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# The Burning Bush

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# THE BURNING BUSH

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# THE CHURCH AND THE TRUTH

Jeffrey Khoo

*“But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15).*

It is good that we remember and remind ourselves what the Church is all about. The Church is described in many ways in the Bible. It is called the Body of Christ, the Bride of Christ, the Temple of God, and the Pillar and Ground of the Truth. Now when Paul said that the Church is “the pillar and ground of the truth”, what did he mean?

## What Is the Church?

The word “Church” is a translation of the Greek *ekklesia*. This word in general means “an assembly”, but whenever it is used in the context of God’s people, it always means a sanctified and separated people, called out of darkness into God’s marvellous light (1 Pet 2:9). Christians have become aliens to this world of sin and Satan to become citizens of the kingdom of God. *Ekklesia* literally means “a called-out people” and thus has the idea of separation. (When I was in seminary, I was told that *ekklesia* does not mean separation. Let me say that the word *ekklesia* means precisely that when it is used in a special way to refer to the Church.) A Church is no Church if it does not practise the biblical doctrine of separation (2 Cor 6:14–7:1).

Now, the Church is not a building in the literal sense. The Church is not made of wood or stone, but flesh and blood. In fact, in the days of the Apostle Paul, up till the 4<sup>th</sup> century, there were no church buildings (with steeple and cross). The buildings called “churches” only came into existence after the 4<sup>th</sup> century when Christianity found favour with the emperor Constantine. The Church before Constantine was much hated by the world, and severely persecuted. In order to worship peacefully, Christians had to meet in the quietness and privacy of their homes, in secluded places, in the forest, in the desert or in caves. Hebrews 11:37,

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38 tells us, *“They were stoned, they were sawn asunder; were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.”*

The Church is “the house of God” and consists not of dead stones but of living stones of the living God. *“Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ”* (1 Pet 2:5).

The Church is also a “holy priesthood” because it is a sanctified people of God. If the Church is going to be an effective witness for God, it must be filled with people who are not of this world—not carnal or devilish but spiritual and Christlike; a people who believe in the Truth and practise the Truth.

### What Is the Truth?

Jesus said, *“thy (God’s) word is truth”* (John 17:17). The word “truth” here is preceded by the definite article. This indicates that Paul was not just talking about the quality of truth, but truth as the object of our faith. The object of our faith is The Truth itself, ie, The Word of God, The Whole Counsel of God, The Holy Scriptures, The 66 Books of the Bible.

The Truth is under tremendous assault today. People no longer know for sure what Truth is any more. Like Pilate, they are asking, *“What is truth?”* Pilate did not know, nor did he understand. He could not believe or see who Jesus truly was because he did not belong to the Truth and was outside the realm of Truth, and so could not appreciate the Truth that Jesus spoke. Jesus said, *“To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice”* (John 18:37). The world today is like Pilate, they do not hear the voice of God and hence do not know the Truth of God. When the Truth is preached and taught, they do not believe or receive it, but rather attack it. It is attacked by not only those outside the Church, but also by those within the Church.

How is the Truth attacked today? It is attacked by Liberalism and Rationalism. For instance, the Truth is attacked by atheists and unbelievers who deny that the God of the Bible was the One who created the whole world and universe out of nothing, by the power of His Word,

in six literal 24-hour days. The atheists substitute the doctrine of creation with their theory of evolution. What is really disturbing is that those who profess to be Christians are agreeing with this theory, calling it science or scientific. To them, science trumps faith—science is for the intelligent, faith is for the weak-minded. So, for Christianity to be intellectually respectable, they mix the Word with the World and advocate a theistic evolution, ie God created the world through evolution. They say Genesis 1–3 is myth, not history.

On the basis of “Science”, there are professing Christians who now claim that the Bible contains mistakes. And so, they deny that the Bible is divinely inspired, infallible and inerrant. They say the Bible is a good book but not God’s Word. They begin to interpret God’s Word just like any ordinary human literature, questioning its authorship, its history, chronology, geography, people, events, doctrines and teachings whenever it does not agree with “Science” so called, or observable facts or evidences. They think after this manner: “If the Bible does not agree with what I can discover and observe through my tests and experiments, the Bible must be wrong.” That was why Paul said, *“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; ... Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools”* (Rom 1:18, 21, 22).

Another attack has come from apostates and compromising Christians who deny the perfect preservation of the Bible. They say the Bible was only infallible and inerrant in the past, when it was first given, in the autographs, but after all these thousands of years, the Bible we have right now is no longer as infallible and inerrant as it used to be. They say that the manuscripts or copies we have today are all corrupted in one way or another, hundreds of thousands of scribal errors have crept in, no two manuscripts are alike. They insist that the Church cannot be dogmatic about what the Bible says in all its minutiae—words have been corrupted or lost. Anyone who is dogmatic about the Bible and makes the present perfection of Scriptures a dogma is castigated as a heretic.

Such a low view of Scripture has resulted in many today accepting all kinds of versions of the Bible regardless of whether these versions are faithful and accurate to the inspired and preserved original language Scriptures or not. Their thinking goes like this: “If the original writings

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have been corrupted and we cannot be totally sure of the inspired words, then it is only the general sense of what the Bible teaches that is important; the mistakes are insignificant and do not affect the general message or the doctrines. The doctrines are preserved, not the words.”

But this is not what Jesus said. Jesus said, *“For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled”* (Matt 5:18), *“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away”* (Matt 24:35). Why was Jesus so concerned that His words, even to the last letter, should never disappear but would always exist? It is because *“It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God”* (Matt 4:4). It is because *“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works”* (2 Tim 3:16–17). We believe that all the inspired words of God, each one of them to the last letter and syllable, have been preserved by God Himself just as He promised, *“The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever”* (Ps 12:6, 7). God has made sure all His words are kept pure so that we might have all of His doctrines. Words first, then doctrines.

In these days of great scepticism and questioning of the Scriptures even by those who profess to be members of the Church, how can we tell the true Church from the false? The answer is simple and straightforward: The Church that is faithful and true is the Church that is the Pillar and Ground of the Truth. The word *stulos* (pillar) is used four times in the Bible (Gal 2:9, 1 Tim 3:15, Rev 3:12, 10:1). It literally means “a supportive column”. It speaks of firm or strong support. The word *hedraioma* (ground) is used only here in the New Testament, and it means “basis”, or “foundation”. It has the idea of strength, steadfastness, safety, fixedness, and certainty. A strong pillar is not enough, the ground or foundation on which the pillar stands must also be equally strong and unmovable. In other words, the Church cannot be flexible and fickle, unsure or uncertain concerning the Truth. It is not enough for the Christian just to know the gospel and nothing else; he must also know deeply all the words of God and doctrines of the Faith (Matt 28:18–20, Acts 20:27).

The Church is thus supposed to be an unwavering upholder of the Truth. When the Truth comes under the weight of enemy attack, the Church is supposed to bear the Truth up so that it will not fall or fail. In the first four centuries, the Early Church upheld and defended the Truth of the perfect deity and perfect humanity of Christ in one Person when it came under attack by the Docetists, Ebionites, Arians, Apollinarians, Nestorians, Eutychians and other heretics. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Reformation Church defended the Truth of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone against the Roman Catholic doctrine of salvation by human works and church traditions. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Biblical fundamentalists defended and upheld the truth of the verbal and plenary inspiration of the Scriptures against the destructive views of Liberalism, Rationalism and Neo-Evangelicalism. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when the doctrine of the verbal and plenary preservation of the Scriptures is under attack, we find faithful believers from various churches and denominations all over the world defending and upholding this good doctrine against Postmodernism, Neo-Deism, and Neo-Fundamentalism.

May the Bible-believing and Bible-defending Church today fulfil its divine call to be “the pillar and ground of the truth” in the midst of rampant apostasy and treachery in these last days just before the Lord comes back. *“For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth”* (2 Cor 13:8).

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and Pastor of True Life Bible-Presbyterian Church.*

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# THE HOLY COMMUNION DOCTRINE OF JOSEPH PRINCE: A CRITIQUE

Jose Trinipil G Lagapa

Joseph Prince is the pastor of New Creation Church in Singapore. “A Leading Voice of Grace Revolution” and a highly sought-after conference speaker, he is author of the bestselling *The Power of Right Believing* and *Destined to Reign*. He is described in his church blog as,

a founding member of New Creation Church, Joseph initially served as an elder and associate pastor. However, his unanimous appointment as senior pastor in 1990 marked a turning point in the history of the church, which started experiencing phenomenal growth. Under Joseph’s leadership, the church congregation has grown by more than a hundredfold—from about 150 to more than 30,000.<sup>1</sup>

Prince has been teaching that the Lord’s Supper is “God’s channel of health and wholeness for His people.”<sup>2</sup> He adds that rightly discerning the Lord’s body in partaking the Holy Communion provides God’s people with health, strength, and long life! Prince’s theology describes Jesus’ body was so full of life that even His clothes were soaked with His health.<sup>3</sup> Several testimonies are published in his website testifying how Holy Communion has healed his church members of various kinds of illnesses and physical infirmities.

Nevertheless, every new doctrine must be measured against God’s perfectly inspired and preserved words in the Bible which is the Christian’s supreme authority and rule of faith and practice (2 Tim 3:16, 2 Pet 1:19). This paper aims to examine the teachings of Joseph Prince regarding Holy Communion. The primary question that needs to be answered is: Did Christ institute Holy Communion to provide physical health and wholeness? There should be a proper understanding of Holy Communion in the parallel passages of the Gospels and that of the First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians.

## **Institution**

The Westminster Confession of Faith 29.1 states, Our Lord Jesus, in the night wherein He was betrayed, instituted the sacrament of His body and blood, called the Lord's Supper, to be observed in His Church, unto the end of the world, for the perpetual remembrance of the sacrifice of Himself in His death; the sealing all benefits thereof unto true believers, their spiritual nourishment and growth in Him, their further engagement in and to all duties which they owe unto Him; and, to be a bond and pledge of their communion with Him, and with each other, as members of His mystical body.

Jesus Christ instituted Holy Communion or what is known as the Lord's Supper on the night of His betrayal (Matt 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:17-20, John 13:12-30, 1 Cor 11:23-34). The Synoptics identify the Lord's last supper as a Passover.<sup>4</sup> It was on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the 14<sup>th</sup> day of Nisan (Exod 12:11-43).<sup>5</sup> It was the day when the paschal lamb was killed.<sup>6</sup> The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia explains,

It was kept in remembrance of the Lord's passing over the houses of the Israelites (Exod. 12:13) when the first born of all the Egyptians were destroyed. It is called also the "Feast of Unleavened Bread" (Exod. 23:15; Mark 14:1; Acts 12:3), because during its celebration no leavened bread was to be eaten or even kept in the household (Exod. 12:15). The word afterwards came to denote the lamb that was slain at the feast (Mark 14:12-14; 1 Cor. 5:7).<sup>7</sup>

The Apostle Paul wrote about the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 in about AD 53, reminding the Corinthians of a tradition which he had "received from the Lord" and which he had already "delivered" to them.<sup>8</sup> Paul said that when evening time came, Jesus took bread,

And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come (1 Cor 11:24-26).

Jesus described the cup as the New Testament in His blood. What is this "New Testament"? Prince admits that this is the "New Covenant" prophesied in the Old Testament which is the forgiveness of sins because of the shed blood of Christ.<sup>9</sup> Hebrews 8:8-12 says,

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant

with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.

Hebrews 8:12 is a quotation taken from Jeremiah 31:31-34. The clause “will I remember no more” is stated in both the Hebrew and Greek in the strongest of terms. This speaks of the forgiveness of sins when a person believes in Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour (Rom 10:9-10). Paul described the salvation work of God thusly, “according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.” (Eph 1:4-5). God promised to put His laws into the minds and write them in the hearts of His elect. He will be their God by grace through faith in Jesus Christ their Saviour (Eph 2:8). The Lord’s Supper represents and exhibits salvation through the one perfect sacrifice of Christ, so that the central emphasis of the ordinance is the “remembrance” of “the Lord’s death.”

The New Covenant thus concerns “that relationship of lordship and obedience which God establishes between Himself and men, and ‘the blood of the covenant’ is the sign of its existence and the means by which it is effected.”<sup>10</sup> Here is what the Apostle mentioned in Hebrews 9:15, “And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.” It is about redemption from sin and the promise of eternal life, not health and wealth here and now!

Nothing in Paul’s statement alludes to the New Testament rite of Holy Communion as a means to physical healing. Prince errs when he expands his view of Holy Communion to include physical healing and prosperity. There is no mention about physical healing by Jeremiah and Paul. It is about the cleansing of the believer from all his sins after

he receives Christ as his Saviour. Paul said in Romans 8:1, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” Note that Paul did not say no more infection or debilitation but no more condemnation.

### **Commemoration**

Jesus Christ instituted the Lord’s Supper for His disciples to commemorate His sacrifice on the cross and the shedding of His blood for the salvation of the perishing souls of man. Twice did Jesus say, “This do in remembrance of me.” The word “remembrance” (*anamnēsis*) is only used four times in the Bible. The Lord’s Supper is a memorial, to be eaten “in remembrance” of Christ. That this remembrance has special reference to Jesus’ death is explicit in 1 Corinthians 11:26.<sup>11</sup> It was not meant for any other purpose than for His people to remember the work of salvation that He had wrought for them.

The *anamnēsis* enjoined means more than recollect. It is to call something to mind and relive it. The self-sacrifice of Jesus has a continuing dimension as well as a past one. This is not to be confused with cultic sacrifice or magical sacramentalism. It means that the true disciple is one who is “crucified with Christ,” one who “daily takes up his cross,” one in whom “the sufferings of Christ are made full” (Col. 1:24).<sup>12</sup>

Prince tells his church, “Do as Jesus said – have it often. ‘How often?’ you might ask. As often as you need to. It depends on how much you want His health and wholeness.”<sup>13</sup> When Paul said, “for as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup” (1 Cor 11:26), he was not indicating how often we should partake (some traditions have a weekly Lord’s Supper; some monthly, others quarterly, etc), but the reason why we should partake it.<sup>14</sup>

### **Elements**

The Lord’s Supper is a rite of remembrance, and in light of the bread and the cup representing the Lord’s body and blood, it is a memorial of His work on the Cross.<sup>15</sup> The Westminster Confession of Faith 29.5 states,

The outward elements in this sacrament, duly set apart to the uses ordained by Christ, have such relation to Him crucified, as that, truly, yet sacramentally only, they are sometimes called by the name of the things they represent, to wit, the body and blood of Christ; albeit, in substance and nature, they still remain truly and only bread and wine, as they were before.

Matthew 26:26 says, “And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.” It is important to note that the bread is only a symbol of the flesh of Christ. Calvin offered a clear explanation,

These words relate to a sacrament; and it must be acknowledged, that a sacrament consists of a visible sign, with which is connected the thing signified, which is the reality of it. It must be well known, on the other hand, that the name of the thing signified is transferred to the sign; and therefore, no person who is tolerably well acquainted with Scripture will deny that a sacramental mode of expression ought to be taken metonymically.<sup>16</sup>

The “cup” is “the new covenant” in Jesus’ blood (1 Cor 11:25). Jeremiah 31:31-32 stands behind Paul’s account, just as Exodus 24:8 stands behind Mark 14:24 and Matthew 26:28. The new covenant was to be written within the hearts of men, based upon God’s acceptance of them as His people and their acceptance of Him as their God, a covenant in which acceptance is grounded in God’s forgiveness of sins and in which knowledge of the Lord is personal and direct.<sup>17</sup>

The bread and the cup are not to be taken as having intrinsic magical powers. The elements simply represent spiritual truths to teach important doctrines. The bread and the cup are but a picture, and not the reality.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, the Lord’s Supper is a spiritual exercise and members are required to partake of it with a worshipful and not superstitious attitude.<sup>19</sup>

Prince on the other hand says, “And when you partake of His broken body, know that his body was broken so that yours can be whole. When you partake in this spirit of faith, something happens to your body. You become strong, healthy and you will live long.”<sup>20</sup>

This is plainly and simply wrong! Nowhere in the Bible does the partaking of the Lord’s Supper impart physical health to the believer as if it is a kind of a food supplement.

### **Practice**

The church in Jerusalem “continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42), and “they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” (Acts

2:46-47). The phrase “breaking of bread” is an idiomatic expression for partaking together. It is not meant to stress the fragmentising of one loaf but the coming together of individuals to be joined together in eating from one loaf.<sup>21</sup> The breaking of bread also makes vivid the thought of the broken body of Christ upon the cross.<sup>22</sup>

From the account in Acts, it is evident that the Lord’s Supper is to be observed not by an individual alone with no one else, but a community participation of a body of believers with “one accord... from house to house.” The word for “one accord” (*homothumadon*) has the idea of togetherness in one and the same mind, purpose or impulse.<sup>23</sup> The believers came together to partake of the Lord’s Supper. It was not meant to be an individualistic but a community exercise. Calvin explained,

We must take notice, that Christ here distributes the bread among the Apostles, that all may partake of it in common, and thus every one may receive his portion, that there may be an equal participation among all. Accordingly, when there is not a table in common prepared for all the pious — where they are not invited to the breaking of bread in common, and where, in fine, believers do not mutually participate, it is to no purpose that the name of the Lord’s Supper is laid claim to.<sup>24</sup>

This refutes what Prince promotes in his church. He says that inside the church, when the Lord’s Supper is served, the pastors minister as the spiritual authority of the church. However, “outside the church, you, as a royal priest, are qualified to partake on your own.”<sup>25</sup> In other words, there is no need for a qualified minister to administer the Lord’s Supper, any believer can do it himself.

The Apostle Paul described the partaking of the Lord’s Supper as a sacred ceremony conducted by an ordained minister. According to Buswell, it is customary in many churches that the minister would be in charge of the distribution of the bread.<sup>26</sup> The Westminster Confession of Faith 29.3 states,

the Lord Jesus has, in this ordinance, appointed His ministers to declare His word of institution to the people, to pray, and bless the elements of bread and wine, and thereby to set them apart from a common to an holy use; and to take and break the bread, to take the cup, and (they communicating also themselves) to give both to the communicants; but to none who are not then present in the congregation.

## Warning

In 1 Corinthians 11:17-22, Paul rebuked the Corinthians for their disorderly conduct before the celebration of the Lord's Supper,

Now in this that I declare *unto you* I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse. For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you. When ye come together therefore into one place, *this* is not to eat the Lord's supper. For in eating every one taketh before *other* his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken. What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise *you* not.

The context is one of disrespect on the part of some carnal Corinthians for this feast of remembrance. Ultimately they were despising the sacrifice of Christ. It was not the Lord's Supper they were having, but rather a social dinner to gratify their physical appetites.<sup>27</sup> It was referred to as a "love feast" which they had before the Lord's Supper. The term "love feast" refers to the brotherly common meals of the early church.<sup>28</sup> But it was not a "love feast" at all. Paul rebuked the Corinthians' abuse of the Lord's Supper when they mixed up their common banquets with the spiritual feast, and at the same time despised the poor.<sup>29</sup> Some of the Corinthians who were socially and economically privileged were turning the Supper into a personal feast eaten for their own selfish gain, and by so doing denied the lordship of Christ and the fellowship of the saints. As Paul said, each was making it "his own supper" (1 Cor 11:21).<sup>30</sup>

In 1 Corinthians 11:27-30 the Apostle Paul warned,

Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.

Prince's argument on "unworthily" is unbiblical. He argues that the Corinthians ate unworthily because they did not recognise that the broken body of the Lord was meant to bring them health and wholeness.<sup>31</sup> He says that sin is not the point of Paul's teaching in this passage.

Paul's warning against those who ate the Lord's Supper unworthily is applicable to Prince and all who follow him. The word "unworthily" (*anaxios*) speaks of doing something in an improper or careless manner.<sup>32</sup> There is therefore a need for self-examination (1 Cor 11:28). Those who eat the Lord's Supper in an improper way do it to their own damnation. What is this improper way? Buswell commented,

The "unworthy manner" of eating does not imply that those who partake consider themselves worthy of the Lord's Supper in their own characters and persons. Such an interpretation would exclude honest men. Clearly the "worthiness" is interpreted by the phrase, "discerning the Lord's body." This also implies, of course, that the Lord's body is discerned, as represented in the elements, there must be a turning away from the particular objectionable practices which Paul has rebuked in the preceding context, and a turning away from all sin.<sup>33</sup>

For partaking the Lord's Supper in an improper way, God had prematurely taken some of the Corinthians home to heaven by way of death, and others were inflicted with illnesses because of their abuse of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:30). So unlike what Prince advocates, it is not health but sickness and death if a person were to partake of the bread and cup unbiblically and improperly.

The keeping of the Lord's Supper requires penitential action. Calvin says, "If you would wish to use aright the benefit afforded by Christ, bring faith and repentance."<sup>34</sup> Barnes added, "Let him search and see if he has the proper qualifications – if he has knowledge to discern the Lord's body, if he has true repentance for his sins, true faith in the Lord Jesus, and a sincere desire to live the life of a Christian, and to be like the Son of God, and be saved by the merits of his blood."<sup>35</sup>

### **Significance**

The Lord's Supper is a proclamation of both the death of Jesus and His parousia (1 Cor 11:26).<sup>36</sup> Luke mentioned the messianic feast in the kingdom of God twice: "I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God" and "I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come" (Luke 22:16,18). He shares with Paul the emphasis upon the eschatological hope as well as the command to repeat the Supper as a remembrance.<sup>37</sup> Paul saw the Supper as a proclamation of "the Lord's death till he come" (1 Cor 11:26).<sup>38</sup>

Jesus Himself looks forward to drinking the fruit of the vine



“afresh” with His disciples when the Kingdom of God comes (Matt 26:29, Mark 14:25, Luke 22:18). Thus the Lord’s Supper is a time of special commemoration which is to be done not merely once or twice, but repeatedly, as often as circumstances render it expedient or desirable, until the Lord returns.<sup>39</sup>

### **Sacrament**

There are two sacraments that have been instituted by Christ for His Church. They are Water Baptism and the Lord’s Supper (and they correspond to Circumcision and the Passover of the Old Testament).<sup>40</sup> The Westminster Confession of Faith 29.2 states,

In this sacrament, Christ is not offered up to His Father; nor any real sacrifice made at all, for remission of sins of the quick or dead; but only a commemoration of that one offering up of Himself, by Himself, upon the cross, once for all: and a spiritual oblation of all possible praise unto God, for the same: so that the popish sacrifice of the mass (as they call it) is most abominably injurious to Christ’s one, only sacrifice, the alone propitiation for all the sins of His elect.

Calvin says a sacrament was an “outward sign by which the Lord seals on our conscience the promises of his good will toward us in order to sustain the weakness of our faith; and we in turn attest our piety toward him in the presence of the Lord and of his angels before men.”<sup>41</sup> It is the external display of an internal invisible reality of salvation.<sup>42</sup> As sacraments, they do not save. The partaking of the Lord’s Supper is the remembering of the Lord’s atoning work on the cross, and when it is partaken by faith, the believer receives spiritual help and blessing to live the Christian life. These truths tell that Holy Communion is never meant to impart physical healing or wholeness.

### **Did Jesus Come to Heal or to Preach?**

Prince asserts that it is God’s nature to heal. According to him, health is the greatest blessing a man can have while here on earth, a divine blessing second only to salvation. He explains that “Jesus did not walk on water all the time, He did not calm the storms all the time, but he healed all the time.”<sup>43</sup> However, Matthew tells us plainly the reason why Jesus came to earth – not to be a doctor, but a Saviour, “And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins” (Matt 1:21). In His public ministry, Jesus Christ Himself testified that He came primarily to preach, not heal, “Let

us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth” (Mark 1:38, emphasis added); “I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent” (Luke 4:43, emphasis added). The above is the fulfilment of Isaiah’s prophecy concerning the Messiah’s coming, “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified” (Isa 61:1-3, emphasis added).

### **Was Jesus Body for Healing?**

Prince also misinterpreted Mark 7:26-28 which records a woman who,

...was a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation; and she besought him that he would cast forth the devil out of her daughter. But Jesus said unto her, Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it unto the dogs. And she answered and said unto him, Yes, Lord: yet the dogs under the table eat of the children’s crumbs.

He said the woman was pleading for her daughter’s healing and that Jesus referred to “the children’s bread” as physical healing. Prince tells people to put their faith in “the children’s bread” as much as the woman put her faith in that little crumb. Such faith on the “bread” and “crumb” would release the power to drive out any illness. According to Prince, “the bread, even the a small crumb, which is His body, is for our healing since we are now God’s children and fully entitled to the healing bread.”<sup>44</sup>

It must be said that Jesus did not use the metaphor of bread for healing. When Jesus spoke of “the children’s bread”, He was speaking of the covenantal relationship Israel has with God. Calvin commented,

For since the beginning of the world, the goodness of God was everywhere diffused—nay, filled heaven and earth—so that all mortal men felt that God was their Father. But as the children of Abraham had been more highly honoured than the rest of mankind, the children’s bread is a name given to everything that, relates peculiarly to the adoption by which the Jews alone were elected to be children.<sup>45</sup>

Barnes called it “a trial of her faith.”<sup>46</sup> As such, the bread and the crumbs had nothing to do with Christ’s body but everything to do with having a humble attitude before God when our faith is tested.

### **Why Must Jesus Shed His Blood?**

Prince understands Isaiah 53 as God’s love for mankind and His desire to make them whole. He believes Christ bore the stripes so that we do not have to be beaten, and His body was broken so that ours can be physically healed and whole.<sup>47</sup> Jesus’ agony on the cross was for the healing grace to be bestowed upon man.<sup>48</sup> He recalls how God cut a covenant with Abraham and bound Himself to a covenant with man when He cut it with Jesus as man’s representative at Calvary.<sup>49</sup> Prince encourages people to “keep on taking Communion until you are completely healed.”<sup>50</sup>

Here are scriptural passages against the claims of Prince that Holy Communion is meant for physical healing. The Scriptures clearly tell us that the bread and cup has to do with spiritual redemption: “Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things ... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet 1:18,19); “Christ being come ... by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. ... The blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your consciences from dead works to serve the living God” (Heb 9:11-14); “And they sung a new song, saying: Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof; for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation” (Rev 5:9); “The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7); “Who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood” (Rev 1:5); “that his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness; by whose stripes ye were healed” (1 Pet 2:24); “Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many” (Heb 9:28); “Being now justified by his blood ... we shall be saved by his life” (Rom 5:9-10); “In whom we have redemption, through his blood” (Eph 1:7); “In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (Col 1:14); “he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2); “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29); “Christ hath redeemed us from

the curse of the law, being made a curse for us” (Gal 3:13). All this points to the reason why Jesus must shed His precious blood. It was for the remission of our sins and not for our body’s healing. Even the Apostle Paul suffered from physical illnesses which the Lord chose not to heal. The Lord simply said to Paul, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Cor 12:9).

### **What Must Christians Pursue After?**

The Lord Jesus Christ says in Matthew 6:25, 31-33,

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?... Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

The Apostle Paul says, “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.” (Col 3:1-3). Christians are exhorted to be spiritually holy to live eternally rather than be physically healthy to perish eternally!

### **Conclusion**

The teaching of Joseph Prince on “Health and Wholeness through the Holy Communion” contradicts the teachings of God’s Word. The Lord’s Supper signifies the New Covenant relationship between God and His people. The bread and the cup represent Christ’s body and blood. It is a memorial of His work on the Cross. Holy Communion is to be observed by Christians as a body and not individually. The Apostle Paul warned against partaking of the elements unworthily. The partaker who does not examine himself before eating the elements mocks the Lord’s work on the cross. Participation in the Holy Communion reinforces the eschatological hope believers have in Christ who will return to drink the cup afresh with His saints. As a sacrament, Holy Communion is an external display of an internal invisible reality of salvation in the believer’s life.

It is the conclusion of this paper that Joseph Prince’s doctrine on Holy Communion is carnal and unbiblical. It emphasises the temporal

instead of the eternal, and promotes the things of this world rather than the things of God.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> <http://blog.josephprince.com/home-page/homepage-2/about/> (accessed April 26, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Prince, *Health and Wholeness through the Holy Communion* (Singapore: Joseph Prince Resources, 2006), 20.

<sup>3</sup> Prince, *Health and Wholeness through the Holy Communion*, 29.

<sup>4</sup> Frank Stagg, "The Lord's Supper in the New Testament," *Review and Expositor* 66:1(1969): 5.

<sup>5</sup> H D M Spence and Joseph S Exell, *The Pulpit Commentary*, in SwordSearcher Deluxe Version 5.3.1. (Broken Arrow: StudyLamp Software, 2008), Mark 14:12.

<sup>6</sup> Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes in the Bible*, in SwordSearcher Deluxe Version 5.3.1 (Broken Arrow: StudyLamp Software, 2008), Mark 14:12.

<sup>7</sup> ISBE, s v "Passover."

<sup>8</sup> Stagg, "The Lord's Supper in the New Testament," 6.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Prince, *Destined to Reign* (Singapore: 22 Media, 2007), 97

<sup>10</sup> Stagg, "The Lord's Supper in the New Testament," 10.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

<sup>13</sup> Prince, *Health and Wholeness through the Holy Communion*, 44-45.

<sup>14</sup> Larry Dixon, "The Doctrine of the Church." *The Emmaus Journal* 13 (2004): 256.

<sup>15</sup> Arthur L Farstad, "We Believe In: Jesus Is Lord" *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 4 (1991): 10.

<sup>16</sup> John Calvin, *John Calvin's Verse by Verse Commentary*, in SwordSearcher Deluxe Version 5.3.1 (Broken Arrow: StudyLamp Software, 2008), Matthew 26:26.

<sup>17</sup> Stagg, "The Lord's Supper in the New Testament," 9.

<sup>18</sup> Warren Vanhetloo, "God's Teaching Pictures," *Central Bible Quarterly* 3 (1960): 19.

<sup>19</sup> Timothy Tow and Jeffrey Khoo, *Theology for Every Christian: A Systematic Theology in the Reformed and Premillennial Tradition of J Oliver Buswell* (Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College, 2007), 352.

<sup>20</sup> Prince, *Health and Wholeness through the Holy Communion*, 31.

<sup>21</sup> Stagg, "The Lord's Supper in the New Testament," 8.

<sup>22</sup> J Oliver Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), 273.

<sup>23</sup> BDAG, 706

<sup>24</sup> Calvin, *John Calvin's Verse by Verse Commentary*, 1 Corinthians 11:24.

<sup>25</sup> Prince, *Health and Wholeness through the Holy Communion*, 44.

<sup>26</sup> Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, 273.

<sup>27</sup> Arthur L Farstad, "We Believe In: Jesus Is Lord", 7.

<sup>28</sup> ISBE, s v “Agape.”

<sup>29</sup> Calvin, *John Calvin’s Verse by Verse Commentary*, 1 Corinthians 11:20.

<sup>30</sup> Stagg, “The Lord’s Supper in the New Testament,” 6.

<sup>31</sup> Prince, *Health and Wholeness through the Holy Communion*, 53.

<sup>32</sup> BDAG, 69.

<sup>33</sup> Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, 277.

<sup>34</sup> Calvin, *John Calvin’s Verse by Verse Commentary*, 1 Corinthians 11:28. See also Stagg, “The Lord’s Supper in the New Testament,” 5.

<sup>35</sup> Barnes, *Barnes’ Notes in the Bible*, 1 Corinthians 11:28. “The self-examination, then, should include an honest answer to the question, “Do I discern and appreciate that the bread and the wine represent Christ’s atonement accomplished for me on the cross, and do I wholly commit myself to Him, not trusting in my own righteousness, but wholly trusting in the fact that His body was broken for me, and His blood was shed for my sins?” Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, 277.

<sup>36</sup> Stagg, “The Lord’s Supper in the New Testament,” 9.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

<sup>39</sup> M Stuart, “Patristical and Exegetical Investigation of the Question Respecting the Real Bodily Presence of Christ in the Elements of the Lord’s Supper (Continued).” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 1 (1844): 270.

<sup>40</sup> William Nast, “The Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 19 (1862): 384.

<sup>41</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans by Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1989), 4.14.1.

<sup>42</sup> Tow and Khoo, *Theology for Every Christian*, 349.

<sup>43</sup> Prince, *Health and Wholeness through the Holy Communion*, 10.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

<sup>45</sup> Calvin, *John Calvin’s Verse by Verse Commentary*, Matthew 15:26.

<sup>46</sup> Barnes, *Barnes’ Notes in the Bible*, Matthew 15:26.

<sup>47</sup> Prince, *Healing Promises* (Singapore: New Creation Church, 2011), 15.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 163.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 229.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 237.

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## LIVING A CONSECRATED LIFE

Shuaiyong Wang

*“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” (Rom 12:1,2).*

As Christians, our duty is not just to give our tithes unto God. If you think this is all God wants you to offer, you are wrong. As God’s people, our duty is not just to offer our tithes but also consecrate our entire life to God. Are you willing to live a consecrated life? Now I come to the first point of my sermon which is the beseeching to live a consecrated life.

### **The Beseeching to Live a Consecrated Life**

First, let us look at whom Paul is beseeching. The text says, “I beseech you”. Who is this “you”? This “you” are the brethren—all the believers and Christians in the city of Rome. This word “brethren” also refers to every one of us, because we are also believers, we are also Christians. I want you to take note that in these two verses, the second person pronoun is used a total seven times as can be seen: “I beseech you” “ye present your bodies”, “your reasonable service” “be ye transformed”, “your mind”, “that ye may prove”. Seven times! And they are all talking to you, because you are brethren in Christ. Paul did not say, “I beseech you therefore, pastors” or “deacons” or “full-time workers”, but “brethren”. And here the emphasis is on you, it is talking to you!

Paul says, “I beseech you”. Beseech means to admonish or exhort. Why here does the Apostle Paul say, “I beseech you” and not “I command you”? Is it because he has no authority to give a command on behalf of God? The answer is definitely no! Being an Apostle of Jesus Christ and used by God to write the very words of God, he has all the right to give a command here. But why instead of giving a command does he say, “I beseech you” with a fatherly, loving, gentle heart? It is because

he wants to say that no one can force you to live a consecrated life, no one can make this decision for you. It is between you and God; you yourself must willingly make this decision, you yourself must willingly decide to live a consecrated life for God. And dear friends, please do not think that the mood here is not imperative; do not think that it is not necessary for you to obey! Why? You will know why when you see Paul's reason for beseeching.

Second, let us look at why Paul is beseeching. This you can see through the word "therefore" and the last verse of Romans chapter 11. The word "therefore" indicates that having known the previous truth, you should have this response. What truth is this? Romans 11:36 says, "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things, to whom be glory for ever. Amen." Here the phrase "all things" definitely includes our life, so "of him" shows that God is the source of our life, "through him" means we are created by God and He is our Creator, "to him ... to whom be glory for ever" shows that we are created for His glory. This verse is also the verse which the Westminster Shorter Catechism quotes when it explains what is the chief end of man? What is the chief end of man? Answer: "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever." Good! So dear friends, having known this truth, you should respond to this beseeching by fulfilling God's plan for your life. Having known this truth, your life should also have the response given in Romans 12:1-2. It is good and right to memorise it but you cannot just memorise it without obeying it; you cannot treat God's Word with only head-knowledge, your life must show what you have known, and as the heavens declare the glory of God, may your life also declare the glory of God, because your chief end is to glorify God!

Third, let us look at how Paul is beseeching. He beseeches us "by the mercies of God". He reminds us that we have now obtained God's mercy because we are no longer unbelievers. We are called brethren—brothers and sisters in Christ. As brethren in Christ we are justified through faith alone. Our identity has changed, and this change from unbelievers to believers has nothing to do with our own goodness, it is all because of God's mercy, it is all by the mercies of God. In other words, we are what we are because of God's mercy, and we are the manifestation of God's pity for sinners.

The first part of Romans 11:30 says, "For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy." So you are a Christian



not by chance, but because God has shown mercy to you and you have obtained His mercy. And by this reminder of the mercies of God you should remember that as totally depraved men, the only thing which you and I deserve is to be cast into the lake of fire and stay there forever. But God is so good. Although we are not worthy to be saved and do not live a perfect life, He mercifully saved us by sending His only begotten Son to die for us and rise again from the dead. Jesus gave His life for us. Should we not gratefully answer this strong beseeching which reminds us that we have obtained God's saving mercy abundantly? We should answer this beseeching by living a consecrated life for God who mercifully saved us!

But what does the consecrated life mean? What is the meaning of living a consecrated life? Let us now look at the second part of verse 1 which talks about the meaning of living a consecrated life.

### **The Meaning of Living a Consecrated Life**

Here the Bible goes to say, "that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." "Present your bodies" does not mean you take a shower and then kill yourself or commit suicide. The mention of our bodies here refers to our entire life, all the aspects of our life, because this sacrifice is to be a living sacrifice and not a dead sacrifice. In our daily life when we do something, the members of our body are the instruments, we use them to execute or carry out our purpose. When you do something, you must use either one part or a few parts of your body or the whole body, even when you just lie down and think, at least you are using your brain. So here your body refers to your entire life, every aspect of your life. Presenting something to God can be understood as consecrating something to God. So here "present your bodies" means consecrating your entire life.

Concerning "sacrifice", we know that in the Old Testament, when the Israelites present their offerings to God like lambs, goats, or bullocks, these sacrifices must be killed. But here the sacrifice is not killed, it is a special sacrifice, it is a living sacrifice. I think we should all give thanks to God for the word "living", otherwise after believing in Jesus Christ, we must all commit suicide. In the Old Testament, when the Israelites want to offer their sacrifice unto God, their sacrifice must also be without blemish. And they also cannot offer anyhow; everything they do must be according to God's Word. And the sacrifice here also has this idea as it is described as a "holy" sacrifice. So our entire life must be morally holy,

and be in accordance to God's Word.

Now gathering all the thoughts together, you can know that as a child of God, you should give your entire life unto God, and the entire life which you offer must also be holy; in other words, you should live a consecrated and holy life for God, you must use every part of your body according to God's Word. Please take note that it does not mean that now we can live a sinless perfect life, but it does mean that the holy and perfect life must always be our goal. We cannot change this goal. We must always pursue this goal. We must always do our very best to be holy. We must strive towards this goal every day, every moment, and in every aspect of our life. As the days go by, we must be more and more holy, come closer and closer to achieving this goal until Jesus returns. This is what the Bible means, and this is also the reason why my title is "living a consecrated life", and not "live a consecrated life", because I want to emphasise that this must be always present in our life!

The Bible also says when we live a consecrated life, it is "acceptable unto God", it is well-pleasing to God. In other words, if every week six days you do your best to live a holy life, but one day you allow yourself to do some evil things, thinking that, "Never mind, later I can confess my sin and then I can still worship God peacefully on Sunday", this is not acceptable to God, this is not well-pleasing to God because it is not a consecrated life. If you keep yourself holy in many aspects of your life but not all, then someone comes and tries to help you with those aspects, but you refuse to be helped and even try to justify yourself, saying, "every man has his weakness, I also have", then you allow that habitual sin or habitual weakness to remain in your life. You are not acceptable to God. This is not well-pleasing to God because it is not a consecrated life. The consecrated life is to do your best to live a holy life every day, not six days a week, but seven days a week! The consecrated life is not just in many aspects but in every aspect of your life. You do your best to be holy. This is well-pleasing to God, this is acceptable unto God, this is the consecrated life.

And the Bible also says that this is "your reasonable service". Here the word "service" means divine service. It is a special word, and can be rendered as "worship". This divine service or worship requires a holy life. Remember that this is to live a consecrated life not just on Sunday but every day, and it is also not just here but everywhere! Even in your home and your work-place, you also should keep yourself away from sin

and do everything with a worshipful heart. And this is your reasonable service unto God. It means you and I have no reason to live a sinful life, you and I have no excuse not to live a consecrated life. So dear friends, in your daily life, do not allow your eyes to watch something unholy, do not allow your mouth to commit murder or to say unholy words, do not allow your hands to sin against God, do not allow your foot to go into some evil places which are full of temptations. Use every part of your body in a holy manner, use every part of your body according to God's Word.

Having known the meaning of living a consecrated life, then if I want to live a consecrated life, how can I know God's will in every aspect of my life that I may obey Him? And what are the dangers that would prevent me from living a consecrated life? Now we come to the danger hindering our living a consecrated life.

### **The Danger Hindering our Living a Consecrated Life**

By saying there is danger, I am not saying that it is dangerous to live a consecrated life. What I am saying is that in the process of living a consecrated life, there is a danger in this present evil age which hinders our living a consecrated life. Romans 12:2 warns, "be not conformed to this world". This is a command. Why did God give this command to us. It is because the world is always trying to influence us and we are also easily influenced by the world! Almost every social media and every newspaper is spreading some ungodly things every day. And when you go out, there are so many people wearing shorts on the streets, and their shorts are very short; even on the MRT and bus-stop advertisement boards, there are many revealing pictures. Even your colleagues in the company or your officers in the army like to speak with vulgarities. The world tells you that sex before marriage and drinking alcohol are not wrong. And there are so-called Christians who promote the lustful and fleshly "Crossover Project". All these things are trying to confuse us and change our thinking, dressing, speech, conduct and testimony. And a lot of Christians have already been influenced by this danger, they are already conformed to this world.

I am not trying to say that we must practise isolation like a monk, or stay in a monastery and never go out. But I want you to realise that this world is the danger, and it is always trying to prevent us from recognising what God wants us to do in every aspect of our life, so that we would fail to obey God and live a consecrated life. But we are not supposed to

follow the world. If we are to live a consecrated life, then you and I must know how we may overcome this danger.

The second part of verse 2 tells us how, “but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God”. The way to overcome the world is not to embrace it, but to let our mind be transformed and renewed. Here renewing means renovation. Our mind refers to our understanding. Prove means to discern or examine. The will of God here refers to God’s desires and demands for our daily life. Who is doing this renewing? It is the Holy Spirit, and He does it through the Word of God. So basically here the Bible is saying that you alone cannot change your own understanding, character and nature. You must submit yourself to the renewing of the Holy Spirit and let your understanding be changed more and more by God’s Word. Then you will be able to discern what God wants of you in your daily life. Then you can obey God’s will and not fail to live a consecrated life. In other words, you should have a biblical mind, and be more and more like Christ. You should study God’s Word more and more and submit to the renewing work of the Holy Spirit.

So dear brothers and sisters in Christ, come to church and hear God’s Word every Sunday, join church activities or church camps to learn God’s Word, attend prayer meetings, attend FEBC night classes (not only attend but take the classes for credit so that you can learn more from God’s Word). And during all this studying of the Bible, when the Holy Spirit convicts you in your heart and shows you that your understanding of God’s Word is wrong, you should quickly repent and change your mind, confess your sins and submit to the work of the Holy Spirit. Let your understanding and your life be renewed by the Holy Spirit. Even if now the Holy Spirit is working in your heart and convicting you through God’s Word, you should repent and be renewed!

Having known what it means to live a consecrated life, let us willingly and thankfully make the decision to live a consecrated life. Let us do our very best to live a holy life in every aspect every day. Let us overcome the worldly danger that prevents us from living a consecrated life. Let us study God’s Word diligently and obediently and submit to the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. May the hymn “I Surrender All” be our desire and decision in every way and every day of our life! Let us pray.

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# **REFORMATION PILGRIMAGE TESTIMONY: OF MAN, MACHINE AND MOVEMENT**

S M Wong

For almost 500 years, Protestants have used 1517 to mark the separation from the Roman Catholic Church when Martin Luther nailed his 95 Latin theses to the Castle Church door in Wittenberg, Germany. But Martin Luther was not the first to preach salvation by faith. And we were only known as Protestants in 1529.

In 14<sup>th</sup> century England, John Wycliffe, considered to be Oxford University's leading philosopher and theologian, had written on the biblical teaching on faith (salvation by faith alone) and challenged the sale of indulgences. Convinced that every Christian should have access to His Word in their native language, he started to translate the Bible into English. Although he died before the translation was completed, his friend, John Purvey, finished the translation of what we now know as the "Wycliffe Bible". Historians have called Wycliffe the "Morning Star of the Reformation".

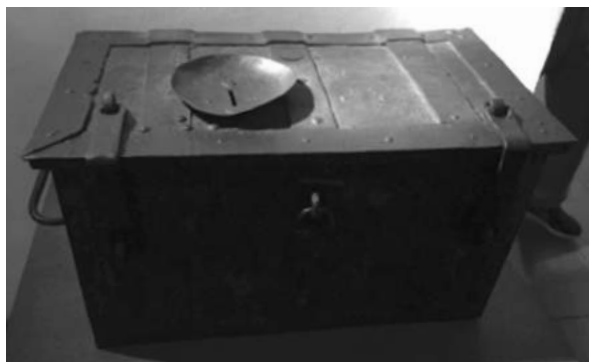
In 15<sup>th</sup> century Bohemia (modern day Czech Republic), Wycliffe's works would influence John Huss, a Rector of Prague University, who also preached the Gospel at the Bethlehem Chapel (1402-1412) in Prague. At its peak, it was standing room only for 3000 worshippers. A prolific writer, he argued that Christ alone is head of the church, not the pope who can make many mistakes.

So why did we not date the Reformation to the 14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> century instead? What was the game-changer which made it possible for Martin Luther to achieve what Wycliffe and Huss started but could not accomplish? With this in mind, my husband and I thank God for making it possible for us to go on the Third Reformation Pilgrimage in the footsteps of Martin Luther and other reformers like John Calvin.

## Martin Luther's World

Martin Luther was born in Eisleben, Germany in 1483 into a world of tumultuous change. Politically, there was a desire to break away from the control of the Church when politics and religion became too intertwined. Culturally, the Renaissance saw a flourishing of ideas and innovations in art and literature. The Dutch humanist, Erasmus, published the landmark Greek New Testament (*Textus Receptus*) in 1516, from which Luther would translate the first German New Testament Bible later. The *Textus Receptus* symbolised the humanist desire to return to the original sources of the Scripture.

In Rome, the rebuilding of the St Peter's Basilica which was started in 1506, was to be the emblem of the glory of papal Rome and how far the Church had veered from His Truth. To finance the expansion plans, the pope needed money – chest loads. So he granted the sale



of indulgences to tap into the people's superstitious beliefs of buying their way to heaven. In Wittenburg, we saw how indulgences were collected with treasure chests secured with three locks, no less.

*An indulgence chest*

The people were poor, both financially and spiritually because they had no access to the Bible and when His Word was read, it was in a language (Latin) they did not understand. Perhaps the Church did not want them to know the Truth to keep their enterprise going. This was particularly poignant when we visited the St Augustine's Church and Monastery in Erfurt where Luther lived as an earnest young monk (1505-1511). According to our guide, the monks would recite the Latin Bible and beyond the veil in the sanctuary, believers would listen without comprehension. I found myself asking how much do I treasure God's Word today, when it is readily accessible, written in a language I can understand. Yet, I wilfully choose not to understand or to selectively hear what I want to hear when the truth is too hard to bear.



*Stone floor in the Augustinian church where Luther laid prostrate to take his monastic vows.*

Over the centuries, God raised brilliant men who studied and taught the Scripture. Through the work of Wycliffe and Huss who in turn would influence Luther, they were convicted to put the Scripture back into the hands of believers.

Martin Luther's world was at inflection point, save for one crucial piece – the printing press.

### **The Facebook of 16<sup>th</sup> Century**

Printing was not new. It was one of the four great Chinese inventions. In 1377, the Koreans printed the Jikji using a movable type system. Over in Mainz, Germany in 1450, Johannes Gutenberg made a mechanical metal movable-type printing press in Europe said to be inspired by the wine press. He was the first to create his type

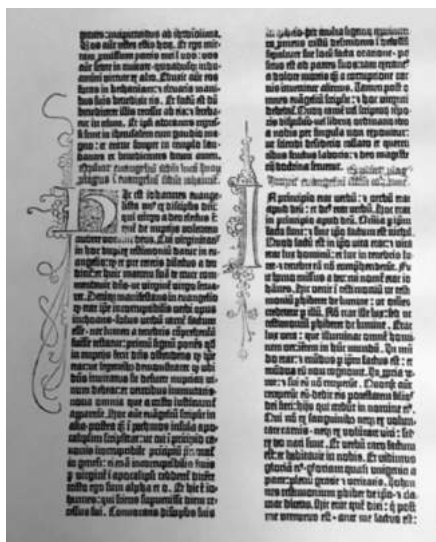
It was also here in the Chapter Room that the seeds of justification by faith alone were planted. What left an impression on me was how hard Luther tried to be a pious monk. Even before asking God for forgiveness, he would be making public confessions before his peers of sins that he had not committed. He was not angry with himself as one monk told of Luther. He was angry with God. Salvation through good works did not give Luther any peace, only anguish.



*Chapter Room in the Augustinian monastery*



pieces from an alloy of lead, tin, and antimony. According to our guide, Gutenberg borrowed 800 guilders to fund his business. In 1455, he printed the Gutenberg Bible sold at 35 guilders or equivalent to the price of a house then. In three to four years, he printed 180 bibles. Before Gutenberg's printing press, it would take a monk three to five years to hand copy one Bible. As it was so expensive, not all churches had a copy. But Gutenberg's printing days were short lived. He was made a bankrupt when he could not repay the business loan. Robbing his idea and invention, the world was to gain a powerful tool of communication. It ignited not just the Protestant Reformation but helped spark the French Revolution in 18<sup>th</sup> century.



A printed page from the Gutenberg Bible

### The Turning Point of Modern History: Philip Schaff

According to Protestant historian Philip Schaff in the *History of the Christian Church*, “The Reformation of the sixteenth century is, next to the introduction of Christianity, the greatest event in history. It marks the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of modern times”.

It was against this backdrop that Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the church door, hoping to invite a public discussion on the truth about indulgences. No one accepted the challenge, and no discussion took place.

But God did not remain silent. As the Chief Strategist, he was moving the right chess pieces to defend His Word and Work



Door of the castle church in Wittenberg

in His own good time. And it is in God that we should trust. According to our guide, one of Luther's students smuggled the theses out, got it copied, translated and printed in Basel. It went viral – fast and wide. Without copyright or censorship, the pamphlets were spread all over Germany and Europe within weeks. The lay people who could not read were absorbed by the public reading of the theses. The theses gained traction because it was a reflection of the people's plight.

The break with Rome came on January 3, 1521 when the pope excommunicated Luther. He was practically declared a heretic. But Luther had powerful allies in the person of Frederick III, the Elector of Saxony who pressured Emperor Charles V not to outlaw Luther without a hearing.

And so Luther was summoned to the Diet of Worms to recant his teachings. Instead of repentance, the journey to Worms was almost like a victory march. Luther was given a hero's welcome by the people who lined the streets. Indeed, he had no reason to recant when he said, "Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason – I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other – my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen"

In the language of the millennials, Luther was so dead. The Emperor issued the Edict of Worms (as tall if not taller than our local guide. See photo) and Luther was made an outlaw. What this means is that he could be killed by anyone without being punished.

On the trip home, the Elector of Saxony allowed Luther to be kidnapped on May 4. Luther was hidden in Wartburg Castle (1521-22) under the disguise of "Squire George".

It was in Wartburg Castle that



*The Edict of Worms*

*REFORMATION PILGRIMAGE: OF MAN, MACHINE AND MOVEMENT*

Luther translated the German New Testament in 11 weeks. This formed the foundation of the first complete German Bible which was ready in 1533 and the first edition was printed in 1534.



*1st edition of Luther's German Bible*

Luther was both an evangelist and a linguist who set the gold standard for High German in his translation. The people read the Bible not only to know the Truth but to learn the language. But the cost of the Bible (one cow and a pig, according to our guide) was beyond the means of the majority. Their solution – buy in pages according to their budget. Even if they could afford the pages, most were not literate. This was when Lucas Cranach's woodcut drawings became useful. To me, the first German Bible was the first serialised comic strip and textbook.

According to Philip Schaff, Luther made the Reformation and the Reformation made him. By my own yardstick, Luther was the original



*Cranach's drawings in early German Bibles*

superstar – a giant slayer of his times.

### **Whither the Reformation?**

The Reformation Pilgrimage was a journey in God's Providence. Very often, we are too focused on our trials and tribulations that we do not wait for or see God's big picture for us.

I am reminded to trust God and not men because they are not perfect. While Erasmus was critical of the abuses within the Church and called for reform, he kept his distance from Luther and continued to recognise the authority of the pope.

Even men of courage and conviction whom God raised can fail us. Luther was anti-semitic (albeit not in the racist sense) when he failed to convert the Jews.

Ulrich Zwingli (1484 – 1531) was a leader of the Reformation in Switzerland. He persecuted the Anabaptists (one who baptises again) to protect the nascent Reformation movement. The Anabaptists (the Amish are direct descendants) rejected infant baptism and believed in baptising converts again even though they had been baptised as infants. Felix Manz and five others were drowned in the River Limmat in Zurich. Pastor explained when there was no separation between state and religion, the consequence was much confusion.

The Reformation Pilgrimage was also a journey to guard our hearts from turning stone cold. We saw many monuments and I am reminded that they are meaningless if the legacy of the reformers do not live in our hearts.

The saddest part of the pilgrimage was at the site in Constance where Huss was burnt at the stake in 1415 where he prayed, "Lord Jesus, it is for thee that I patiently endure this cruel death. I pray thee to have mercy on my enemies."

I found myself asking the question, "What did he die for? And to what end?"

The Bethlehem Chapel where he once preached was converted from a Protestant to Catholic church in 1661 by the Jesuits. It was desecrated and demolished in 1786. What we saw on the pilgrimage was a reconstruction in the 1950s. According to the Czech Republic's 2011 census, 34.2% of the population had no religion, 10.3% was Roman Catholic and 0.4% belonged to the Czechoslovak Hussite Church, tracing

its roots to John Huss.

As a church, we must pray that we will be a living church, not a monument. We must pray for Far Eastern Bible College to raise up more men and women who will start a revival in wherever they are called to serve. Above all, I see the need to document the Bible-Presbyterian movement. Future generations must know where we came from, what we are and why we are defending His Word, lest we forget.

On the last day of the pilgrimage, we had devotion in the Reformed Evangelical Church in Grindelwald, Switzerland. Pastor reminded us that the pilgrimage may be coming to an end, but we continue as pilgrims in our sojourn here. As our voices soared to the high heavens (the acoustics in the church is exquisite) singing “Great Is Thy Faithfulness”, I am reminded I can and should do better as a Christian until I touch the face of God.

To God be the glory!

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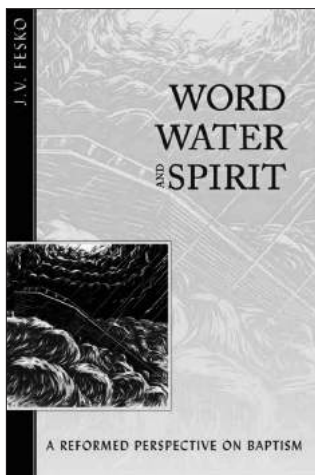
*S M Wong is a member of True Life Bible-Presbyterian Church. The above Reformation Pilgrimage, FEBC's 3<sup>rd</sup>, was conducted in May 2016.*

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# ***WORD, WATER, AND SPIRIT: A REFORMED PERSPECTIVE ON BAPTISM:*** **A BOOK REVIEW**

Chin-Meng Cheong



J V Fesko in his book—*Word, Water, and Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 480pp—argues for adult and infant baptism through a thorough biblical and historical study of the doctrine. As the stated purpose of Fesko’s book was to validate the exegetical and theological conclusions of the Westminster Confession of Faith on baptism, Fesko defended the Confession’s baptismal statements most comprehensively.

## **History of the Doctrine**

In Fesko’s research on the history of baptism, he found that during the Patristic and Middle eras, such a man as St Augustine advocated the practice of infant baptism, but he held to the view of baptismal regeneration through the sacrament. In latter times, Reformers Luther, Zwingli and Calvin countered such a heretical view. John Calvin is seen as the theologian of the Reformation whose writings have survived up till the present time, and of whose doctrinal views have remained to be the standards for today’s Reformed churches. On the sacraments, first, Calvin defined it as “an outward sign by which the Lord seals on our consciences the promises of His good will toward us in order to sustain the weakness of our faith; and we in turn attest our piety toward him in the presence of the Lord and of His angels before men.” Calvin denied baptismal regeneration but saw the sacrament as “a visible sign of a sacred thing” or “a visible form of an invisible grace.” Second, Calvin echoed Luther’s

teaching that a sacrament is the visible Word or promise of God. Calvin wrote in his commentary on Genesis, “It is common to all sacraments to have the word of God annexed to them, by which He testifies that He is propitious to us, and calls us to the hope of salvation; yea, a sacrament is nothing else than a visible word, or sculpture and image of that grace of God, which the word more fully illustrates.” In another place Calvin wrote, “Just as men are known by their appearance and speech, so God utters His voice to us by the voice of the prophets, and in the Sacraments puts on, as it were, a visible form from which He can be known according to our small capacity.” Third, Calvin agreed with Zwingli who saw baptism as the baptised believer’s expression of commitment to the Lord, besides it being God’s means of self-revelation of His covenantal promises. Fourth, on the issue of infant baptism, he argued for it. Children of believing parents ought to be given the sign of the covenant as well. This view is held by Reformed churches because they see baptism as linked to God’s covenant of grace with His redeemed people.

The Westminster Standards upon which Reformed churches based their practice is also Calvinistic in their doctrinal statements on baptism. The Shorter Catechism rightly defines a sacrament as “a holy ordinance instituted by Christ; wherein by sensible signs, Christ, and the benefits of the new covenant, are represented, sealed, and applied.” (Q92). The Westminster Standards advocate infant baptism. Thus, Fesko’s research into the Reformed churches’ doctrine and administration of baptism has come from such spiritual roots. This aspect of Fesko’s research is particularly helpful for churches which hold to the Reformed and Calvinistic view of adult and infant baptism.

Our greater attention shall now be directed to the biblical text for Fesko’s biblical-theological survey of the baptismal doctrine.

### **Biblical Basis for the Doctrine**

From where did the New Testament (NT) sacrament of baptism originate? Did it originate in the rituals of inter-testamental Judaism or in the Qumran cleansing rituals? Fesko argues that the NT sacrament of baptism originates from the Old Testament (OT).

The OT washing is a precursor to the NT practice of baptism. A key verse cited by Fesko is Numbers 19:18. Clean water was sprinkled on one who was to be cleansed. David in his plea for forgiveness said, “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than

snow” (Ps 51:7 cf. Isa 1:16; Ezek 36:25; Zech 13:1). He also cites the washing of Aaron and his sons for their ministerial duties. Their hands and feet have to be washed before they enter into the tabernacle (Exod 30:17-21), and the priests have to wash themselves before putting on their priestly garments (Lev 13:6, 34). Those with leprosy or with bodily discharge have also to be washed (Lev 15).

Furthermore, the OT prophets Isaiah, Ezekiel and Zechariah prophesied of the future restoration, linking it with the sprinkling of water and the Holy Spirit. Ezekiel 36:25 says, “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.” Likewise, in Zechariah 13:1, “In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness.” The use of water for cleansing of sin is indicated in these verses foretelling of Israel’s future restoration. This is reminiscent of Levitical cleansing rituals (Lev 1:5, 11; 16:16, 19).

The water-cleansing imagery is combined also with the Holy Spirit’s work. Ezekiel 36:27 states, “And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgements, and do them.” Isaiah 44:3 says similarly, “For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring” (cf. Isa 12:3; 30:25; 32:3, 15; 33:21; 35:6; 41:18; 43:20; 51:3; 55:1; 66:12). The combination of the water-cleansing imagery and the Holy Spirit’s work in the eschatological restoration of Israel supports the view that NT baptism, such as John the Baptist’s baptism and that of Pentecost, is foreshadowed in the OT Scriptures (Matt 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; 24:49; Acts 1:4; 2:16-17, 38). In what aspects are the connections of the Testaments? They are in the common denominators of water, forgiveness of sins, and the outpouring and presence of the Holy Spirit. Fesko seeks to show baptism as new creation which to him is a unifying theme in both Testaments. He does this by reasoning from the biblical record of the creation, the Flood, the Red Sea crossing, the baptism of Jesus, and certain Pauline texts.

### **Baptism as Covenant Blessing and Judgement**

God has dealt with His people according to His covenants which He initiated and made with them. It is important to understand the biblical teaching on the covenants as it is key to comprehending aright



the Scriptures. Fesko listed several major covenants, namely the Adamic, Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic and Davidic covenants.

Fesko's says that circumcision as a sacramental practice is superseded by the baptism in NT. He also says that the two sacraments—circumcision and baptism—represent not only covenant blessing (or new creation), but also covenant judgement.

### Circumcision and Curse

When God made the covenant with Abraham, He commanded the patriarch to cut the animals in half (Gen 15:9-10). "And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces" (Gen 15:17). The "smoking furnace and burning lamp" signified the presence of God. Why did God pass between the severed animal halves? Was it God's oath of self-malediction? Fesko explains that in a treaty agreement, if a covenant-maker violates the terms of the covenant, then the penalty for the transgressor would be like the animals which have been severed. As such Fesko argues that there is a judgement aspect to the covenant. Furthermore the practice of severing animal into halves in covenant ratification is reflected in the language terminology of "cutting a covenant."

### Circumcision and Covenantal Judgement

Circumcision rite is both bloody and painful. God says, "And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant" (Gen 17:14). Thus circumcision consists of both elements of blessing and cursing. Circumcision was not just an outward sign without the inward spiritual reality of the circumcision of the heart. The Lord requires both of His covenant people. The Lord says through His prophet, "Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings" (Jer 4:4).

### Circumcision and the Exodus

God wanted to kill Moses because he had failed to circumcise his son (Exod 4:24-26). This was an expression of God's covenant judgement. Zipporah, his wife, then circumcised his son, and touched

Moses' feet with the severed foreskin. This averted God's judgement upon him. The circumcision of Moses' son foreshadowed the coming Passover judgement-deliverance. The Egyptian firstborn who came not under the blood of the Passover lamb fell under God's wrath, whereas Israelite firstborn, who were under the blood, were redeemed from His wrath. Fesko opines there is a link between the circumcision of Moses' son and the Passover (Exod 4:23, 24-26). If so, the Passover was like the Abrahamic covenant ratification ceremony. Either God bears the curse or man. Circumcision and Passover both point to the substitutionary sacrifice, the former with the severing of the foreskin, and latter requires the Passover lamb. In both practices blood was shed.

### Circumcision and the Conquest

Joshua was commanded of the Lord to circumcise all the Jewish males before they entered into the Promised Land. He obeyed and circumcised all the men of Israel (Josh 5:2-3). Those who had perished in the wilderness were those who "obeyed not the voice of the LORD" (Josh 5:6). Hebrews 4:2 says that they had not faith, thus they believed not in the promise of God. Israel's circumcision was in preparation for the Passover feast (Josh 5:8-10). The circumcision-Passover combination is reminiscent of that in Exodus 4, and thus reiterates the theme of redemption and judgement curse, symbolised by the severed foreskin and the sacrificial lamb. Thus the narrative indicates that Israel's blessed state in the Promised Land could only be secured through a substitutionary sacrifice. He would bear the curse of the covenant, symbolised by the severed foreskin in circumcision. Christ must suffer the curse of the covenant on behalf of sinful Israel (cf. Isa 53:8; Jer 11:19, 21). This suffering of Christ was symbolically seen in His circumcision as an infant.

### Circumcision and Baptism

Fesko argues for the close connection of the OT circumcision and the NT practice of baptism. Both the sign and the thing signified in these sacraments were applied to Christ and to believers. First, he argues that the circumcision of Christ points to His crucifixion, who was cut off from the benevolent presence of God and the covenant community. Christ was crucified "without the camp" (Heb 13:12-13). The sword of judgement that sought the life of Moses, that fell on the Egyptian firstborn, was turned on Him.

Fesko explains the links between circumcision and baptism in Colossians 2:11-12. One need not separate the sign and the thing signified. Christ has accomplished for both Testaments' believers through His life, death, resurrection, ascension, and the consequent outpouring of the Spirit. The physical circumcision points to a spiritual circumcision made without hands. God Himself accomplishes it through Christ's atoning work and the Spirit. The Spirit consequently regenerates the believers, of which work is the removal of the foreskin of the heart or in the terms of Colossians 2:11b, "putting off the body of the sins of the flesh" (cf. Deut 30:6; Tit 3:5). This is accomplished by the "circumcision of Christ," which means Christ's crucifixion. Fesko reasons that in both circumcision and baptism as applied to both Christ and the believers, the sign and the thing it signifies are joined. Thus to be baptised into Christ is to be "baptised into His death" (Rom 6:3) and "buried with Him" (Col 2:12).

The link between Christ's suffering and the Spirit's regenerative work is also evidenced in such passages as Galatians 3:13-14, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." Christ underwent the curse of the covenant, being crucified, or in other words, circumcised or cut off, and the consequence was the outpouring of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit accomplished the circumcision made without hands on the people of God.

### Baptism as Covenant Promise

When Christ spoke of His baptism, He referred it to His crucifixion and death. He said to James and John, "Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptised with the baptism that I am baptised with?" (Mark 10:38b). In another place, He said, "But I have a baptism to be baptised with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" (Luke 12:50). Similarly when Jesus submitted Himself to the Baptist's baptism, it was a baptism that pointed to His crucifixion. Consequently, Christ's baptism became believers' baptism. Christ's resurrection affirms His righteous standing before God (Rom 1:3-4; 1 Tim 3:16). In addition, the baptism-circumcision imagery of the new creation is also evident at Pentecost. The 50<sup>th</sup>-day festival consists of 49 days or seven multiplied by seven days (Lev 23:15-16). The 50<sup>th</sup> day occurs on an eighth day which

circumcision has in common. Fesko explains it as the first day of a new week, which implies a new beginning or a new creation.

The covenant promises consisted of the outpouring of the Spirit of God on God's people. The outpouring of the Spirit brings forth new life and new creation, and the new heaven and new earth of the eschatological eighth day. Further, the circumcision of the Jewish males pointed to the future male descendants who would experience the circumcision-baptism in order to redeem Israel. This was done in order to avert God's wrath on Israel, and for that matter, the believing Gentiles also. Christ was cut off in order that God's people would not suffer the covenant curse.

### **Baptism as Eschatological**

Baptism represents both the new creation and the covenant. In this segment Fesko deals with the latter. Baptism represents for believers the deliverance from sin and for unbelievers the destruction of sin, such as was manifested in the flood of Noah's time. The floodwaters became to the unbelievers the flood of judgement, but for believers salvation.

#### **Fire of Purification**

For the people of God, the baptism of the Spirit is a purifying and refining fire. This purifying fire cleanses God's people of their impurities (cf. Zech 13:9; Isa 1:25; Mal 3:2). At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples. The Spirit's coming was described as "cloven tongues like as of fire...and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:3-4). In the OT, God's presence has been manifested by fire, such as His appearance to Moses in a burning bush (Exod 3:2-5), the pillar of fire that led Israel during the night (Exod 13:21), and the fire that hovered over the tabernacle (Exod 40:38). Fesko asserts that for God's people, the fiery manifestation of the Spirit's presence is a blessing.

The purifying fire of the Spirit is also stated in Isaiah 4:4-5, "When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgement, and by the spirit of burning. And the LORD will create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defence." The holy remnant that remains in Zion and Jerusalem shall be cleansed "by the spirit of judgement, and by the spirit of burning" (Isa 4:3-4). This refers to the

Holy Spirit's purifying fire. Isaiah 4:5 states the Lord shall create a dwelling for the holy remnant. This is the positive aspect of the baptism of fire.

### Fire of Wrath

The negative aspect of the baptism of fire is also clearly taught in the Scriptures. John the Baptist said that the Messiah would use the winnowing fork to separate the wheat from the chaff and burn the latter with unquenchable fire (Matt 3:12). In the OT, fire is associated with the destruction of the wicked. "For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch" (Mal 4:1 cf. Isa 31:9; Amos 7:4). "The day that cometh" refers to "the day of the LORD" which is a day of judgement and wrath upon the unrepentant of the earth. This fiery destruction is a manifestation of covenant curse (Deut 32:22).

The Lord Jesus also spoke using the fire imagery, "I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled? But I have a baptism to be baptised with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished! Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division" (Luke 12:49-51). The Lord shall send fiery judgement upon the earth. At the same time, He also foretold of His own judgement-baptism that He has to undergo. This was of course on behalf of sinners. The Lord said of the fiery destruction that fell upon Sodom shall be similar to that at His Second Coming. The Apostle Peter spoke of the ultimate destruction by fire of the present atmospheric heaven and earth (2 Pet 3:7, 10-13). God shall create a new heaven and a new earth.

Thus Fesko argues that Christ who baptises with the Spirit and with fire has a twofold purpose, first, the Spirit's fire is to purify, purge and refine the people of God; and second, Christ baptises with fire to curse the unbelieving and unrepentant ones. The unbelievers in the whole world shall face God's wrath and fiery judgement. These shall have no part in the Messianic kingdom. It is through such sufferings of the purification-baptism and condemnation-baptism that the promises of the Messianic kingdom shall be fulfilled.

### Universal Fire-Baptism Flood

There is a close connection between the Holy Spirit and water, or in other words, the outpouring of the Spirit and the waters of new creation.

Isaiah 44:3 says, “For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring.” Ezekiel also spoke of a time when God will sprinkle His people with water and place His Spirit within them (Ezek 36:25-27). Fesko cites the Lord Jesus’ words in John 7:37-39 to reinforce this point. During that Feast of Tabernacle, the Lord seemingly paired water and the Spirit together as was revealed in the OT. There is also a Messianic link in all these citations (cf. Isa 12:3; 44:3; 49:10; Ezek 36:25-37; 47:1; Joel 3:18; Amos 9:11-15; Zech 13:1).

The Apostle Peter sees in human history three epochs divided by two world-wide catastrophes—the world before the Flood, the present world that shall end in eschatological judgement (2 Pet 3:7), and the world to come (3:13). The first flood was by water, the second flood shall be by fire: “But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgement and perdition of ungodly men” (3:7). “Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (3:13).

To sum up this segment, Fesko shows the variegated imagery and ideas linked with the rites of circumcision and baptism—namely, new creation, covenant judgement, and eschatological judgement. He shows that the sacrament of baptism originated in the OT, even from the opening verses of the Bible. He uses the events of the Noahic flood and the Red Sea crossing to explain these ideas.

He has made clear that circumcision is superseded by baptism because Christ has been circumcised, cut off or crucified, buried and resurrected. Christ baptised His church when He poured out the Spirit upon His church. The idea of baptism is the outpouring of the Spirit which gives spiritual life to those who believe, and to those who are unbelieving the baptismal fire of the Spirit shall result in their eternal destruction as in the Noahic flood.

### **Baptism as a Means of Grace**

Fesko seeks to prove that baptism is a means of grace. His approach is first to define the term grace, and then to identify the means by which God’s grace is received. The historic Reformed church has basically identified the Word and the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper as means of grace. By which God objectively communicates His grace

through the revelatory means of the audible and visible Word.

First, what is grace? Grace is God's favour to sinful men received through the Mediatorship of Christ. This grace results in sinful men's salvation through the redemptive work of Christ, the efficacy of Christ's saving work applied to them through the sovereign working of the Holy Spirit.

Second, Fesko identifies the means of grace by which God reveals His salvific grace to men. These are the Word of God and the sacraments, termed by the Reformers as the audible and visible Word respectively. This is aptly stated in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession largely written by Philip Melanchthon which states, "For just as the Word enters through the ear in order to strike the heart, so also the rite enters through the eye in order to move the heart. The word and the rite have the same effect. Augustine put it well when he said that the sacrament is a 'visible word,' because the rite is received by the eyes and is, as it were, a picture of the Word, signifying the same thing as the Word. Therefore both have the same effect." The Westminster Confession of Faith states that the sacraments are "holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by God, to represent Christ, and His benefits" (27.1). The Word and sacraments are objective means of grace

Third, Fesko explains the means of grace in relation to the covenant. God's dealing with men has been according to His covenants with them. God gives salvific grace according to His covenant of grace. Christ is the Mediator of this covenant through which God gives His pardoning grace to sinful men. The covenant points to the necessity of the means of grace of the Word and sacrament through which God reveals His gospel of saving grace. Fesko says, "So baptism preaches a message through water, though this message can only be heard and effectual when it is united to the preaching of the Word. Water alone has no power to save or cleanse. Rather, in conjunction with the preaching of the Word, God through the Spirit saves and sanctifies. In technical theological language, baptism is a means of grace."

There are those like Ulrich Zwingli who do not regard the sacraments as a means of grace. And there are others who extend the means of grace far beyond the Word and the sacraments. In this regard, Fesko refutes the error of baptismal regeneration.

## **Baptism as a Sacrament**

What are sacraments? Westminster Confession rightly defines it as “holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace” (27.1). There is a revelatory aspect to the sacraments. It reveals God and Christ, and of their dealings with men in the context of the covenants. Hence, sacraments are not merely oath-pledges made by baptised believers.

In God’s covenantal administration during different periods of human history, He has given signs like the rainbow in the Noahic covenant. God promises Noah and his descendants He will never again flood the earth with water (Gen 9:9-11). With Abraham, God said to him to circumcise all the male adults and male infants. The circumcision was the sign and seal of the covenant He made with them (Gen 17:11). This sign pointed to the work of Christ who was “cut off” from the benevolent presence of God for His people. At the same time it pointed to the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit. For only the Spirit could circumcise their hearts (Deut 10:16; Deut 30:6; cf. Rom 2:28-29). Hence the sacraments serve as signs to reveal the person and work of the triune God especially Christ’s, and as seals to confirm the trustworthiness of God’s covenantal promises. Fesko further distinguishes signs and sacraments. All sacraments are signs, but not all signs are sacraments. Circumcision, which is superseded by baptism, and the Lord’s Supper are sacraments because God affirms it in His Scriptures.

Augustine has well said that the sacraments are visible signs of invisible grace. The signs point to the unseen incarnate Messiah and the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit. Calvin explained why God gave signs. He wrote: “For God’s truth is of itself firm and sure enough, and it cannot receive better confirmation from any other source than from itself. But as our faith is slight and feeble unless it be propped on all sides and sustained by every means, it trembles, wavers, totters, and at last it gives way. Here our merciful Lord, according to His infinite kindness, so tempers Himself to our capacity that, since we are creatures who always creep on the ground, cleave to the flesh, and do not think about or even conceive of anything spiritual, He condescends to lead us to Himself even by earthly elements, and to set before us in the flesh a mirror of spiritual blessings. For if we were incorporeal (as Chrysostom says), He would give us these very things naked and incorporeal. Now, because we have souls engrafted into bodies, He imparts spiritual things under visible ones.” (Institutes, 4.14.3). As sensory signs, Berkhof said that God has



given the word for the ear and the sacraments for the eye in order to aid sinful man in understanding His truth. The Westminster Larger Catechism states, “The sacraments do comfort sinful man and strengthen his faith by giving him something to behold, taste, and feel (Q162). The desire to know God through all of the senses is ultimately the goal of creation and redemption (cf. Gen 3:8; Rev 22:4).

There are several views concerning the relation of the sacramental sign and the thing it signifies. First, the Roman Catholic Church holds to the dogma that the sacrament is equated to “the washing of regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Spirit.” That is baptismal regeneration.

Second, there are those like Ulrich Zwingli who hold that the sacraments are simply as memorials. Millard Erickson argues for this, “The act of baptism conveys no direct spiritual benefit or blessing.”

Third, Luther and the Lutherans believe in the efficacy of the sacrament, not in the actual administration of it as the Roman Catholic Church does, but in the promise of God’s Word. At the same time, the Lutherans saw the need of faith. Their Confession states: “A promise is useless unless it is received by faith. But the sacraments are the signs of the promises. Therefore, in their use faith needs to be present.” But later Lutheranism shifted its doctrinal position closer to that of the Roman Catholic Church. Francis Pieper writes of the neo-Lutheranism, “They teach that Baptism communicates psychic (‘psychophysical’) powers and gifts which the baptised do not receive with the hand of faith. This is the Romanizing element in their teaching.”

Fourth, Reformed theologians hold that the sacramental sign and the thing signified are closely linked. The Westminster Confession states, “There is, in every sacrament, a spiritual relation, or sacramental union, between the sign and the thing signified: whence it comes to pass, that the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other” (27.2). As the OT sacraments and sacrifices have no efficacy but pointed to the person and work of Christ, so also the NT sacraments pointed to His redemptive work. Hence the water in the baptism saves not, but Christ saves through the Spirit. This salvific work is signified and sealed by means of the sacrament.

In conclusion, the sacraments are signs and seals of the covenant of grace. The sacraments have no efficacy to save. Rather the sacraments serve to reveal the person and work of the triune God in His redemption of fallen men.

## **Institution of Baptism**

Fesko says that NT baptism was instituted by Christ in the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20). In Christ's post-resurrection appearance and just prior to His ascension, He affirms His sovereign rule and commanded His disciples to baptise new converts. On the formula of NT Christian baptism, new converts are baptised in the name of the triune God. Fesko, quoting John Murray, explains that the NT baptism in the name of the triune God means sacramentally to enter into a relationship with the Lord by union with the Mediator of the new covenant, by which believers are made beneficiaries of the blessings of redemption and submit to His covenant lordship.

Fesko argues that baptism is a sign and seal of church membership, "for the solemn admission of the party baptised into the visible church" (WCF 28.1), and that the church is a covenant community. On the first point, Fesko reasons that baptism is more than an act of public profession of one's faith, it is also to become part of the visible church. In regard to the visible church, he acknowledges that the visible church is a mixed body. By this he means that not all baptised persons are true believers, even though church ministers and elders ought to keep church purity at the highest level. There are those who apostatise (Matt 13:5-6). By apostatising, their baptism has become to them a judgement-baptism. Fesko sees a distinction between the visible and invisible church.

On the second point on baptism as an initiation into the covenant community, Fesko argues that the church is a covenant community and not a voluntary association. It is because the church is a covenant community that children of believing parents could be baptised into it. At the same time, Fesko makes it clear that baptism does not guarantee a person is part of the invisible church. The presence or absence of faith in Christ is key to whether one's baptism is unto blessing or judgement. He cited the example of Israel in her wanderings. They were baptised in the Red Sea under the leadership of Moses. But not all exercised faith in Christ who was with them (Heb 4:2). Baptism is thus the sign and seal of the covenant of grace by which sacrament the covenant community is distinguished from the unbelieving world, such as the Red Sea baptism differentiated them from the pursuing Egyptian army. For the first, it was a baptism of blessing, and for the second, it was a blessing of judgement.

Baptism into Christ indicates the believers' union with Him. This union with Christ is in His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension

(Rom 6:3-4). Water baptism also signifies the baptism of the Spirit. It is by the operation of the Spirit that effects a person's union with Christ. A believer's faith in Christ is Spirit-wrought (Eph 2:8-9). Faith is the instrumental cause in a person's union with Christ. It is the same in Abraham's case. Righteousness was imputed to him based on his Spirit-wrought faith, and not his circumcision, the sacrament was incorporated after he had believed. Circumcision pointed to the same truth as baptism, which is the death of Christ, and the cutting away or burial of the body of sin. Fesko is against the idea of baptismal regeneration.

Christ is the covenantal head. The benefits of His redemptive works are applied to the believers through the operation of the Spirit. The Spirit's baptism signifies and seals such salvific benefits. Furthermore Fesko urges that every baptised Christian is to commit himself wholly to Christ. As baptism signifies union with Christ in His death and resurrection, every Christian is to die to sin and live unto righteousness. In this regard, every baptised Christian, child or adult, is subject to church discipline. Fesko argues that baptism of a child or even an adult should not be conducted if the spiritual nurture through the preaching of the gospel truths could not be done. He says "baptism and the gospel must go hand in hand, and must continue to be conjoined throughout the life of the one baptised, infant, child, or adult." He further says, "If there is no commitment from the parent(s) to raise the child in the way of the cross, in the fear and admonition of the Lord, then the church practises idolatry and turns the baptism of the child into a mere dedication or saccharine ceremony."

Baptism has an eschatological aspect to it. Christians are also united to Christ in His resurrection. It is by the Spirit of Christ that brought the newness of life in every Christian. Baptism thus signifies the new creation brought forth by the outpouring of the Spirit following the glorification of Christ. Nicodemus was told that except a person is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God (John 3:5). The same Spirit of God was involved in the creative process during the creation week in Genesis 1. The same Spirit descended upon Christ at His baptism (Mark 1:1-11; Matt 3:1-17; Luke 3:21-22). Fesko sees baptism as Christocentric, but its effects as Pneumatic. Baptism is as much a visible representation of the work of Christ as well as the Spirit's, and the power of the age to come (Heb 6:4-5).

## **Mode of Baptism**

Fesko takes the view that the modes of baptism by immersion, pouring and sprinkling are all biblically acceptable modes.

Fesko writes that the exclusivity of immersion-only baptism was an unprecedented move in the history of the doctrine. The Baptist Confession (1689) states, “Immersion, or dipping of the person in water, is necessary to the due administration of this ordinance” (29.4). The Baptists argue for this exclusivity of immersion-only mode of baptism based on the term baptizo and the grammar in such accounts as Acts 8:39, “they were come up out of the water”. Fesko in turn says that the meaning of baptizo should be determined by its contextual usage. He further reasons that at Pentecost, the baptism of the Spirit was rather by pouring instead of by immersion (Acts 2:17 cf. Joel 2:28).

First, immersion is a proper mode of baptism, besides pouring and sprinkling. Peter calls the flood a type of baptism (1 Pet 3:20-21). Noah and his family were saved through this baptism, but the unbelieving world perished by being immersed in the baptism-judgement of God. Likely Paul terms the Red Sea crossing a baptism (1 Cor 10:1-2). Israel was saved through that baptism, but the Egyptian army was destroyed being immersed in the baptism-judgement. Also Christ called His crucifixion a baptism (Luke 12:50). He was immersed in the floodwaters of His Father’s wrath. Psalm 69:1-2 was thought to be in the Lord’s mind when He spoke of His crucifixion as baptism. In the Psalm, the Psalmist cried out to God as the waters have come up to his neck. Thus Fesko agrees that baptism by immersion has a biblical basis.

Second, baptism by pouring also has its biblical support. Isaiah 44:3 foretells of the outpouring of the Spirit: “For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring.” Ezekiel 39:29 similarly says: “Neither will I hide my face any more from them: for I have poured out my spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord GOD.” Similar references in the OT could be found in Proverbs 1:23, Joel 2:28-29 and Zechariah 12:10. Likewise in the NT, Acts 2:17 which says Christ poured out His Spirit upon the church. Thus baptism by pouring is an equally acceptable mode.

Third, baptism by sprinkling is also taught in the Scripture. The cleansing rituals of the Levitical system involve sprinkling. During the

consecration rites of the Levitical priests, water was sprinkled on them (Num 8:5-22, esp. v7). David cried to the Lord to cleanse him, that the Lord should purge him with hyssop (Ps 51:7). This mode of cleansing was according to the OT cleansing ritual (Num 19:18-20). Similarly Ezekiel 36:25 says, “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.” This mode of baptism is spoken in the context of the giving of the Spirit (Ezek 36:27), the Spirit who is the agent of cleansing and sanctification.

What is critical in baptism is not the mode but the preaching of the Word, says Fesko. Thus the preaching of the Gospel must accompany the sacrament of baptism. In fact, Fesko asserts that the Word can exist apart from the sacrament, but the sacrament cannot exist apart from the Word.

### **Baptism and Its Recipients**

All denominations practise adult baptism. But the debate rages on particularly in regard to infant baptism. Fesko seeks to provide reasons in support of infant baptism. He explains the origin of baptism is found in the OT, and that adult and infant baptisms have to be seen in the light of God’s covenant with His redeemed people. Not all would see it in this light such as the dispensationalists who do not regard the OT as relevant in understanding the doctrine and practice of baptism. Consequently they do not regard the continuity of the Abrahamic covenant as the biblical basis for infant baptism.

First, Fesko argues that circumcision is not merely a physical, national and ceremonial rite of God’s covenant people, Israel. Circumcision has also spiritual connotation and is a sign of the gospel. Both circumcision and baptism point to the person and work of Christ, and His consequent outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Christ, the Seed of the woman who came (Gen 3:15), bore the curse of the covenant in His body on behalf of God’s redeemed people. Israel’s circumcised males, collectively pointed to Him, the male Seed who was circumcised, that is, cut off from God’s benevolent presence and the covenant community. His circumcision was to accomplish His redemptive works at the cruel cross.

Second, Fesko argues on the spiritual aspect of the circumcision from the Mosaic exhortation: “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked” (Deut 10:16). And in Deuteronomy 30:6 Moses said, “And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart,

and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.” The spiritual connotation in circumcision is also expressed by the Apostle Paul in Romans 2:29, “But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.”

Third, the spiritual aspect of circumcision which Abraham and his descendants were given as a sign and seal of the covenant was expressed by Paul when he spoke of the Gentiles’ inclusion in the Abrahamic covenant by faith in Christ. The Apostle wrote, “And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed” (Gal 3:8). Thus circumcision is a sign of the gospel which points to the Mediator of the covenant of grace.

Fesko argues for infant baptism on the basis of the household principle. God has dealt with family units, not isolated individuals apart from the covenant. This familial principle is seen in God’s dealing with the patriarch Abraham (Gen 17:12-13). This principle is also seen in Joshua stating that both he and his house would serve the Lord (Josh 24:15), and the salvation of Rahab and her father’s household (Josh 6:25). Furthermore, the corporate nature of baptism was operative in Israel’s Passover-deliverance and Red Sea deliverance.

In the NT, this same corporate pattern is seen in the salvation and baptism of households, such as the households of Lydia at Philippi (Acts 16:15), the Philippian prison-guard (Acts 16:33), Crispus (Acts 18:8), Stephanas (1 Cor 1:16), and Onesiphorus (2 Tim 1:16; 4:19).

Baptist theologians contend that only those who professed faith could be baptised. Thus they ruled out infant baptism. Fesko argues that the administrative ground for infant baptism is rather based on God’s covenant promise. The Abrahamic covenant included infants who received the sign and seal of the covenant by means of circumcision. Fesko argues for the continuity of the Abrahamic covenant, and thus the continuity of administering the sign and seal of the covenant—circumcision in the OT and baptism in the NT—to infants of believing parents. Fesko did qualify that the administration of this sacrament to infants is not equated with baptismal regeneration. Neither does Fesko agree to paedocommunion.

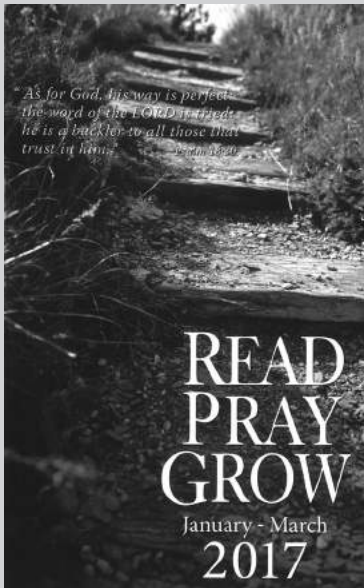
## Conclusion

Fesko has done thorough research into the doctrine and history of baptism. Particularly useful is his presentation of the Reformed doctrine of baptism by which those of us who hold the same view can appreciate how our Calvinistic observance of this doctrine has come to us through the ages.

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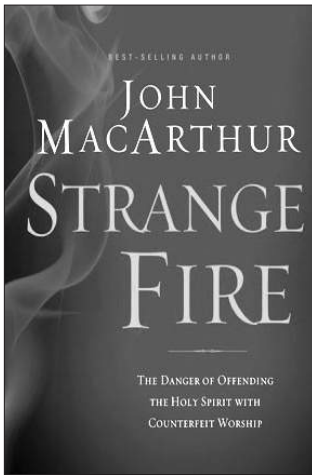
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# ***STRANGE FIRE: THE DANGER OF OFFENDING THE HOLY SPIRIT WITH COUNTERFEIT WORSHIP: A BOOK REVIEW***

Wai-Ho Yap



*Strange Fire: The Danger of Offending the Holy Spirit with Counterfeit Worship* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013) is authored by John F MacArthur, the pastor of Grace Community Church in Los Angeles, California and President of The Master's Seminary. He is a prolific writer having authored nearly 400 Christian books and Bible study guides.

## **Overview**

In 2013, Dr MacArthur and the Grace Community Church hosted a conference called *Strange Fire* where he launched his book with the same title. The title of the book takes reference from an Old Testament account in Leviticus 10, where two priests Nadab and Abihu, were devoured by divine fire as judgment came upon them for offering “strange fire” to God. Their sin was a careless and irreverent attitude in worship, before a holy God. The author likens the theology and practices of the Charismatic Movement today to “strange fire”. In his treatise, MacArthur confronts the dangerous doctrines of the Charismatic Movement which has pervaded every major Christian denomination. In his introduction, the author especially highlights the erroneous and unscriptural portrayal of the Holy Spirit and His work (xii-xiv). The author concludes that the Holy Spirit of the Charismatic Movement is not the Holy Spirit described in the Bible. Rather, it is a golden-calf version of the Holy Spirit (xiv).

The author divides the book into three parts. The first part



entitled “Confronting a Counterfeit Revival” brings to light a historical perspective on the fraudulent excesses of the Charismatic Movement. The second part, “Exposing the Counterfeit Gifts” deals with the author’s biblical defence of his cessationist position against the Charismatic’s continuationist belief in the restoration of the four gifts, namely, apostleship, prophecy, tongue-speaking and miracle-healing. In the third part entitled “Rediscovering the Spirit’s True Work”, the author teaches the biblical doctrines on the Holy Spirit and His role in salvation, sanctification, inspiration and illumination of the Scriptures. The author ends part three with an open letter of warning and appeal to his continuationist friends to turn away from the errors of Charismatic theology.

### **Confronting a Counterfeit Revival**

In chapter one, “Mocking the Spirit”, the author exposes the greed and excesses of Charismatic preachers as well as the bizarre behaviour of them and their followers which they attribute to the work of the Holy Spirit (3-4). The author asserts that while the Charismatic Movement claims to emphasise the ministry of Holy Spirit, in actual fact, it treats the Holy Spirit with contempt and derision. Much of their bizarre practices which they attribute to the Holy Spirit’s doing, has resulted in a wrong impression and perception of who the Holy Spirit really is. It has made the Holy Spirit look like a farce or a fraud (5). While the Charismatics claim that they are privy to sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit which is not necessarily available to every believer, the author argues that this must be proven in the sanctified lives of their leaders. The author provides evidence that is certainly not the case as observed in morally disgraceful lives of their leaders in the past 30 years (6-8). The author then highlights the “Word of Faith” Movement which promotes a popular prosperity gospel contrary to the true gospel. The author describes the greed and deceptiveness of many Charismatic televangelists who prey on the gullible, greedy and desperate (10). According to the author, the remarkable popularity of this blatant heresy of the prosperity gospel is caused by a systemic defect in Charismatic theology, this being the elevation of religious experience above Bible truth (16).

In chapter two, “A New Work of the Spirit”, the author traces the origin and historical development of the Charismatic Movement. He focuses on two major events that are catalyst in the formation of

this movement. He first began describing the 1901 ministry of Charles Fox Parham who started the “Apostolic Faith Movement” (21). This movement was the precursor of the modern Pentecostal movement. A second major event was the Azusa Street revival in 1906, in which a young woman, Agnes Ozman claimed to speak in tongues (20). Parham promoted positive confession “What I confess, I possess”. This slogan was in turn popularised by William Kenyon, whose novel ideas and teachings led to formation of the “Word of Faith” Movement. The “Word of Faith” Movement due to its popular prosperity gospel propelled the growth of the Charismatic Movement so much so that it became known as the new Great Awakening much like the Great Awakening Movements of the previous centuries which revitalised Christianity (32). Chapter two concludes with an examination of the Great Awakening during the time of Jonathan Edwards and the five-fold test prescribed by Edwards to evaluate if the event is the true work of the Holy Spirit (35).

In chapters three and four, “Testing the Spirits”, the author uses the five-fold criteria which is based on Scripture (1 John 4:2-8) to evaluate the Charismatic Movement (37-38). The first criterion is based on whether the Movement exalts the true Christ (39). According to the author, the true work of the Spirit not only points people to Christ (41), but also affirms the truth about Christ (46). On both counts the Charismatic Movement fails. First, it fails to realise that exalting the Spirit and His gifts alone detracts from exalting Christ (44-45). Second, instead of affirming the truth about Christ, the Charismatic Movement espouses Christological heresies (47). The Charismatic Movement also fails on the second criterion which centres on whether it opposes worldliness (56). The countless examples of moral misconduct and worldliness of its leaders are clear evidences of its failure (60-64). The third criterion refers to whether it points people to the Scriptures (66). Again, the Charismatic Movement simply fails because it promotes the view of the insufficiency of Scripture and the need for extra-scriptural revelations (67-70). The Charismatic Movement also fails on the fourth criterion which is whether it elevates the Truth (71). Contrary to this criterion, it in fact promotes false doctrine (71-74). Lastly, it also fails on the fifth criterion which is whether it promotes love for God and others (74). Here, clearly the Charismatic Worship which is characterised by chaos and disorder dishonours God (75-78).

## **Exposing the Counterfeit Gifts**

In chapter five, “Apostles Among Us”, the author highlights the claim of Charismatics regarding the restoration of the office of Apostleship. Chief among the charismatic leaders who made this assertion was Peter Wagner who claimed that the year 2001, which signified the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, marked the beginning of the Second Apostolic Age (85). Claiming himself to be an Apostle, he called this new resurgence of Apostolic leadership, the New Apostolic Reformation (86). In 2000, he set up the International Coalition of Apostles, opened it to those who claimed Apostleship and started collecting membership fees. The author exposes the fraudulent claims of the New Apostolic Reformation. Using scriptural arguments, the author outlines the biblical criteria for Apostleship and concludes that it is not possible for any to possibly claim Apostleship in the church today. Using New Testament scriptural references, the author contends that there at least three criteria that must be met for a person to claim Apostleship (91-92). First, he must be a physical eye-witness of the resurrected Christ. Second, he must be appointed by Christ personally and third, his appointment must be attested by miraculous signs. Further arguments against charismatic claims include the Apostle’s unique authority, the fact of the church’s apostolic foundation having been completed in the first century, and that the post-Apostolic Church is now led by pastors, elders and deacons (94-98). Finally, the author a cessationist claims cessation of the office of Apostleship after the first century.

In chapter six, “The Folly of Fallible Prophets”, the author presents three biblical criteria gleaned from Deuteronomy 13:1-5, regarding the characteristics of false prophets. Accordingly, false prophets are those who lead others to false doctrine or heresy, live lives of unrepentant sin and debauchery, and claims extra-biblical revelation from God, which turns out to be untrue (106-108). Based on these criteria, the author asserts that Charismatics who claim to be prophets, are indeed false prophets. The author also thoroughly refutes charismatics who stood by Wayne Grudem’s teaching that prophets today need not be 100% accurate in their prophecy (114-115). The author provides scriptural evidence to show that even New Testament prophets such as Agabus, which the Charismatics claim to be a fallible prophet, was in fact infallible in his prophecy just like genuine Old Testament prophets (121-126).

The author discusses the tongue-speaking claimed by the

Charismatics in chapter seven which is entitled, “Twisting Tongues”. First, the tongue-speaking claimed by Charismatics, according to the author is actually non-linguistic irrational gibberish (136). It is certainly not the tongue-speaking described in Acts 2, which comprises known languages which can be interpreted (137). Using the Scriptures, the author provides a biblical understanding of tongue-speaking in a catechetical manner (143-154). Of particular concern to the author is the use of fabricated tongue-speaking for self-gratification, and justifying it by claiming that it makes one feel closer to God.

In chapter eight, “Fake Healing and False Hopes”, the author exposes the excesses of Charismatic leaders who dupe many into giving large sums of money to them in return for purported faith healing. He focused on two televangelists, Oral Roberts and Benny Hinn whom he considers perpetrators of this scam to cheat the gullible (155-159). The author then contrasts the healings claimed by Benny Hinn against that done by Jesus in the New Testament. The author points out that New Testament healings did not depend on the faith of the recipient, were not performed for money and provided complete undeniable healing (161-176). In sharp contrast, the healings by Benny Hinn are the complete opposite.

### **Rediscovering the Spirit’s True Work**

In chapter 9, “The Holy Spirit and Salvation” the author brings to attention the lackadaisical response of many evangelicals to the blatant blasphemy of the Charismatic Movement in mocking the Holy Spirit’s true nature. He attributes it to a diminished view of the Holy Spirit’s divine majesty by the modern Church which simply regards the Holy Spirit as a harmless dove (181-182). The author asserts that the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Holy Trinity is wholly God and possesses all the attributes of God. The author then outlines the orthodox doctrine of salvation and the Holy Spirit’s important role in convicting lost sinners, regenerating their hearts, bringing about repentance, and dramatic conversion (183-189). The Holy Spirit also indwells every believer and seals their salvation forever (192-194). Thus, every aspect of salvation has the Holy Spirit’s involvement, from justification to sanctification and finally glorification (194-195).

Chapter ten, “The Spirit and Sanctification”, focuses on the Holy Spirit’s work in sanctification. The author refutes the claim

of Charismatics that manifested ecstatic experiences such as being “overcome by the Spirit” or “slain by the Spirit” are evidences of being Spirit-filled (197-200). He further states that these bizarre antics make a mockery of the power and filling of the Holy Spirit (203). The author then explained the scriptural meaning of being Spirit-filled. A Spirit-filled Christian, according to the Scriptures, is one who submits to the Word of God, lives a life of walking in the Spirit and not in the flesh (203-209). Such a person is continually conformed to the image of Christ (209-211). Thus, the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer is the work of sanctification, helping the believer to conquer sin and become more and more like Christ (212).

In chapter 11, “the Spirit and Scriptures”, the author highlights the three-fold role of Holy Spirit with regard to the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit inspires, illuminates and empowers the Scriptures (224- 227). While the charismatics claim to represent the Holy Spirit, in actual fact, their perception and understanding of the Holy Spirit and His work runs contrary to what the Scriptures say (228); thus, the call by the author to honour the Holy Spirit by honouring the Scriptures (228-230). The author especially appeals to believers to earnestly contend for the faith especially against those who seek to undermine the authority of Scripture (219).

In chapter 12, the author presents a letter of appeal to his continuationist friends who call themselves “reformed charismatics” or “evangelical continuationists”. The author does not hold this group of people as equivalent to the charismatic false teachers and spiritual charlatans (231-232). He recognises them as Christians who uphold the authority of Scripture and fundamentals of the faith. However, he believes that their continuationist position exposes the evangelical church to the danger of influence from erroneous charismatic practices (232). Especially pertinent is their insistence on using biblical terminology to describe contemporary charismatic practices that does not match biblical description and practice (234). Using eight reasons, the author appeals to his continuationist friends to see the real dangers of charismatic theology and to reject the false doctrine (234-247).

The book concludes with an appendix with quotations from church leaders from the past attesting to the cessation of gifts and extra-biblical revelation after the first century.

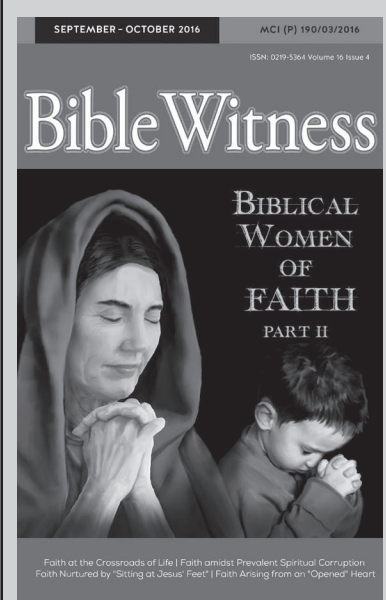
## Recommendation

The book is well written in a readable style. The average reader should be able to understand the issues at hand and the theological concepts presented. It is well researched with extensive documentation in the end notes (263-312). Overall the book is an excellent read for Christians interested in knowing about the erroneous practices of the Charismatic Movement. More importantly, it serves to warn those who are in it to come out of it. The reader in reading the book will be able to understand issues that are at stake regarding the Charismatic controversy. He will also gain a better understanding of the biblical truth regarding the Holy Spirit and His work. Finally, he will also learn the truth of cessationism.

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# Bible Witness

BIBLICAL  
WOMEN  
OF  
FAITH  
PART II

Faith at the Crossroads of Life | Faith amidst Prevalent Spiritual Corruption  
Faith Nurtured by "Sitting at Jesus' Feet" | Faith Arising from an "Openess" Heart

**Bible Witness** is a magazine for the nurture of individual spiritual life, a magazine for every Christian home, and a magazine for Bible study groups. Visit the Bible Witness website 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.

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## College News

**FEBC's new academic term** started with a day of prayer on Monday 18 July 2016. The college family gathered for a time of worship, Bible meditation, fellowship and prayer from 8.30 am to 12.30 pm at the sanctuary of Life Bible-Presbyterian Church. The Rev Dr Prabhudas Koshy—Dean of Students—was the Lord's messenger. He spoke from 2 Timothy 2:20-21 on how students must purge their hearts of all uncleanness if they wish to study God's Word and become good servants of God.

**The Rev Park Jong Gyoo**, who graduated from FEBC in 2002 and now a pastor-teacher of Pilgrim Church in Korea, gave a word of encouragement to all the students and shared with them three principles on how to succeed in FEBC: He told them to (1) strengthen their relationship with God, (2) strengthen their relationship with fellow students, and (3) strengthen their knowledge of God's Word.

**FEBC had a total enrolment of 541 students** in the July-November 2016 semester: 99 day students (fulltime: 50, part-time: 49), 261 students in the "Basic Theology for Everyone" night classes, and 181 distance learning students. The students come **from 12 countries**: Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, USA, and Vietnam. We welcomed nine new students: Five from Korea: **Gouk Taehwan, Jeong Youngjoo, Kang Songhan, Kwak Wonyoung, Park Heeyoung**; two from Singapore: **David Chew, Katharine Kiew**; one from India: **Ajay Daram**; one from USA: **Dominic Zinnanti**.

**The courses** offered last semester were **Systematic Theology III (Soteriology), Charismatism, Greek Exegesis I** by the Rev Dr Jeffrey Khoo; **Deuteronomy, Contemporary Theology I, Hebrew Reading I** by the Rev Dr Quek Suan Yew; **Homiletics, The Names of God** by the Rev Dr Prabhudas Koshy; **Greek Elementary I** by Mrs Ivy Tow; **2 Samuel** by the Rev Stephen Khoo; **Bible Geography IV, Cults IV** by the Rev Dr Koa Keng Woo; **2 Thessalonians, Titus** by the Rev Tan Kian Sing; **Teaching Methods, Beginner Pianoforte** by Mrs Jemima

Khoo; **Women in the Bible, Youth Christian Education** by Miss Carol Lee; **Hebrew Elementary I** by Mr Clement Chew; **Greek Reading I** by Mr Dennis Kablingue; **English Intensive I** by Mrs Anne Lim; **English Intermediate I** by Mrs Irene Lim; **English Advanced I** by Elder Han Soon Juan. The online courses are (1) **Systematic Theology I: Theism**, (2) **Daniel**, and (3) **Gospel of John**.

**Two new tutors** have been added to the FEBC Faculty, namely, **Dr Jose Lagapa** and **Miss Joycelyn Chng**. Dr Lagapa holds a DVM from Central Mindanao University (Philippines), a PhD in Veterinary Science from Hokkaido University (Japan), and the MDiv and ThM from FEBC. He is married to Celeste, and they have three children—Theya, Thessa and Biboy. Joycelyn holds BEng from the National University of Singapore and graduated with an MDiv (*magna cum laude*) from FEBC. Both are serving full-time at True Life Bible-Presbyterian Church. Dr Lagapa teaches the Book of Acts this semester, and Joycelyn teaches Hymnology.

**We thank God** for raising up young men and women to be trained for the ministry of the Word at FEBC. We are glad that our graduates are being used by God in various ways in the mission fields all over the world.

One of them is **Phannarith** (CertRK 06) who is director of Stronghold Cambodia, a humanitarian NGO supported by American Lutheran churches. Phannarith is married to Naomi and they have two sons David and Solomon. He has fond memories of FEBC and was



*Phannarith and family.*



sharing with his sons his experiences at FEBC as they toured the campus. He speaks excellent English. A copy of *Theology for Every Christian* was presented to him.

Another is **Dr Lazum Lonewah** (BTh 96) who married Kim Jae Eun a Korean FEBC alumna (BTh 96). They have three children (two girls and the youngest a boy) and are settled in California USA where Lazum is pastor of a Myanmar Baptist Church. Both went to the States for further studies after FEBC. There they earned their Master's degrees. Lazum went on to earn his DMin from Temple Baptist Seminary and recently a PhD from Piedmont International University. Lazum is very thankful for FEBC for laying a solid foundation for him to pursue his MA, DMin and PhD degrees. He returns to Myanmar annually to lecture in a Baptist Seminary in Kachin State.

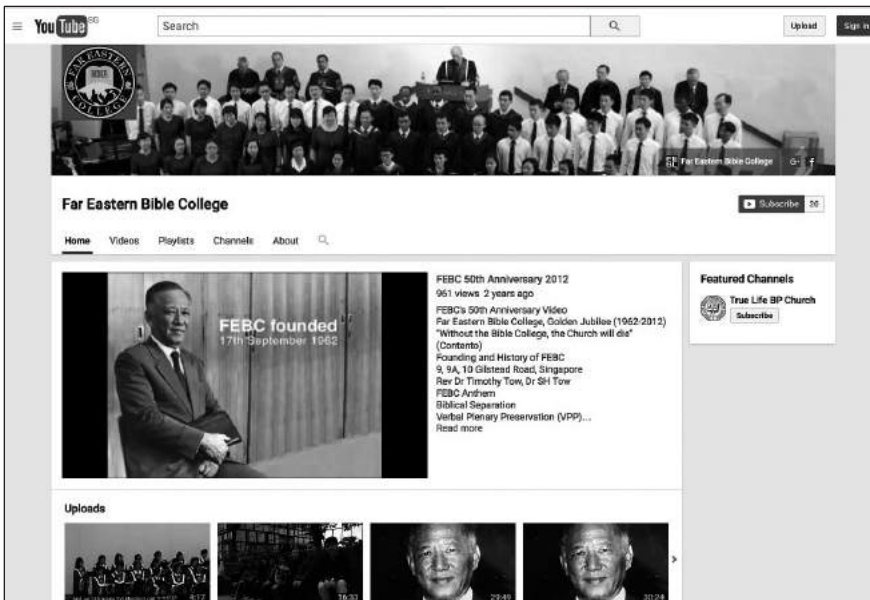


The pursuit of knowledge is unending. **Ko Linggang** of Calvary Pandan, having obtained his BTh and MDiv from FEBC, has just enrolled into the ThM programme of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary (Grand Rapids, Michigan). Many of our graduates after completing their undergraduate degree are pursuing their Master's degree at FEBC if they qualify. Jose Lagapa is on his final lap towards his Doctor of Theology degree. He is now ABD (all but dissertation).

## FEBC in the Internet



[www.febc.edu.sg](http://www.febc.edu.sg)

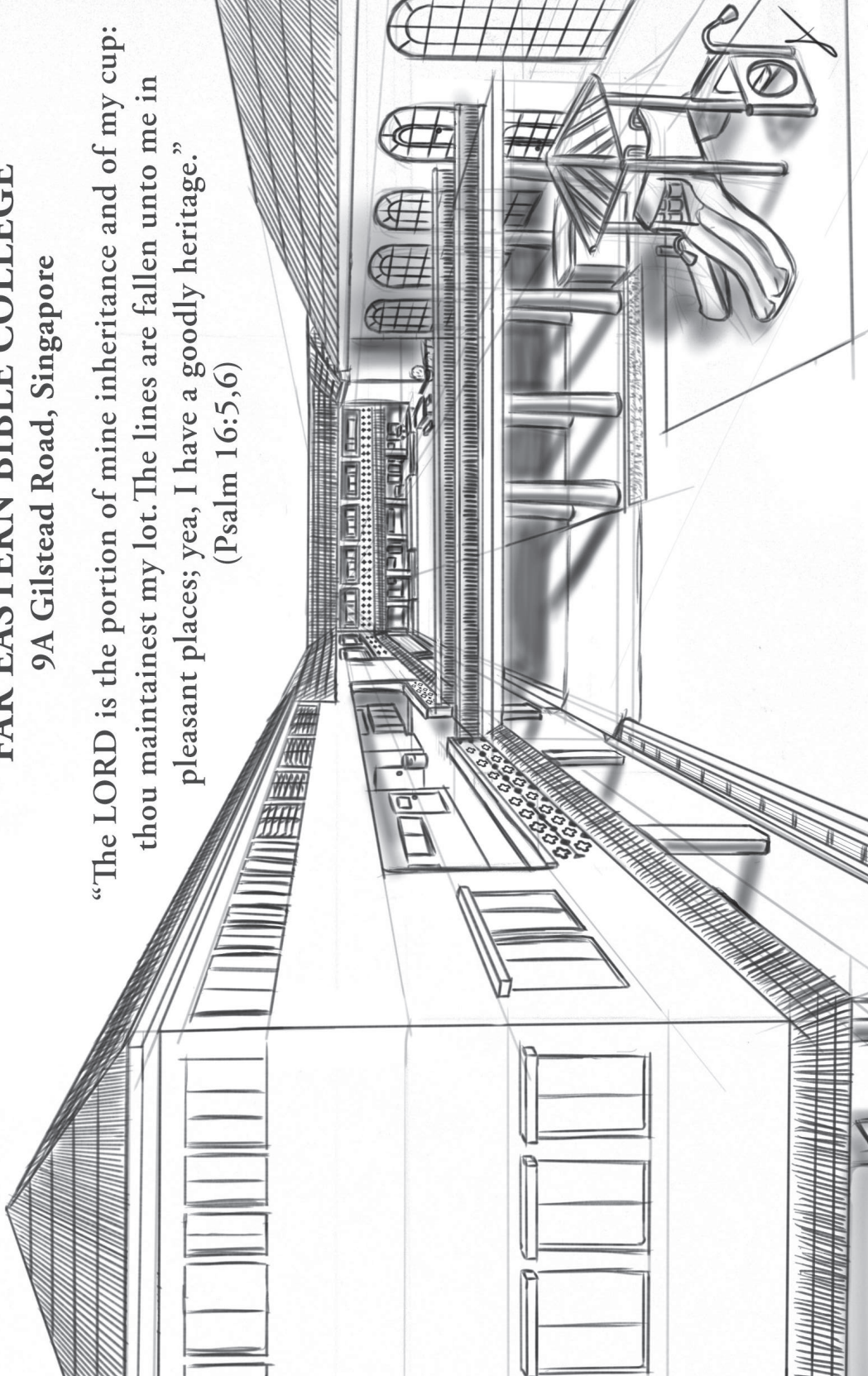


[www.youtube.com/channel/UCf2cO9IWk4vISrY4b-QHvzq](http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCf2cO9IWk4vISrY4b-QHvzq)

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“The LORD is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup:  
thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in  
pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage.”

(Psalm 16:5,6)



**"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills,  
from whence cometh my help.  
My help cometh from the LORD,  
which made heaven and earth."**

**Ps 121:1-2**

**FAR EASTERN BIBLE COLLEGE  
3<sup>rd</sup> Reformation Pilgrimage (9-20 May 2016)**

