Otherwise, it is a gift given because of our favoured position as heirs of the estate. Many of us have, at some time or other, received some form of inheritance, be it money, shares, property or jewellery.

Many stories have been told of people who had acquired large inheritance. Not a few had their lives ruined because of the sudden wealth. A young man was left a large sum of money by his late father who had hoped that it would give his son a good start in life. Sadly, it did not work out as his father had wished. Instead, he was totally corrupted by the large windfall. Being overcome by the lusts of the flesh, his life took an about turn. In no time, he had squandered all he had on flashy sports cars, fine dining and strange women. This young man is now in a most deplorable state not unlike the prodigal son in our Lord's parable who had also wasted his substance on riotous living. Beware of earthly inheritance which can ruin both heart and soul.

There is also the heavenly inheritance, one that is far superior to the earthly, reserved for all who have named the name of Christ. The Apostle Peter says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you"

(1 Peter 1:3, 4). Here the word "begotten" has the meaning of "being born again." So, as in the earthly inheritance we, too, are also born into the heavenly when we profess Christ as our Saviour. Then, having become privileged heirs of God by adoption, He our

Heavenly Father will give to us all the blessings of heaven as an inheritance.

This heavenly inheritance is quite different from the earthly.

It is incorruptible. It is more lasting. It does not depreciate in value; neither can it be squandered away. It is imperishable.

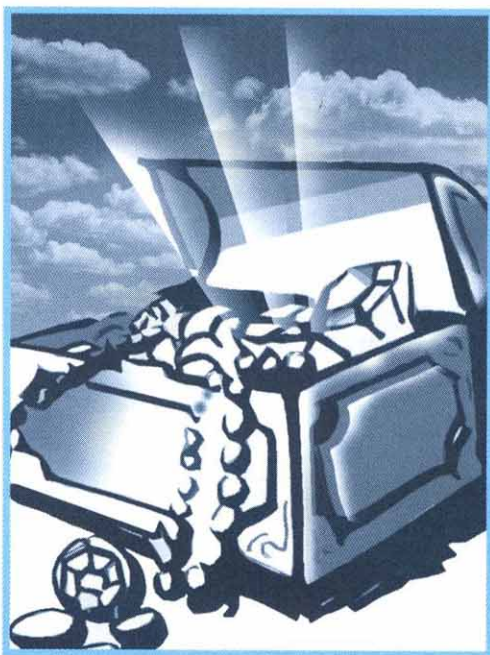
It is undefiled. It is pure and cannot be obtained through dishonest means. It does not affect or change our character, neither does it corrupt our souls or defile our hearts and tempt us to sensuality, lusts and extravagance.

It does not fade away. It is perpetual. Its brilliance and splendour will never fade or grow dim. The river of water of life will always remain as clear as crystal; the streets of gold will never lose its lustre.

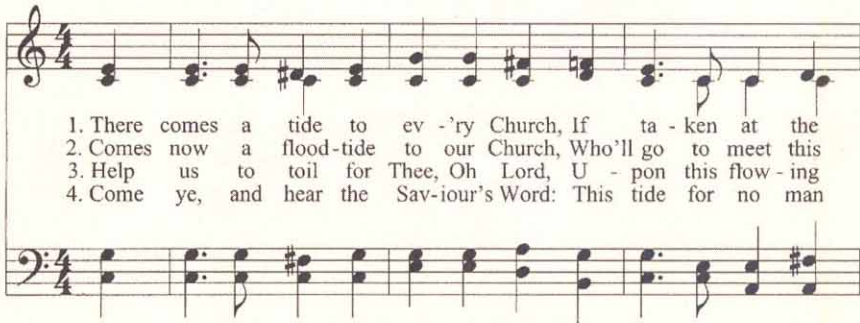
How blessed it is to know that at the end of our earthly sojourn, we have such a wonderful inheritance waiting for us in heaven. This we are assured of because our Heavenly Father will see to that. He watches over us to see that we do not fall away. He keeps us by His power unto salvation. "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).

Thanks be to our gracious and merciful God.

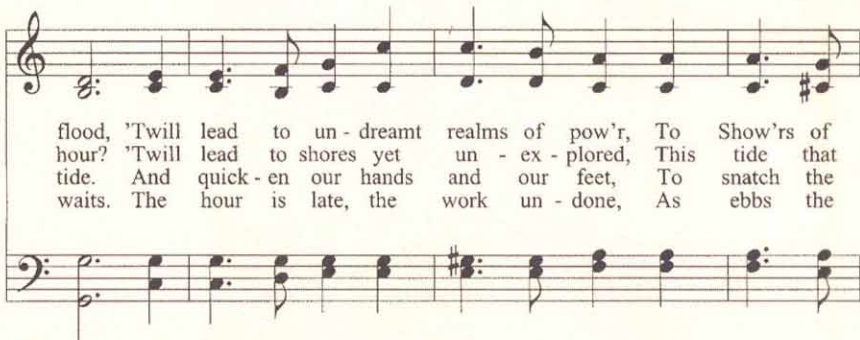
*Elder George Foong is an elder of
Calvary Bible-Presbyterian Church (Pandan).*



There Comes A Tide To Every Church



1. There comes a tide to ev - 'ry Church, If ta - ken at the
 2. Comes now a flood-tide to our Church, Who'll go to meet this
 3. Help us to toil for Thee, Oh Lord, U - pon this flow - ing
 4. Come ye, and hear the Sav-iour's Word: This tide for no man



flood, 'Twill lead to un - dreamt realms of pow'r, To Show'rs of
 hour? 'Twill lead to shores yet un - ex - plored, This tide that
 tide. And quick - en our hands and our feet, To snatch the
 waits. The hour is late, the work un - done, As ebbs the



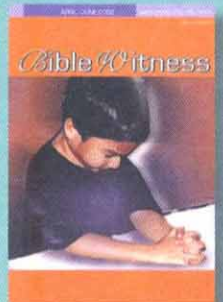
bles - ing from a - bove The Ho - ly Ghost of God!
 bears thee up yon - der The flood - gates of our God!
 souls of men a - drift The com - ing Day of God!
 flow be - low the sun The judg - ment Day of God! A - men.

Words by Timothy Tow
 Music by Frederick C. Maker

Bible Witness

- A magazine for the nurture of individual spiritual life
- A magazine for every Christian home
- A magazine for Bible study groups

Visit our web-site (www.biblewitness.com) for discussion questions based on the articles in the magazine. You may print out the questions and use them to facilitate discussion in family worship, Bible study groups, etc. You may also use them for individual study.



Next issue : Prayer