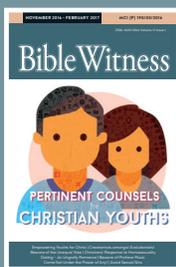


Bible Witness



Empowering Youths for Christ | Creationists amongst Evolutionists!
Beware of the Unequal Yoke | Christians' Response to Homosexuality
Dating – An Ungodly Romance | Beware of Profane Music
Come Not Under the Power of Any! | Avoid Sexual Sins



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*All the above articles are contributed
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SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

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USE OF ARTICLES

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

EDITORIAL

In this issue, Bible Witness seeks to particularly address Christian youths regarding their crucial role in the battle being waged against the church. A vicious alliance forged by Satan, the world, false teachers and false brethren has been subtly at work to conquer the minds of our youths and turn them away from Scriptural truths, holiness, genuine worship and service of our Lord Jesus Christ. These enemies of our children's souls may not appear to be working in tandem, but when their efforts are carefully considered through vigilant, discerning eyes, the satanic ploy being meticulously executed to hurt in so many fronts of life become all too apparent.

Christian youths are incessantly under enormous pressure from the world to conform to its ungodly ways. A fierce (albeit subtle and sophisticated) onslaught has been unleashed at our young generation! It comes in many forms – education, science, arts, media, fashion, trends, entertainment, friendship, etc. This is intensified by the onslaught of the flesh from within. Every Christian youth must be discerning, vigilant and “combat-ready” as faithful soldiers of Christ's army.

For the protection and empowerment of our youths, church leaders and Christian parents need to be prayerful and vigilant in strengthening the minds of our youths with God's Word. Having some youth programmes in the church is not enough. Every effort must be made to equip our young men and women to be vigilant, battle-ready soldiers of Christ. Parents, youth workers, church leaders, pastors and all in the church must make their individual and concerted efforts to lead our youths to victory over all kinds of satanic ambushes and assaults.

I cannot help but lament that too many parents and church leaders have let their youths walk straight into the devil's snares, having done little to prevent them from doing so and failing to warn and arm them against the battles they would face. Some, when they come to know of the spiritual maladies into which their children have fallen, simply pretend that nothing serious has happened or even adopt a casual “can't help it, what to do?” attitude.

We hereby call all the youths in our churches to rise and take their stand with the LORD against all forms of wiles of the devil. Make your choice for God's glory, whether it be studies, friendships, entertainment, pursuits of life, etc. We pray that the articles in this Bible Witness issue will not only remind you of the battles you have to fight as a Christian, but also equip you for triumph for the pleasure and glory of our Great Saviour, Jesus Christ. O Christian youth, "that thou by them mightest war a good warfare" (1 Timothy 1:18)!

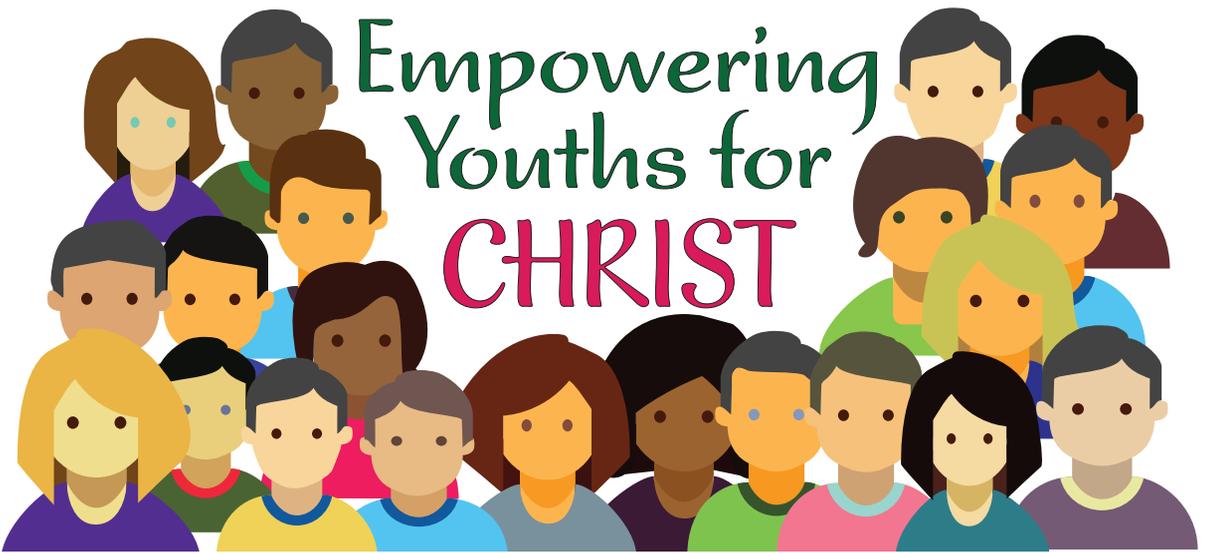
On a different note, I would like to implore our ardent readers for their patience and understanding as we strive our very best in the midst of many ministerial burdens to publish Bible Witness bimonthly. From time to time, being inundated by unexpected issues and problems, we were compelled to postpone the publication, such as the last issue (Nov-Dec 2016) of Bible Witness. We sincerely regret such disruptions. However, we are very glad that the Lord has helped us to publish the Bible Witness Calendar 2017 and "365 Daily Exhortations from God's Word". We are encouraged that many of our fervent friends have purchased the calendars and the devotional books, and distributed them among their friends and family members. Please contact us or the bookrooms if you need more copies of the devotional book.

We are also glad to inform you, with much thanksgiving to God, that Gethsemane B-P Church has obtained the in-principle approval from ACRA for "Gethsemane Bible Witness Limited", a Company Limited By Guarantee (CLG) so that suitable premises may be purchased for her various ministries, such as Bible Witness Media Ministry and The Gethsemane Care Ministry. We are fervently praying that the Lord will speedily provide one million dollars more to the Building Fund so that the much needed facility may be obtained without delay. We ask all our readers to earnestly pray and send in your generous love-gifts to the Building Fund of Gethsemane B-P Church. (You may write your cheque to "Gethsemane B-P Church", and indicate "Building Fund" at the back).

May the Lord's grace and peace be with you.

Heartily in Christ,
Prabhudas Koshy





Wherever Christian youths live, they face immense challenges to their faith and holiness. The odds stacked against them defy concise description. These are no more just matters arising from contending with their own fleshly lusts and enticements of friends, but also from the internet social media that (blatantly or subtly) seek to undermine their faith and Christian values. Be it their beliefs, speech, conduct, entertainment, activities or dressing, Christian youths are pressurised to follow the worldly trends. This is not helped by another dreadful influence from within the church – even from certain youths who profess to be saved but live a worldly life.

Young people, who (to a great extent) symbolise the “face” of our churches, ought to be the “frontline” of our churches’ spiritual army. They make a statement about their churches by the way they live, just as they do about their families. While ungodly, ill-mannered, lazy and lethargic

young people bring disgrace to their churches and families, those with godly, well-mannered, strong and enterprising children have much to rejoice. Truly, “As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate” (Psalm 127:4-5). The blessedness of well-guided youths is corroborated by certain young men of biblical times who have been endowed with great measure of divine strength and wisdom to win their spiritual battles – youthful Joseph, Samuel, David, Josiah, Daniel, Timothy (and many more) who stood up for the LORD in their times! May our youths today be like them in displaying unusual maturity and ability.

We are not without aid in guiding our youths to victory in the spiritual battles waged against them, for the church is provided with the best spiritual resources. Christian parents and church

leaders need to avail themselves of those divine provisions for the equipping and empowering of our youths to stand for Christ. The Word of God – the Bible – is the youths’ first and foremost resource. “I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one” (1 John 2:14b). The apostle John, in speaking of strong and triumphant youths of the church, is not referring to their physical strength, but their spiritual strength which comes through spiritual resources that God provides.

Unfortunately, many physically strong young men, being “wrestled to the ground” and chained by worldliness in the pit of sin, are taken captive by the devil. Christian youths need something far greater than natural vigour to fight their spiritual battles. As enlisted soldiers of Christ’s army, they need to “be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might” (Ephesians 6:10). The only way to be thus empowered in the might of God is to “be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 2:1) by yielding to God in devotion and ceaseless prayer.

The key to spiritual strength, as 1 John 2:14b says, is the Word of God that abides in Christian youths. The Word is not to be kept out of their lives, but always embraced, studied, believed and obeyed. When the Word remains in them, it makes them followers of Christ, for Jesus said, “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed” (John 8:31). They shall then be always empowered and

equipped to fight and win their battles. The Word of God makes the youths pure. “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word... Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psalm 119:9, 11). It establishes them in their spiritual walk and keeps them from faltering – “The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide” (Psalm 37:31). Furthermore, Word-abiding Christians will also achieve great things for the Lord through prayer – “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you” (John 15:7).

The victory of spiritually empowered Christian youths is guaranteed (cf. 1 John 2: 13b). With the strength and wisdom of the most Holy God, all the young men and women of God must fight against the devil and not make peace with him. “Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses” (1 Timothy 6:12). All those who are saved have already tasted the victory – “ye have overcome the wicked one.” In Christ we have victory, for He has defeated the devil on the cross. “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Hebrews 2:14). Indeed, they who have found their strength in the Lord and His Word will overcome all the ploys of the wicked one, and their final conquest is sure!



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CREATIONISTS amongst EVOLUTIONISTS!

We live in a world that is full of unbiblical philosophies and practices, which have pervaded and deeply influenced societal thinking and attitudes. Our firm convictions and commitment to holiness are often viewed with contempt, scorn and even hatred! Jesus, being aware of the hostility that we would face in the world, prayed for us: “I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” (John 17:14-16).

Our faith in the truth of God’s Word will not only be tested and challenged, but also detested. Faithful Christians, whether they are adults, youths or children, are all facing many difficulties in society, schools and workplaces, simply because of their adherence to the doctrine of Creation. The evolutionists would like to depict us as anti-scientific

and irrational people, and view us as intellectually narrow. In most academic settings, to believe in Creation is considered old-fashioned, not up-to-date or truly educated. The pressure to compromise is very intense. Indeed, the tension that Bible-believing Christians feel today is multifaceted and very severe.

This brings to mind Jesus’ forewarning: “Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves” (Matthew 10:16). Undeniably, the idea of atheistic evolution has crept into almost every academic discipline of our time and even our workplaces. Let us therefore be prepared to bear a bold and yet holy witness for the Lord. As Jesus has said, we have to be “wise as serpents, and harmless as doves”.

Now, if you are being taught evolution, it is not necessary that you walk out of the class immediately. You can listen attentively to what is being said, but with biblical discernment (cf. 1 John 4:1-6). If any so-called scientific dogma is against Scripture, you must

not believe or subscribe to what is being taught, but rather reject it. Study the issue further in the light of Scripture through research and interacting with knowledgeable Christians.

Of course, the matter of examinations in school is, admittedly, a sensitive issue. Although the exam is about how well you recall the content taught and not about whether you believe what has been taught, to have to reproduce what is being taught that is against one's biblical convictions can be rather troubling to one's conscience. It is like being pressured to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's golden image in order to escape the fiery furnace (cf. Daniel 3:14-15). This undue desire to be acceptable to the scholarly (but godless) world runs counter to the biblical injunction to "be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2a). Biblically speaking, it is strongly advised that if your conscience is stifled or severely affected in taking such courses, then prayerfully consider pursuing another course of study. This is surely one application of biblical separation.

"Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Corinthians 15:33). Christians should exercise godly wisdom at all times to discern and to keep away from projects and works that compel us to compromise our faith. Whether it is research or project work, we need to ensure that we keep away from promoting unbiblical theories and philosophies. Do not be partakers of unbiblical endeavours! It is very evident that many unregenerate teachers in

schools, colleges and universities attempt to brainwash Christians with their pseudo-scientific arguments into denying the truths of Scripture. Please know that this is one of the devil's subtle weapons against Christian youths. When such an effort is made against our biblical convictions, be "wise as serpents" and turn the situation into a witnessing event to explain to them, as well as other Christian friends, as to why the Bible is the truth and why they are in error. Never compromise our faith in the biblical truths! Though the non-believer may not be concerned with the accuracy of the biblical truths, whenever the opportunity presents itself, explain to him why his theory is scientifically flawed and that the evidence supports the biblical facts.

Yet at the same time, as Christians, we must conduct ourselves in an honourable manner at all times. We should be "harmless as doves" and not foolishly disrupt the class to protest the teaching of the lie. We must act wisely in a cordial and peaceful manner as much as possible (cf. Psalm 34:14; Romans 12:18), showing submission to authority (cf. Romans 13:7; 1 Peter 2:17). If we have to be involved in discussions or debates, we must present our points logically and clearly. With the wisdom that God will give us (cf. Psalm 119:98-99), we are to refute the fallacies of the atheistic evolution worldview by presenting scientific evidence correctly in support of biblical facts. But at all times, we must pray that we will be able to speak in meekness (cf. 1 Peter 3:15). Remember, heated arguments with non-believers who are set in their hearts against the Scriptures will achieve very little.

However, if a Christian educator needs to mention evolution as a part of the curriculum, he must not hesitate to point out the fallacies of that theory. He must not miss that excellent opportunity to be “salt of the earth” and “light of the world” (Matthew 5:13-16), by pointing out the problems of lies attached to that humanistic theory. Bible-believing Christians must not miss such an opportunity to refute atheistic education. Show to your students why evolutionistic claims are not facts but myths, and thus are downright lies to discredit the biblical account of Creation. The Christian educator, while explaining the evolutionistic theories, must not be afraid to point out their fallacies. In academia, it is acceptable (and, in fact, expected) practice to challenge theories with the use of substantiated arguments. Remember, nature abhors a vacuum. If left unchallenged, such misguided, unbiblical theories can take root and make significant inroads into impressionable minds. As “silent truth is no match for outspoken lies”, we do well not to surrender even an inch in this intellectual conflict!

Nonetheless, if in the event that we are forbidden to disprove widely-accepted though unsubstantiated theories, know for sure that there is a clear bias in that educational institution. Academic honesty is no longer upheld by the regulatory board. We then have to make a stand for God’s truth! Jesus said, “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and

despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24). God will make another way for us, and He promises to take care of us (cf. Proverbs 3:5-6). May we be strengthened by the sterling words of testimony uttered by the ancient saint, Joseph, to his brothers who thought they had got rid of him when they sold him into slavery decades ago – “But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive” (Genesis 50:20). God’s providence in turning his adversity into undreamt-of opportunity and consequent elevation is surely an encouragement to us to commit our ways unto the LORD and stay faithful to the truths of God’s Word.

Dear Christian youths, we need to rise and shine for the Lord in this dark world of unbelief and ungodliness. Ephesians 5:11 reminds us to “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.” We are further exhorted: “See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is” (Ephesians 5:15-17). As creationists studying, working and living in the midst of a vast majority of evolutionists, “among whom ye shine as lights in the world” (Philippians 2:15b), God’s will certainly involves us “holding forth the word of life” (Philippians 2:16a) with regards to our origins!

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“Ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk

therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.” *Jeremiah 6:16*



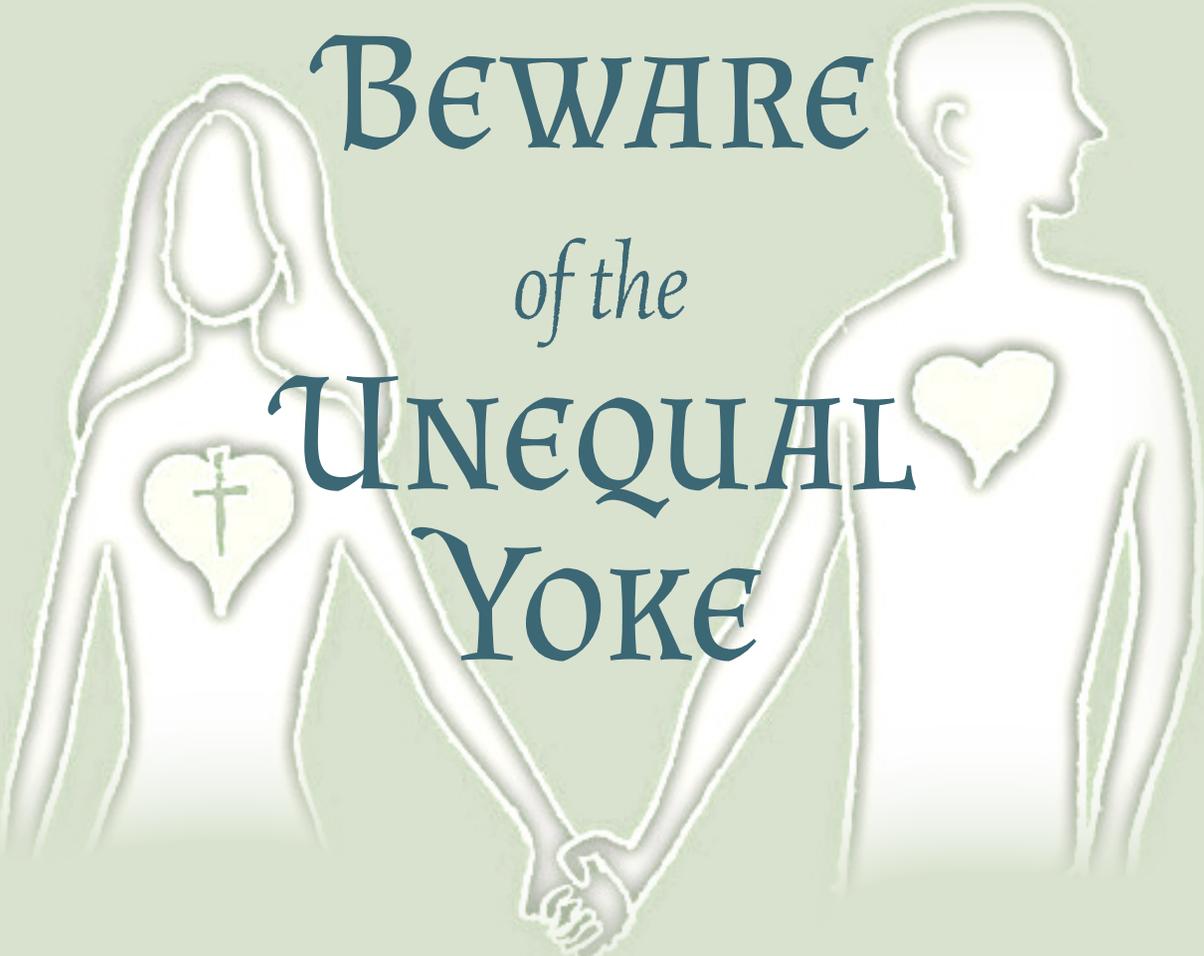
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BEWARE *of the* UNEQUAL YOKE

All Christian youths must be warned about the dangers of the dating practices that are prevalent in our society. It is generally a relationship whereby two unmarried individuals of opposite genders pursue a close friendship purely based on their carnal senses. The outcome is flirting and fornication, and most of such relationships do not culminate in marriage either. Christians should not follow this worldly and sensual kind of dating that is so widely accepted as the norm in our society.

Such dating habits in schools and colleges lure many Christian youths into intimate relationships with unbelievers.

This is creating a serious spiritual situation in Christian homes and churches. Increasingly, Christian youths allow themselves to be entangled and become “trapped” in the sticky web of carnal relationships, eventually betraying spiritual truths, holiness and even the Lord Jesus Christ Himself whom they once professed. Tragedy, O utter tragedy! These are souls being “drugged” and dragged into the darkness of wild, sinful passions!

Dear youths, do not casually regard or view with nonchalance the evil of this unguarded pursuit of the world’s dirty game called “dating”. If this writer would not warn you of its dangers, he will have

to bear the awful guilt of not telling you of the divine warning against cultivating intimacy with the unbelievers. After reading what has been written in this article, if you would still flirt with the worldly ones, then this writer cannot be held responsible for your choice of the worst for yourself.

Please read carefully and take heed of what God's Word teaches you:

Christians are commanded not to be in any kind of close relationship with unbelievers

This prohibition is most succinctly expressed in 2 Corinthians 6:14 – “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers”. The imagery used here is that of two incompatible animals being put together under the same yoke. They would be such a mismatch! For such a pair to work together for long is just not possible, as they are of different natures and temperaments. It is not only unwise conduct, but also a sin for a Christian to choose an unbeliever to be a life-partner.

The apostle Paul further exposes the foolishness of such an “unequal yoke” through a series of rhetorical questions: “for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?” (2 Corinthians 6:14b-15).

Spiritual wholesomeness is not at all possible in a marriage between a Christian and a non-Christian. There will be no harmony whatsoever, but the

worst conflicts of eternal proportions! The disparity and conflict between a Christian and a non-Christian will be just as between light and darkness, between Christ and false gods like Belial. Certainly, there will be no blessing of the Lord upon such an unbiblical union.

Christians will be tarnished and corrupted by such relationships

In 1 Corinthians 15:33, believers are warned – “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.” The term “evil communications” means the associating with evil or ungodly individuals. You deceive yourself when you choose to cultivate a close relationship with an unbeliever. Self-deception is the worst kind of deception, because you eventually betray yourself.

When you choose an unbeliever, you will have deceived yourself to accept the worst choice you could have made. An unbiblical alliance is an unholy alliance. It will prompt you to ungodly conduct. Corruption is a gradual change. Silently but surely, evil communications corrupt good manners. All the good manners that you have learned as a Christian child will eventually be lost.

There is no safety in the company of those who have no fear of God. They have no spiritual and moral principles to abide by. They are openly immoral or unprincipled. Such association is dangerous to a true Christian. To have one who is destitute of faith and holiness to be your trusted friend is to endanger yourself with all sorts of ungodly evils.

Christians will not have the power and blessings of Christian faith and virtues

A couple's faith and commitment to Jesus Christ is vital to overcoming challenges and hindrances to a blessed marriage life. Christian husbands are commanded to love their wives like Christ – "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it" (Ephesians 5:25). A man, who has not known the love of Christ, certainly will not know how to love sacrificially, genuinely, and purifyingly as Christ loves. A woman, who has not known how to be submissive to Christ, will not know the joy and blessings of submissive conduct.

Mutual prayers and biblical exhortations will not grace their family life. Worshipping and praying together as a family will also not be possible. Christ will not be the Head of their home! Without spiritual unity with Christ, there can be no ultimate marital unity marked by Christ-like love, submission and oneness. Marital life is not just a sexual union. A proper relationship with God is indescribably more important than sexual intimacy. Though there is physical pleasure and satisfaction in family life, it will not at all be joyful and successful without dependence on and obedience to God.

"Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it" (Psalm 127:1). Consider the remarkable description of a godly home in Psalm 128:1-3 – "Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways. For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands:

happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee. Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table." Just imagine the precious spiritual heritage and the wonderful blessings you would be forfeiting when you choose an ungodly relationship!

Christians will be without spiritual aid and examples for the nurture of their children

Trying to bring up children in a disobedient relationship, where one of the parents is a non-Christian, is like swimming against a strong current. Without leadership or support of the other parent, it will be very difficult – to say the least – to nurture a child in godly ways. In fact, in such a family environment, there will be constant opposition to wholehearted commitment to the biblical upbringing of the children. The conflict of faith among the parents will not only be confusing but also disheartening to the children.

Conclusion

If you are single, the most obvious thing to do, in the light of the above biblical counsels, is to avoid any intimate companionship with an unbeliever. Do not begin an ungodly relationship with an unbeliever. If you are dating a non-Christian, you should leave that relationship at once, for the Bible admonishes unequivocally in 2 Corinthians 6:17 – "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you".

Christians' Response to *Homosexuality*

The redefinition of marriage, through the increasing influence of the homosexuals, is posing a vicious challenge to Christians, their families, and the church. Our society is under great pressure from the homosexuals to accept their same-sex marriage as an alternative lifestyle. Our youths and children are most vulnerable as they are increasingly pressured not only to act acceptably towards the homosexuals' behaviour, but also to support them.

While I was in Australia as an invited speaker for a church camp in July 2015, I was told by some high school and college students that they were pressured by their schoolmates to show support for the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) movement by wearing rainbow colours. A few of them had to endure angry and rude responses from their friends when they rejected their demand. Undeniably, in recent years, the rainbow colours have become universally recognised as a symbol of LGBT pride and identity. The "rainbow" flag has found wide application in all manner of products, such as jewellery, clothing and other personal items. Indeed, the "rainbow" flag colours

are regularly used as a show of LGBT identity and solidarity.

How our youths and children stand up to such relentless pressure is a matter of grave concern. They are studying and growing up in a socio-political environment constantly addressed by educationists, columnists, publishers, analysts and politicians who are sympathetic towards the LGBT agenda. There is a fast-changing society, which expects them to be supporters and even participants of the carnal pursuits of a generation that has not only completely rejected the traditional moral norms, but also disregarded biblical virtues and prohibitions. More than ever before, Christian parents need to know what biblical advice they should give to their youths and children.

As a people of God, we must follow divine counsels for our conduct in a world of sin. When changes occur in the culture of our society, especially when they lead to rampant moral declension, Christians are admonished to swim against the tide and not be swept away with the world. We are expected to stand steadfastly with the biblical truths and instructions, to engage zealously in preaching God's Word, as well

as to patiently and lovingly work for the salvation of souls. “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry” (2 Timothy 4:3-5).

We must not approve or support homosexuality, for God has condemned it as a sin

God has opposed homosexuality in every age – whether it is in the days of the patriarchs (Genesis 19:1-28), in the Law of Moses (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13), in the days of Israel’s Babylonian exile (Ezekiel 16:46-50), in the Apostolic era (Romans 1:18-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10), or in the last days (Luke 17:26-30; 2 Timothy 3:1-5).

LGBT advocates have been promoting their carnal agenda to Christian youths and children by advocating their warped interpretations of passages in Scripture that address homosexuality. Their pro-gay arguments from the Bible are not only unsound, but also completely irrational! They quash God’s design for a proper human matrimonial relationship, which is the complementary relationship between a man and a woman (Genesis 2:18-25; Matthew 19:4-6; Ephesians 5:22-33). We should not be intimidated by the wilfully misguided homosexual advocates and their vain reasoning, which is utterly contrary to the Scriptures!

Neither should we go along with those who refuse to acknowledge the sinfulness of homosexuality. The Bible repeatedly warns us against being supportive of conduct that is condemned by God as sin. “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (Isaiah 5:20). To call evil good is to mislead, nay to deliberately “usher”, people to the wrath of God. Not warning people of their wickedness is a woeful attitude that God will judge. Ezekiel 3:18 gravely declares, “When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.”

Christians must not compromise what the Bible says about homosexuality. Even though we want to show charity and compassion to those who are lost in sin, such as homosexuality, we must not do it without loving the Lord and His truth. To express our love for man at the expense of righteousness and devotion to God would make us promoters of sin. Homosexuals and all sinners, who stand defiantly against the will of our Creator and Redeemer, are worthy of eternal damnation in hell, according to the Scriptures (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21; Revelation 21:8). So if we truly want to show compassion and charity to homosexuals, let us in no uncertain terms warn them of God’s wrath, that they may turn from their wicked ways. The judgment of unrepentant homosexuals, as is the case

with all unrepentant sinners, is absolutely certain. To deny this truth of God's Word is to deceive those who are perishing!

We must actively and lovingly preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to such sinners

Though a great number would refuse to repent from the sin of homosexuality, we are reminded in the Scriptures that we should preach the Gospel of God's saving love to sinners, no matter how wretched their sins may be.

In my pastoral ministry, I have come across several sad and suffering homosexuals. Their lives have been wrecked by this sin. They were not at all looking "gay". (The word "gay" has always meant "happy", until it has been "hijacked" to describe the homosexuals!) They were consumed by "vile affections" (Romans 1:26). Their lust had caused them to abuse their physical bodies (as the use of drugs and alcohol are also common among the gays in their revelry), and ruined their relationships with parents, spouses, etc. Some of them are still in great suffering of soul and body, craving for liberty from this accursed bondage of sin and God's wrath (cf. Romans 1:24, 26, 28).

The good news is: God welcomes even homosexuals to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ in order to enter His joyous and blessed kingdom. There were former homosexuals in the Corinthian church (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:9-10); concerning them, Paul has said, "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:11). Even in our church, there are former homosexuals who have repented and turned to the Lord Jesus for salvation. They now live their renewed life with great joy and peace.

Therefore, let us be ever willing to preach the Gospel to those who are lost in the sin of homosexuality. Proper Gospel presentation to sinners requires us to tell of God's wrath against their sins – even homosexuality – and point them to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for forgiveness and deliverance from sin. Preach the truth of the Gospel faithfully and zealously, "in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth" (2 Timothy 2:25).

**God has opposed homosexuality in every age - whether
it is in the days of the patriarchs ... in the Law of Moses
... in the days of Israel's Babylonian exile ... in the
Apostolic era ... or in the last days ...**

Dating

an ungodly
romance



Christian youths – even young teens – have been following the worldly practice of dating, which is thoroughly unbiblical. Many seem to be totally unaware of the dangers of “dating”. Now, what is biblically wrong about modern “dating”?

Generally, what is called “dating” today refers to the maintaining of a romantic relationship with someone of the opposite sex. To an increasing number of youngsters in our society, dating is simply “having fun” with someone of the opposite sex, with no strings attached. In Singapore, dating is becoming common even among young teens in secondary schools. The dating activities of youths in tertiary educational institutions frequently involve booze, drugs, going on holidays together, sexual intercourse, etc.

Dating is largely patterned after the lifestyles portrayed by the entertainment world in movies and suchlike. It is a relationship based on sensual feelings and fantasies. In dating, friendships are struck up through fleshly attractions, such as good looks, a cute smile, an amorous voice, sensual appearance, flirtatious speech and behaviour, fashionable and trendy attire, a groovy car, etc.

Even Christian youths begin dating on the basis of such sensual appeal. Christian couples, who date much like the world, fall into many spiritual, moral, emotional and social problems. Dating opens the youths to temptations of sin. Improper sexual conduct, sin and a damaged testimony often plague such youths. That is

not all. More troubles and evils will ensue – disappointment, depression, guilt, shame, quarrels, resentment, vengeful spirit, etc. Furthermore, the relationships with parents and friends will likely also become tumultuous.

When a dating couple agrees not to date others and stay together for an extended period of time, they are considered as “going steady”. They become attached romantically, emotionally, and often sexually. They often behave like a married couple. However, it does not have the commitment of a faithful marriage relationship. Their relationship is generally unstable and unpredictable. It is a phoney, sensual liaison – a counterfeit marriage relationship! Then when the boy or girl gets bored with the relationship, or becomes suspicious of the other, or catches the other cheating, or simply decides that someone else is more desirable, the relationship is ended.

Unsurprisingly, dating is so often a temporary, flirtatious rather than a permanent, godly relationship. Many of those dating relationships do not end up in marriage. The resultant break-up often involves heartache, anger and many negative emotional consequences. Although some “succeed” only after going through several dating experiences, they often manifest the distasteful experiences of distrust, suspicion, anxiety, etc. which have been engendered by their string of failed dating relationships. It is not uncommon that such marriages end up on the rocks.

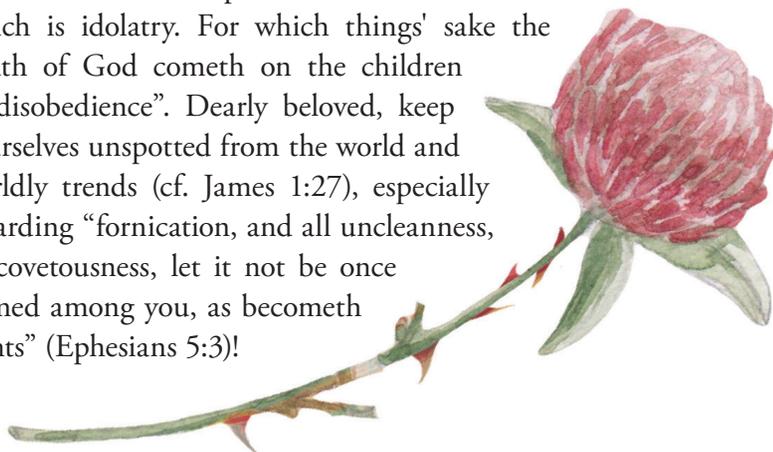
Dating, which is founded on worldly principles, promotes fornication and destructive behaviour among young people. Hedonistic attitudes maintained in such relationships, which drive one to be obsessed with deriving as much pleasure out of life as possible, engender disrespect and ill-treatment, as well as desensitise moral discernment. The resultant marriages are much like houses built upon sand, ready to collapse.



The apostle Paul viewed very disapprovingly those who conducted themselves in an impure and sensual manner. He warned the Corinthian church, “And lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and that I shall bewail many which have sinned

already, and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed” (2 Corinthians 12:21). This shows that in the Corinthian church, some members had been living sensually. Paul was appalled and mindful that such members who conducted themselves in a sensual and worldly manner would bring shame to the Lord and His church. It is utterly humiliating to a godly congregation when some members live in worldliness and in fornication. Paul spared no effort in warning against the destructive effects of fornication: “Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand” (1 Corinthians 10:8); “Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body” (1 Corinthians 6:18). Do realise that a life of fornication not only destroys relationships, but also one’s emotional, mental and physical health!

Dear youths, do not engage in the worldly kind of dating. Let every young Christian know that “this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication” (1 Thessalonians 4:3). God’s Word clearly admonishes us in Colossians 3:5-6 to “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry. For which things’ sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience”. Dearly beloved, keep yourselves unspotted from the world and worldly trends (cf. James 1:27), especially regarding “fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints” (Ephesians 5:3)!



BEWARE

of PROFANE



Does it matter what sort of music a Christian youth listens to?

A large number of Christians of our time have no qualms about listening to and singing worldly music. After singing hymns of faith and spiritual songs on Sunday in church, they would spend the rest of the week listening to ‘R-rated’ music (and even watching ‘R-rated’ movies). They would easily learn by heart the lyrics of those profane songs. Needless to say, their minds become saturated with the sounds (and also the associated visual images) of the filthy themes of those songs.

Let us not be foolish to embrace the secular music of our time. It is highly pernicious and certainly perilous to the Christians’ pursuit of holiness. Just think of the undue influence and far-reaching impact of the “Beatles” of yesteryear. This highly popular music band had helped to bring up a generation around the world that was characterised by loose morals, drug abuse and blasphemous beliefs / conduct. The members of this band themselves were fornicators, drug abusers and profane people. And yet, we hear of Christian musicians declaring themselves to be ‘Beatle fans’! This

is incongruent and contradictory to godly Christian testimony.

Today's famous secular musicians are not any better than them. If anything, they are coarser in their songs and conduct. The worldly musicians and their music have been one of the greatest contributors to the moral erosion of our society. Not only do they promote sexual promiscuity and violence, they also sneer and belittle godliness and purity!

The irony of it all is: why would Christians, who are called unto holiness, give themselves to such ungodly entertainment? Are not Christians taught in the Scriptures to have no association with people and activities that would stain their minds and instil ungodliness? Unquestionably, every singer and song that glorifies anything which is opposed by God should be utterly rejected by Christians. The apostle Paul warned the Ephesian Christians to "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Ephesians 5:11). Likewise, Christians are admonished in no uncertain terms in 2 Corinthians 6:14 – "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?"

Why are Christians warned against associating themselves with those things that are forbidden in the

Bible? It is important to realise that the things we watch and listen to, do affect us – just as we are affected by the people whom we have associations with. "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed" (Proverbs 13:20). When it comes to our sanctification, it is an absolute necessity that we keep ourselves away from anyone or anything which corrupts us. "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Corinthians 15:33; cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:3).

This is particularly true when it comes to our struggles with sin. The perverse things we watch and hear will entangle us in sins that easily beset us. For instance, if a Christian who is struggling with the lust of the flesh gives himself to watching obscene movies or listening to sensual songs, he will be led to temptations of lust whenever those scenes and songs come to his mind. If a man struggles with swearing, and yet closely associates himself with vulgar people (or listens to songs with lots of swearing), it will be harder for him to have purity of thoughts and words. So, give diligence to remember Christ's words: "And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell" (Matthew 5:29). In fact, we are

told to go one step further, even to “abstain from all appearance of evil” (1 Thessalonians 5:22).

We also do well to be mindful of the apostle Paul’s earnest beseeching to “mark them which cause ... offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them” (Romans 16:17). Withdraw from so-called Christians who try to influence us with the wicked entertainment of this sinful world, taking particular heed of the warning in 2 Timothy 3:1-5 – “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.”

Rather than dwelling on that which defile our minds, let us give ourselves to pursuits and preoccupations that will influence us unto purity and godliness. “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Philippians 4:8). The Christian youth who guards his heart and mind well, constantly feeding his mind with godly and biblical stuff, will be well steered towards spiritual victory. Truly, “When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul; Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee ... from the way of the evil” (Proverbs 2:10-12a).

It is important to realise that the things we watch and listen to, do affect us - just as we are affected by the people whom we have associations with ... “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners” (1 Corinthians 15:33; cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:3).

was introduced to the rest of the world in the mid-1990's. Its new version, Pokemon Go, is an augmented reality game, whereby players would chase Pokemon cartoon characters in real world environments using their smartphone camera and a phone app. There are biblical reasons why we should dissociate ourselves from this fantasy game.

Firstly, it is not all that innocuous as it is made out to be. Christian writers have warned about its troubling similarities with some occult practices. (By the way, "Pokemon" is short for "pocket monster"!) Its hundreds of cartoon characters depict demonic creatures. One such creature even displays fictitious power to curse Pokemon players, thus inculcating in children that cursing through magic is alright. Though promoted as an amusement, in reality, it is a promoter of occultism, including clairvoyance, summoning of spirits, practice of mind-control, dabbling in magical arts, etc. The more immersed you are in the game, the more severe the spiritual maladies!

Secondly, there is much evidence that it affects the mood and behaviour of those given to it. Though there is

no official report of Pokemon players becoming demon-possessed or witchcraft practitioners, it can easily lead to these evil outcomes. Moreover, there have been media reports highlighting some thoughtless, dangerous behaviour of these gamers – even to the extent of causing near-road accidents and posing not a few physical dangers to others and themselves!

There is nothing wrong with having some fun using our imagination. But when it involves characters and activities of occult themes, our minds will be gradually influenced to ignore Scripture's prohibitions and be open to spiritual dangers. Due to its subtle power to negatively affect our behaviour and spiritual integrity, our children and youths must be dissuaded from playing Pokemon Go. What we need is not fun with the occult, but godly discipline that turns us from worldliness to Christ. Brethren, avoid all things that are not spiritually expedient. Indeed, "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any" (1 Corinthians 6:12)!

We should be cautious to avoid being enslaved by anything, even if it seems lawful. This is particularly true when it comes to our recreational pursuits.

AVOID SEXUAL SINS

Blatant promotion of immodesty and public display of carnal affection are increasing day by day. In these days, pornographic images and movies are easily available to all, and even children view them with ease. Sexually explicit music is also listened to as entertainment. Many talk about extramarital sexual activity as normal. Sexual immorality is like an unstoppable plague of our time, corrupting and destroying individuals and families!

Here are some very appalling reports about the sexual decadence that appeared in our country's leading newspaper, The Straits Times, in recent years:

"One in two teenagers here has watched or read sexually explicit materials, a poll has found, with some as young as seven when they were first exposed to it. And one in three admitted viewing pornography in the past year, whether intentional or accidental. The first large-scale survey here to examine children's exposure to pornography, which polled 836 students aged 13 to 15, was conducted by Touch Cyber Wellness, the main agency that gives online safety talks in schools here. Experts say the findings are worrying as such content affects young people's attitudes and behaviour towards love and sex, and may lead to sexual crimes."

(See more at: <http://www.straitstimes.com/news/singapore/more-singapore-stories/story/half-teens-singapore-exposed-pornographysurvey-20140906#sthash.vEtap2VS.dpuf>)

"Underage sex on the rise in Singapore, say social workers: More teenagers are becoming sexually active – with an increasing number thinking that it is normal for them to have sex, social workers say. Figures from the State Courts show a steady growth in the number of cases of sex with a minor

– that is, sex with a girl under 16, which is a crime even if she gives her consent. Last year, there were 76 cases of the offence, down from 89 in 2013, but still an increase from 63 in 2012 and 36 in 2011...

Social workers told The Straits Times that young people are typically referred to counsellors for behavioural problems but, during counselling, they sometimes open up on their sexual experiences. Ms Lena Teo, assistant director of counselling at the Children-at-Risk Empowerment Association (Care Singapore), said: "I've seen roughly 20 per cent more underage sex cases over the years. Nowadays, teens are more tech-savvy and some lack parental control. They are more experimental because of curiosity and hormones raging at that age. It could also be peer pressure."

(A report by Lim Yi Han, published on Feb 9, 2015, 6.45 am SGT – <http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/underage-sex-on-the-rise-in-singapore-say-social-workers>)

"The number of teenage girls getting pregnant in the past decade has dropped massively, and it is not because fewer of them are having sex. Instead, social workers say, it is because today's teens are more savvy about using contraceptives. There were 359 babies born to girls aged 19 and under last year. This is the lowest in 25 years, going by checks of the Report on Registration of Births and Deaths published annually by the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority."

(A report published on Feb 22, 2016, 5.00 am SGT – <http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/big-drop-in-number-of-teen-pregnancies>)

With such reports, we can easily discern the severity of the moral decay of our society. You do not have to be an expert to know how accepting our society is when it comes to promiscuity, both in thought and deed.

However, the Bible teaches us the avoidance of sexual sins. There is nothing better than prevention when it comes to sexual sins. If sexual sins occur, there can be severe consequences of various kinds. Most certainly, God will forgive those who repent of such sins. Nonetheless, the consequences of such an action can linger on for a long time. So, the best is prevention.

One of the sad things about those who commit sexual sins is that they often live in serious denial about their sin. They believe that they will never get caught and somehow, life will continue to move towards a happily-ever-after ending. But let us take heed of the age-old warning: "Be sure your sin will find you out" (Numbers 32:23).

The Scriptures Prescribe Prevention

Our attitude towards scriptural admonitions and counsel should not be “when all else fail, read instructions”. Many consumers try to assemble or operate things that they buy even without taking a look at the manufacturer’s instruction manual. They only refer to it when they are in trouble. If we take such an attitude towards the biblical instructions given to us by our Great Creator, we will not be able to prevent many tragic and disastrous events. This is especially so with regard to sexual sins.

If you have carefully read the Scriptures to find out what God says about sexual sins, you will certainly realise that nowhere does He counsel us to try it once and then think of how to get out of it. On the contrary, the Scriptures repeatedly warn us not to engage in any sexual conduct outside marriage and call for total abstinence from sexual activities outside marriage:

“Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body” (1 Corinthians 6:13).

“Flee fornication” (1 Corinthians 6:18).

“Flee also youthful lusts” (2 Timothy 2:22).

“... abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, ...” (Acts 15:20).

“But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints” (Ephesians 5:3).

“Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, ...” (Colossians 3:5).

“For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication” (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

“Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge” (Hebrews 13:4).

“Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul” (1 Peter 2:11).

“For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries” (1 Peter 4:3).

“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, ... shall inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; cf. Galatians 5:19-21).

The Scriptures’ clear message to the unmarried is: “Wait till you get married”; to the married, it is equally clear: “Don’t - with anyone other than your spouse.”

Scriptural Reasons for Avoidance

Sexual sins distort the purpose of God concerning Christians' bodies

1 Corinthians 6:13-14 says, "Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body. And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power." Believers' bodies, according to God's design and purposes, are not just for biological functions. They are also for the Lord (cf. verse 13). Verse 14 reminds us that our bodies are not only for the service of the Lord in this world, but also for the heaven to come. God will raise our bodies one day as glorified or heavenly bodies to serve Him for ever and ever in that sinless world. Since our bodies are for the Lord forever, we must not pervert their purposes by polluting them with sexual sins.

Sexual sins desecrate the spiritual body of the Lord

1 Corinthians 6:15-17 records, "Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit." Believers' bodies are not only for the Lord's service, but are also inseparable members of His own body. Romans 12:5 says, "So we, being many, are one body in Christ." So, for Christians to commit sexual sins is to use a part of Christ's body to commit immorality. Because sexual relationship involves a union, the Christian who commits adultery or fornication joins Christ's members with the members of a harlot. What an abomination to corrupt the Lord's holiness by such an association!

Sexual sins damage Christians' bodies

1 Corinthians 6:18 warns, "Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body." Paul is saying that sexual sins are more destructive to the body than any other sin. From the experiences of many, we know that sexual immorality not only brings horrendous diseases, but also can drive one to depression and even suicide.

Sexual sins desecrate the temple of the Spirit

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 admonishes, "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." The bodies of Christians have been made the temple of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit rejoices in indwelling and sanctifying our bodies to be a glorious temple for Him, but sexual sins will instead desecrate the bodies that are consecrated. Sexual sins, in other words, are sacrilegious!

Scriptural Advice for Prevention

Refrain from flirtatious comments and gestures

Godly wisdom advises us to be kept and delivered “from the strange woman, even from the stranger which flattereth with her words; which forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God. For her house inclineth unto death, and her paths unto the dead” (Proverbs 2:16-18; cf. Proverbs 7:5, 21), as well as “from the evil woman, from the flattery of the tongue of a strange woman. Lust not after her beauty in thine heart; neither let her take thee with her eyelids” (Proverbs 6:24-25).

Guard your eyes and ways

Scripture, in no uncertain terms, warns us in Proverbs 7:6-21 of the ruin that befalls an unrestrained man who allows himself to sink deep into sexual immorality. This description is given that we may avoid such situation at all costs.

“For at the window of my house I looked through my casement, and beheld among the simple ones, I discerned among the youths, a young man void of understanding, passing through the street near her corner; and he went the way to her house, in the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night: and, behold, there met him a woman with the attire of an harlot, and subtil of heart. (She is loud and stubborn; her feet abide not in her house: Now is she without, now in the streets, and lieth in wait at every corner.) So she caught him, and kissed him, and with an impudent face said unto him, I have peace offerings with me; this day have I payed my vows. Therefore came I forth to meet thee, diligently to seek thy face, and I have found thee. I have decked my bed with coverings of tapestry, with carved works, with fine linen of Egypt. I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. Come, let us take our fill of love until the morning: let us solace ourselves with loves. For the goodman is not at home, he is gone a long journey: he hath taken a bag of money with him, and will come home at the day appointed. With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forced him.”

Avoid places of temptation. During courtship, young couples must not be alone in quiet places whereby they may be tempted to sin. Married people must be deliberate in not developing close or intimate friendships with people of the opposite sex.

Remind yourself of severe consequences

Scripture further warns us in Proverbs 7:22-23 of the serious consequences of sexual sins. “He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks; till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life.” Finally, do not ever forget Scripture’s unequivocal warning against the unrepentant of eternal judgment (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21)!

Bible Trivia - Exodus 28 & 29

Sarah Yong

A) Read Exodus 28:1-21, then draw a line to connect each boxed statement to the correct numerical answer.

i) Aaron and his ___ sons were chosen to serve as priests. (v. 1)	ii) The priestly garments consisted of ___ items. (v. 4)	iii) Both ephod and breastplate would be made of fine linen with ___ colours. (vv. 6, 15)	iv) A total of ___ names were to be engraved on the onyx stones. (v. 10)
v) The breastplate would have precious stones set in gold, arranged in ___ rows. (vv. 17-20)	(6)	(4)	(12)
			vi) These stones would bear the names of the ___ tribes of Israel. (v. 21)

B) The priests in the Old Testament had to offer various kinds of sacrifices unto the LORD for the forgiveness of their own and the people's sins. Find out what these are by reading the selected references from Exodus 29.

- S ___ offering (v. 14) B ___ offering (v. 18) W ___ offering (v. 24)
 H ___ offering (v. 28) D ___ offering (v. 40) M ___ offering (v. 41)

C) Read the given references in the book of Hebrews and then fill in the blanks in the table showing the comparison between man's and Christ's priesthood.

Earthly Priesthood	Priestly Ministry of Christ
1) It continued until the death of the priest. (7:23)	1) It continues forever as Christ has an u____ p____ (7:24), and e____ l____ to make intercession for His people. (7:25)
2) The priest served God in the physical tabernacle. (9:6)	2) Christ is an high priest of good things to come, by a g____ and more p____ tabernacle, not made with hands. (9:11)
3) The high priest had to bring animal blood as an offering for himself, and for the errors of the people. (9:7)	3) Christ entered in once into the holy place, having obtained e____ r____ for us, not by the blood of goats and calves, but by his o____ b____. (9:12)
4) The priest had to daily minister and offer the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. (10:11)	4) Christ offered o____ sacrifice for sins f____ e____, then sat down at the right hand of God. (10:12)

ANSWERS TO BIBLE TRIVIA - EXODUS 27 (VOLUME 16, ISSUE 4, P. 27)

- 1) U; 2) R; 3) N; 4) T; 5) F; 6) F;
 7) E; 8) R; 9) I; 10) N; 11) G.

Altar of BURNT OFFERING

MARTIN LUTHER

(1483 – 1546) - PART II

"The just shall live by faith"

(Retold from "Martin Luther" written by Mike Fearon, published by Bethany House Publishers; "Martin Luther: The German Monk Who Changed the Church" written by Ben Alex, published by OM Literature; and "Trial and Triumph: Stories from Church History" written by Richard M. Hannula, published by Canon Press)

Retold by Jenny Lok

Illustrated by Andronicus Koshy

At an early age, Luther was taught that when a person dies, he would enter purgatory (a place between heaven and hell), where much torment awaits him. One can, however, release such a person from purgatory by paying money to the Roman church and praying to the saints. Doing good works is a way to gain salvation, including confession of sins to a priest and worship of sacraments (like the bread and wine partaken during Holy Communion). Luther held firmly to the traditional authority of the Roman church, even though the world outside was changing and the power of the church was challenged by emperors, princes and nobles at that time. He was also too busy with his studies to care about these and other new developments. Upon his completion of the Master of Arts degree (within two years) on 7 January 1505, his father bought him a new copy of "Corpus Juris", a large heavy book meant for his subsequent law studies. He had hoped that Luther would do him proud by being an outstanding lawyer in the near future.

In July that year, after spending ten days with his family, Luther was travelling back to Erfurt University when storm clouds gathered in the distance. Soon, he felt the first drops of rain and suddenly, the sky opened its floodgates and a torrential downpour ensued. In a moment of panic, he sought shelter beneath an elm tree. Before he could catch his breath, a flash of lightning lit up the sky momentarily before hitting the tree



Indulgences presented to the Roman Catholic Church



and splitting it just above him. The impact also caused him to be knocked down to the muddy ground. With the wind howling and the twisted tree branches shaking, Luther was terrified, thinking that God must be angry with him and hellfire was awaiting him. In his desperation, he remembered that his parents had taught him to pray to St Anne, the patroness of miners. So without hesitation, he pleaded: "St Anne, save me! ...I will give up my studies... I will do anything... I will even become a monk!"

Back at Erfurt, Luther's friends were shocked by his decision to be a monk. Though Luther was a little regretful over his hasty decision, he felt that he had to keep his promise. So as a farewell gesture, he invited his friends to a meal and said to them in jest, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow I become a monk!" On 17 July 1505, Luther entered the monastery of the Augustinian order, a religious community known for its strict monastic life. Father Lang was the prior (person in charge of the monks) and Von Staupitz, the head of the order. Upon being received as a novice, Luther had to have a circle of hair shaved off from the crown of his head (a monk's typical tonsure). Next, he had to put on a hair shirt and simple robe of a monk in place of his fine student's clothing. He also had to promise to keep his "vows of poverty, chastity (not to be married), and obedience". Life as a monk was truly tough and demanding. He stayed alone in a small cell with only a table, a chair and a straw bed.

His daily activities included begging in the streets, performing cleaning, sweeping and polishing tasks, praying seven times a day, and memorising all the rules which governed a monk's behaviour in the monastery.

Although Luther spent many hours in prayer and confessed his sins to Father Lang, he did not enjoy any peace at all. He was still troubled by the thought that the angry God would never forgive him. To chastise himself for his sins, he once whipped himself so hard that his entire back bled and he lost consciousness due to the intense self-inflicted pain. In no time, Luther lost much weight due to a lack of appetite and constant fasting. His emaciated appearance and sad countenance soon caught Staupitz's attention. The compassionate, elderly Staupitz decided to have a word with Luther, who confessed to him his frustrations of not being able to live a holy life and his great fear of an angry God: "I kept making vows and promises, but I never seemed able to keep them... I'm more frightened of Jesus than I ever was of my teachers or my parents". In reply, the vicar-general told him, "Remember, Brother Martin, that when you have done wrong, think not on how much you must pay to satisfy your guilt, but how much Jesus paid for you..." Luther was comforted by Staupitz's words of encouragement.

Soon after, Luther was selected to be trained as a priest. Once again, he was back to Erfurt University, this time to study theology instead of law. Eventually, he obtained the Bachelor of Arts degree on the Bible and was formally ordained as a priest at 23 years of age on 3 April 1507. Days after that, he performed his first priestly duties at the church altar. In the midst of the congregation was his father, who was obviously very unhappy about his decision to be a monk. When Luther tried to greet him later, he was upset and burst out, "...wasn't (it) the devil you met in that thunderstorm, that drive you to your vow!" With that, Luther's doubts and fears about being carried away by the devil came back to haunt him. Father Lang tried hard to convince him that God can pardon his sins, and then told him, "You're going to Wittenberg to be a teacher, and that's the end of it." However, Luther's struggle to



find peace with God did not end with his appointment to teach at Wittenberg, about 70 miles northeast of Erfurt.

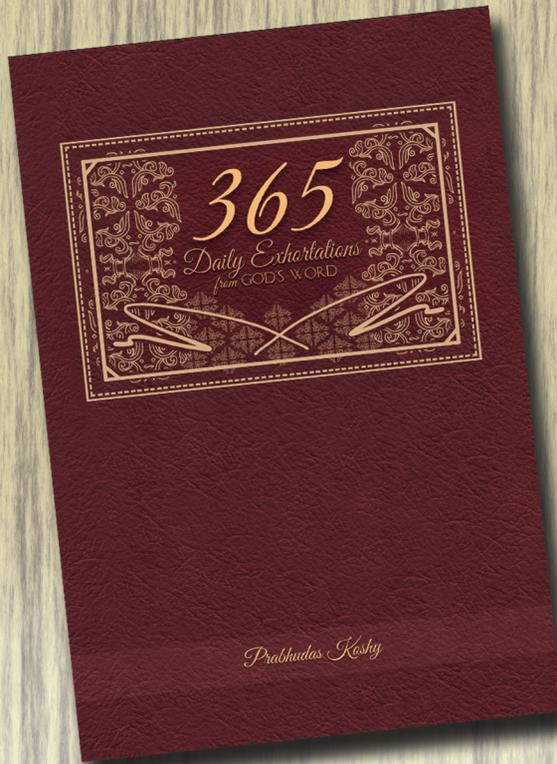
Wittenberg, the main city of Saxony, was ruled by Prince Frederick. At Wittenberg, Luther was told to preach in a "tiny wooden church", an old, run-down building that had to be propped up by timber and he humbly accepted it. His strong and direct teaching attracted large crowds of people and soon the "little barn-like church" was bursting at the seams! Under the guidance and encouragement of the vicar-general Staupitz, Luther began to grow in his spiritual life and service. However, Luther did not share Staupitz's love for relics or sacred objects (e.g. pieces of bones, cloth, teeth and hair of some dead saints). To Luther, "surely all these so-called relics must be fakes" and he had doubts about getting near to God through the worship of such "sacred" objects.

In 1510, Martin Luther was sent by Staupitz on one occasion to Rome to seek help from the pope to settle a certain dispute within the Augustinian order in Germany. Luther was really excited about visiting Rome, which he regarded as a holy city. To his utter disappointment, Luther soon realised that Rome was far from being holy when he saw with his own eyes the corruption and evil practices in the churches and monasteries. Instead of living frugally, the monks indulged in rich food and delicacies, as well as wore expensive tailored clothing! They led immoral lives and were only interested in fine living, not the people's well-being. Nevertheless, Luther made it a point to climb the famous "Scala Saneta" or sacred stairs (of twenty-eight steps), which Jesus was mistakenly believed by many to have climbed when He went on trial at Pontius Pilate's palace. With each step he climbed, he recited the Lord's Prayer, believing (as many did) that a poor soul would escape purgatory's torment for each step that was taken. Alas, when he finally made it to the top, he wondered aloud: "Who knows whether it is true?"

For the first time in his life, Luther doubted the authority of the Roman church...

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