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# THE BURNING BUSH

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# CALVINISM AND EVANGELISM

Timothy Tow and Jeffrey Khoo

“We are born lions, tigers, wolves and bears, until the Spirit of Christ tames us, and from wild and savage beasts forms us to be mild sheep” (Calvin).

## Man Cannot Save Himself

Man in his fallen condition is condemned in his sin and has no ability whatsoever to gain entrance into heaven. *“As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one ... For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”* (Rom 3:10–23). *“For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; ... For to be carnally minded is death; ... Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God”* (Rom 8:5–8).

Left on his own, the natural, sinful man is destined to eternal destruction. If the Holy Spirit does not convict him of sin, he would be unconscious of his lost condition and would have no desire for the things of God. Man is so totally corrupted by his sin that he is incapable of choosing God. He is selfish and proud, and continually disobeys God. He has no strength whatsoever to keep the Ten Commandments. As a matter of fact, he breaks the Commandments every day.

Unless the Holy Spirit of God works in the heart of the totally depraved sinner, he will never come to believe in Jesus Christ and be saved. As Paul has said, *“It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy”* (Rom 9:16). A sinner saved by God’s grace contributes nothing at all to his salvation. It is purely by God’s mercy that a sinner is saved. *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast”* (Eph 2:8–9).

## **Man's Salvation Is God's Choice**

The doctrine of unconditional election follows necessarily from the doctrine of total depravity. If man is totally incapable of saving himself from sin, it follows that salvation can only come to him by the pure grace and election of God. God's election of man to salvation is not conditional upon any virtue, foreseen or otherwise, in fallen humanity. Our salvation is "*not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them*" (Eph 2:9–10). The faith by which we are saved is "a gift of God." "*It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure*" (Phil 2:13). "*Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law*" (Rom 3:27–28). "*Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost*" (Tit 3:5).

It ought to be understood that God's decree of election is not at all based on foreknown faith. God did not look down through the ages to see just who would be good enough to believe in His Son, and then chose them on the basis of their faith. Such a notion does not glorify God but man, and is clearly erroneous. The Bible teaches that the foreknowledge of God is not passive but active. He knew us before time, and chose us even before we existed or did anything good or bad (Rom 9:11, 16). Ephesians 1:5 makes it quite clear that it was He who chose us directly and deliberately out of His own good will and pleasure, and not vice versa. As Jesus said, "*Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain*" (John 15:16).

Election in the Scripture frequently refers to God's eternal and purposeful choosing of a people from among the sinful mass of humanity and appointing them to obtain everlasting life through His beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. According to Calvin, "Every part of our salvation depends on election." Unconditional election, then, bases our salvation wholly upon the grace of God. As the saying goes, "If anyone is saved, God does all the saving." "Amazing grace—how sweet the sound—that saved a wretch like me." "We are believers because we have been elected" (Calvin).

## God Became Man to Save Sinners

The doctrine of limited or particular atonement is succinctly expressed by Augustine, “Sufficient for all, efficient for the elect.” Calvin accepts this as correct in his commentary on 1 John 2:2, “*And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.*”

The Calvinistic system of doctrine affirms the atonement of Christ to be universal in three respects—that it is sufficient, applicable and offered to all. There is nothing inadequate in Christ’s redemptive work on earth that would make it inapplicable to any member of the human race in any earthly circumstances. The atonement is absolutely infinite in its value and thus in its potentiality. No sinner will be lost for lack of a sufficient atonement. There is really no reason why any Calvinist should hesitate to use the words of Wesley’s great hymn:

*Lord, I believe were sinners more  
Than sands upon the ocean shore,  
Thou hast the ransom fully paid,  
Thou hast a full atonement made.*

Although the atonement is universal or unlimited in its sufficiency, applicability and availability, it must be noted that the atonement is limited or particular in its intention, design, and ultimate results. It is not every single human being but only those whom God had elected that will be saved. There is a special sense in which Christ is the Mediator for His elect, and not for all. He said, “*I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine*” (John 17:9). Within the decrees of God, the atonement was intended to accomplish precisely what it does accomplish. It accomplishes the salvation of the elect of God; it furnishes the ethical and logical ground for common grace (Rom 3:25); and it renders the lost ethically and logically inexcusable (Rom 1:20).

## God Calls Sinners to Be Saints

“When Christ sets out to save a people, He saves them!” (Machen). If God has elected to save a people, and has provided for the certainty of their salvation, it follows that He will infallibly accomplish that salvation. According to the Westminster Confession of Faith (10:1–2),

All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by his

Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature to grace and salvation, by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God, taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them an heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and, by his almighty power, determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ: yet so, as they come most freely, being made willing by his grace. This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not from any thing at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein, until, being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it.

God calls His chosen ones individually to Himself. There are two kinds of call: the outward call and the inward call. The outward call is a general call of the gospel to both the elect and non-elect issued by the preacher which by itself does not save. If the sinner is to be saved, he must receive the inward call. The inward call is a special call whereby the Spirit convicts the heart of sin, and enables the sinner to understand the gospel, and to believe in Christ. The gift of faith is imparted at this time. The outward call can be resisted, but no one can effectively or finally resist the inward call (John 6:37, 44, Rom 8:14, 30).

### **God Preserves His Saints to the End**

“Once saved—always saved.” The elect of God will never lose their salvation because it is God who preserves them to the very end. God's special providential preservation of His people will cause them to persevere in their faith to the very end. A person who is truly born again will reach heaven one day because God always keeps His promises and He never fails.

Jesus made this very clear in John 10:27–29, *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.”* Concerning the perseverance of the saints, the Westminster Confession of Faith (17:1–2) states,

They, whom God hath accepted in his Beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved.

This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father; upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ, the abiding of the Spirit, and of the seed of God within them, and the nature of the covenant of grace: from all which ariseth also the certainty and infallibility thereof.

One of Calvin's repeated sayings is the exhortation, "Presume upon the veracity of God." In simple modern English, we should say, "Take God at His Word." Calvin said,

But, as for us, since we see that sinners are enjoined by the oracles of God to entertain a hope of salvation, let us joyfully presume so far on His veracity as to reject all confidence in our own works, to depend solely on His mercy, and venture to cherish a hope of happiness. He who said, "According to your faith be it unto you," (Matt 9:29) will not deceive us. God vouchsafes to those whom he has determined to call to salvation special grace.

The God who has called us home will surely lead us safely home as He promised.

### **Why Evangelise?**

Christians are commanded and exhorted to preach the Gospel throughout the world to all mankind. God has promised emphatically and repeatedly that "whosoever" commits himself to Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour, "whosoever" believes and trusts in Him, will infallibly be saved to an eternal life of blessedness. The doctrines of election and atonement do not contradict the Great Commission of Christ (Matt 28:18–20).

As a matter of fact, it is precisely because God has chosen some to be saved that makes the preaching of the gospel effective and fruitful. If God had not chosen anyone to be saved, no one would be saved. Man in his totally depraved condition can never and will never come to the Saviour on his own. And so God graciously invites all men to salvation, and the Spirit makes them able to accept that invitation. "*The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely*" (Rev 22:17). "God offers his word indiscriminately to the good and bad; but it works by his Spirit in the elect; ... as to the reprobate ... it renders them without excuse" (Calvin). We are to preach the gospel to every class of men, and assure

every man that if he would repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ he would be saved.

The Calvinistic doctrine of God's election and predestination gives great assurance in our preaching of the gospel and training of young people for pastoral, missionary, and evangelistic work. We have a very reassuring and joyful doctrine of evangelism and salvation: "God has chosen a people in Christ, from before the foundation of the world. He has provided in Christ for the certainty of their salvation, and for their progress in grace. He has made to all men the universal offer of salvation by faith in Christ. If, therefore, you will put your faith and confidence in Christ as your personal Saviour, you can know, with the infallible assurance of the Word of God, that you are one of His elect. 'Take God at His Word!'"

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*The Rev Dr Timothy Tow was the founding principal of the Far Eastern Bible College. The Rev Dr Jeffrey Khoo is the current principal. The above is an extract from their book Theology for Every Christian (Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College Press, 2007).*

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# **BIBLICAL COOPERATION: PRINCIPLES OF PARTNERSHIP IN FULFILLING THE GREAT COMMISSION**

Jeffrey Khoo

In missions and evangelism, it is biblical to serve together with others. Jesus for example sent out His disciples to do the work of the gospel not alone but in pairs (Mark 6:7). Ecclesiastes 4:9 says, “*Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour.*” Companionship and cooperation in ministry should be promoted and practised.

However, does that mean we should work with anyone and everyone simply because he calls himself a Christian or names the name of Christ? Jesus told His disciples, “*Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.*” (Matt 10:16). Jesus warned, “*Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.*” (Matt 7:15). It does us no good to be naïve or gullible. We need to be discerning.

So, how do we go about deciding on whom to cooperate or work with as we seek to fulfil the Great Commission of Jesus Christ (Matt 28:19–20)? The Lord gave us these three principles to help us make the right decision:

## **(1) Not Against Is For**

**Principle #1: Cooperate with those who are fundamental in the faith as contained in the Holy Scriptures, who are gospel-preaching, Bible-believing, Bible-teaching, and Bible defending.**

“*And John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbid him, because he followeth not with us. And Jesus said unto him, Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us.*” (Luke 9:49–50).

There are Christians from other churches or denominations, and though they may not be of the same church or denomination as us (“*he*

*followeth not with us*”), but are doing God’s work in God’s way according to God’s Word unto God’s glory—“*in thy name*”, we should not prevent them but rather promote them—“*for he that is not against us is for us.*” They are friends not foes. The reference point for cooperation is never man—his likes or dislikes, his whims and fancies—but God, His Word and His glory. This keeps us from elitism, factionism, and isolationism.

The Apostle Paul practised this principle. In Philippians 1:15–18, he testified, “*Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel. What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.*” As far as Paul was concerned, regardless of personal motives (whether good or bad), as long as Christ (ie the Truth) is preached, he is happy. He is happy the gospel truth is spreading without hindrance. Although some may preach the gospel with an ulterior motive or with ill will, he is not bothered. God will be the judge of that (1 Cor 4:5).

It goes without saying that if another gospel was preached or if false doctrines were taught, Paul would have been quick to expose and condemn the false preachers and their teachings as he did in Galatians 1:7–9, “*but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.*”

Christianity has many denominations—Anglican, Baptist, Brethren, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Independent etc—and they may differ with us Bible-Presbyterians in their method of church government, or mode of water baptism, or view of the rapture and the like—but if they are true to the gospel, biblical in the faith, fundamental in the doctrine, defenders of the historic Protestant faith, biblical separatists (*against* liberalism, ecumenism, neo-evangelicalism, charismatism, worldliness etc), and not against us in our Bible-Presbyterianism, we can cooperate with them in the work of building God’s kingdom—“*for he that is not against us is for us*”. We as Bible-Presbyterians put to practice this good principle. In a cooperative spirit, we have given financial and material support to churches from other denominations to build their church

buildings, providing support even for their Bible schools—all this only for the extension of God’s kingdom and for God’s glory.

Nevertheless, let us be aware that there are those who say they do evangelistic work “in the name of Jesus” but are denounced by our Lord Jesus Himself, “*Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*” (Matt 7:22–23). Simply mouthing the name of Jesus means nothing. We should not cooperate with those who simply pay lip service to Jesus. As such, the following principles of non-cooperation apply.

## (2) Not With Is Against

**Principle #2: Do not cooperate with those who oppose, or who seem to be for but are actually against the fundamentals of the faith or any of the fundamentals as contained in the Holy Scriptures.**

“*He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth.*” (Luke 11:23). Here, Jesus spoke of his theological enemies—the scribes and Pharisees—who accused him of being possessed by an unclean spirit and doing God’s work by the power of the devil (Luke 11:15, cf Mark 3:22). These religious teachers knew the truth that Jesus by His powerful words and works was truly from God and of God; yet they falsely and maliciously accuse Him of heresy and evil. They hated Him and His doctrine and did all they could to destroy Him and prevent people from hearing His truth. We must have nothing to do with such people, and they will amount to nothing. Those who “*gathereth not with me scattereth*”. This is biblical separation and excommunication—we warn against them and leave them to their own deception and destruction.

Jesus had already warned of false Christs and false prophets who will proliferate in the last days. Three times in Matthew 24 He warned, “*And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many*” (vv4–5), “*And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many*” (v11), “*For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect*” (v24). Many who appear to be Christian may not be Christian at all, even those who come “in the

name of Christ”, who preach the “gospel”, teach the “Bible”, and even perform “miracles”. In Matthew 7:21–23, Jesus said, *“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”*

On one occasion, there was someone who appeared to be supportive of Paul and his gospel, but was actually working for the devil. This incident is told in Acts 16:16–18 when a girl, possessed with an evil spirit, who worked as a fortune teller, followed Paul, *“And cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation. And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.”* There may be those who look to be gospel-promoting but are subtly subversive, trying to mislead, confuse, and deceive. For this reason, we should reject any cooperation with unbelievers and false teachers even though they may appear to be supportive of the gospel or the work that we do. *“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.”* (2 Cor 11:13–14).

There are ignorant and undiscerning Christians today—they may even be church leaders—whose only criterion for fellowship and cooperation is merely the “gospel” or “evangelism”. Such naivety finds no encouragement in Scripture for it raises the question: What kind of gospel? We must also ask: Is it evangelism that will lead to biblical and truthful indoctrination? The Christian faith is not just John 3:16, but the whole Bible (all 66 books, every book, chapter, verse, word, syllable, letter). *“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).

Know that the Great Commission is a *teaching* commission (Matt 28:19–20): (1) *“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations”* (ie evangelism), and (2) *“Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you”* (ie indoctrination). Evangelism and indoctrination are inseparable links in missions and ministry. It is disastrous to evangelise someone and then release him to be indoctrinated by false teachers. If

we preach the gospel and do not teach the truth, we are no better than the scribes and Pharisees whom Jesus denounced, *“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.”* (Matt 23:15). Paul himself said he is *“pure from the blood of all men”* for in *“preaching the kingdom of God, ... I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.”* (Acts 20:25–27).

That was why in the past, our founding pastor—the Rev Dr Timothy Tow—refused to cooperate with Billy Graham. The gospel might have been preached, but Graham made no effort to ensure that all who professed faith in his crusades were channelled to Bible-believing, Bible-teaching, and Bible-defending churches. Instead, he cooperated with liberals and modernists who deny the fundamentals of the faith, Roman Catholics who preach another gospel, neo-evangelicals who reject the total inerrancy of Scripture, charismatics who peddle counterfeit miracles, and released his converts to them. Know that Graham as a neo-evangelical was friendly to liberals and modernists who oppose biblical inerrancy and the fundamentals of the faith. As Jesus said, *“He that is not with me is against me”*. JA Johnson rightly called Graham “the Jehoshaphat of our generation”. Jehu’s rebuke of Jehoshaphat applies equally to Graham, *“Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the LORD.”* (2 Chron 19:2). We refuse cooperation with neo-evangelicals (2 Thess 3:6).

### **(3) Neither For Nor Against**

**Principle #3: Do not cooperate with those who take a neutral or compromising position in matters of faith and practice, who refuse to take a declared position on issues that affect the fundamentals of the faith and who do not practise biblical separation.**

*“No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”* (Luke 16:13). There are those who say they love God but at the same time love money. It is mutually contradictory to want to be godly and at the same time worldly. There is a Chinese proverb, “Don’t try to stand in two boats simultaneously, especially in matters of love.” No lady would take kindly to a double-dealing suitor. Neither does God. God detests anyone who plays both sides, a double-agent. That was why the Pharisees derided Jesus when He

denounced them for their double-dealing ways, “*And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.*” (Luke 16:15).

The Apostles of Jesus Christ warned against a worldly spirit. John for instance counselled, “*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.*” (1 John 2:15–17). James admonished, “*Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.*” (Jas 4:4). If “*friendship with the world is enmity with God*”, how can there be cooperation between the godly and the worldly?

Our Lord is against the neither-for-nor-against attitude. To the church of Laodicea, He said, “*I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.*” (Rev 3:15–16). There are those who refuse to take sides in any and every situation—they want to please everybody and be favoured by all. Such an attitude is to be abhorred. Paul showed he was no man-pleaser or fence-sitter, “*For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.*” (Gal 1:10). We must always take the side of the good, the right, the true, and shun the bad, the wrong, and the false. We must speak with a straight tongue and not a forked tongue. Jesus said, “*But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.*” (Matt 5:37). The prophet Isaiah said, “*Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!*” (Isa 5:20). “*He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the LORD.*” (Prov 17:15).

When we want to do God’s work God’s way, we can expect opposition and persecution. Jesus said, “*If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember*

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*the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me.*" (John 15:18–21). Did they not call Jesus a devil (Matt 10:25, John 8:48, 10:20), a deceiver (Matt 27:63, John 7:12), a heretic (Acts 24:5, 14)?

We must always seek the approval of God, not man. When told to be silent and not teach the truth, "*Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.*" (Acts 5:29). For the Christian, it should be either-or, not both-and. It is either God or not; one cannot be both black and white at the same time. To be true to God, we cannot cooperate with those who are neither here nor there, fence-sitters, or two-faced double agents.

Bishop JC Ryle rightly warned against the sin of neutrality and compromise, "We all naturally love an easy Christianity. We dislike collisions and separation. We like, if possible, to keep in with both sides. We fear extremes. We dread being righteous overmuch. We are anxious not to go too far. Such thoughts as these are full of peril to the soul. Once allowed to get the upper hand, they may do us immense harm. Nothing is so offensive to Christ as lukewarmness in religion. To be utterly dead and ignorant, is to be an object of pity as well as blame. But to know the truth and yet 'halt between two opinions,' is one of the chief of sins."

### Conclusion

We should cooperate with other believers in furthering God's kingdom but we must do so with the right ones. How to know who are the right ones? We have the above biblical principles (with all the necessary qualifications) for our guide. Above all we need to cooperate with God and make sure He is with us and for us. And if God is for us, who can be against us? No one! (Rom 8:31).

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# THE DOCTRINE OF PREMILLENNIALISM IN THE BIBLE-PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Joshua Yong

The Bible-Presbyterian Church (BPC) is Reformed in its system of theology with a pro-Israel premillennial view of the end times. Being Presbyterian, the BPC subscribes to covenant theology as defined by the Westminster Confession of Faith and rejects dispensationalism as a theological system. Although the BPC rejects dispensationalism, it accepts its premillennialism which sees Christ returning before the millennium, restoring the nation of Israel, and ruling the world for a thousand years.<sup>1</sup>

## Issue at Hand

In 2011, four BPCs formed a new Presbytery named “Bible Presbyterian Church in Singapore” (BPCIS). Subsequently, three other BPCs joined the BPCIS. In 2018, they published a book titled *Heritage & Legacy of the Bible Presbyterian Church in Singapore*.<sup>2</sup> In this book, they sought to retell Bible-Presbyterian history and redefine Bible-Presbyterianism. Daniel Chua explained why they felt it was the right time to launch the BPCIS:

A key reason why it is feasible this time is because we are determined to work on a “moderate” position. We agree there are some core distinctives that define us as “Bible-Presbyterian”, and those are non-negotiable. But there are other matters that are secondary and peripheral, yet have caused divisions in the past.<sup>3</sup>

What does Chua mean by a “moderate” position? What are the doctrines which are considered “core distinctives” and those that are “secondary and peripheral”? Chua wrote, “the non-essentials are matters that should not detract us from our understanding of Bible-Presbyterianism, such as premillennialism (versus amillennialism), Bible versions, types of musical instruments, adoption of hymns and spiritual songs, style of worship, disposal of the deceased, and association with



non-BPCs and parachurch organisations.”<sup>4</sup> Chua criticised the BPC in the USA for parting over “non-cardinal or secondary issues such as views on amillennialism or premillennialism, personal liberty or total abstinence over alcohol, tobacco, dancing, card playing, and movies, and primary or second-degree separation.”<sup>5</sup>

The “white paper” of BPCIS specifically states premillennialism as a doctrine that is “**NON-ESSENTIAL**” to Bible-Presbyterianism (emphasis theirs). They explained:

While we largely follow and teach the position of the Premillennial Return of Jesus, we do not require this as the only possible position. Godly Christians and scholars have held to the positions of Amillennialism and Postmillennialism: these two are viable options. But we stick to our historical position as Premillennial and will only teach this view in our churches.

...

The White Paper adopts the Presbyterian tradition of forbearance and tolerance of differing millennial views among its ministers and congregational members.<sup>6</sup>

Chua appears to speak from both sides of his mouth on the matter of premillennialism. On the one hand, he expresses that the BPCIS will only teach premillennialism in their churches; on the other hand, he says it is not required of ministers and members to adhere to this teaching as the only position for the BPC. What is the point of teaching a doctrine that one does not really believe in or is convicted of, at least not enough to require one’s adherence?

Some preliminary comments are in order. The core distinctives of Bible-Presbyterianism are what makes a Bible-Presbyterian a Bible-Presbyterian. Without these distinctives a person is without identity—he can be anything and everything. The distinctives of the BPC or for that matter any denomination are necessary to give a denomination its identity. Having a distinct and definitive identity will facilitate its congregants to worship and serve together in unity.

### **History of Premillennialism in the BPC**

From the very beginning, premillennialism has always been an important theological distinctive of the BPC. The Rev Dr Timothy Tow who is the founding pastor of the Singapore BPC recalled learning this doctrine from Dora Yu who was China’s first woman evangelist in the

1920s. He also testified how he learned this doctrine as a little child from his parents, singing such hymns as “When Jesus comes to reward His servants” from Dora Yu’s revival hymnal.<sup>7</sup> This learning was enhanced when he came under the ministries of Dr John Sung and Dr Chia Yu Ming. Sung taught the premillennial doctrine through his exposition of Daniel and Revelation at his revival meetings:

A thorough student of the Bible, John Sung knew the Old Testament as well as the New. His sermon texts ranged through every book of the Bible. A Premillennialist, believing in the soon coming of Christ, he would expound Daniel or Revelation in his follow-up ‘spiritual nurture’ meeting after every revival campaign. These Bible-study sessions, like the revival meetings, would last two hours each session, three times a day.<sup>8</sup>

In another place, he recounted,

When Dr. John Sung brought Pentecostal Revival to Singapore in 1935, he was most articulate in preaching the soon Return of Christ. He spoke on Israel’s Restoration and the part she would play in the Golden Millennium. This he emphasised by teaching Revelation and Daniel in his “spiritual nurture” sessions. A poster depicting Nebuchadnezzar’s statue in Daniel for a backdrop to his teaching at the Telok Ayer Methodist Church where the revival meetings were held, substantiates what I say.<sup>9</sup>

After Dr John Sung was Dr Chia Yu Ming—China’s first theologian—who taught him premillennialism when he studied at Spiritual Training Theological Seminary in Nanking, China, 1946–47.<sup>10</sup>

After China, Tow went to America to study at Faith Theological Seminary where he learned the doctrine of premillennialism from Dr J Oliver Buswell, Dr Allan MacRae, and Dr R Laird Harris. Concerning the Reformed and premillennial faith, Tow remembered Harris saying in class that it is “nearest to the truth.”<sup>11</sup> When he returned to Singapore after graduation, he imparted this doctrine to his congregants at Life BPC and students at Far Eastern Bible College in 1950 and 1962 respectively.<sup>12</sup>

The Singapore BPC is avowedly premillennial following the BPC in the USA. Historically, the latter was founded in 1937 by Dr Carl McIntire and other Presbyters who broke away from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) because of its amillennialism and anti-premillennial stance. Besides, the OPC also advocated Christian liberty in matters of smoking and drinking, which was opposed by those who were premillennial and who held to the separated life.<sup>13</sup> Thus, when the

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BPC in USA was founded, a document entitled, “Articles of Association of the Bible Presbyterian Fellowship”, was drawn up. One of the articles included a statement on their decision to insert into the Westminster Confession of Faith a statement on premillennialism so as to ensure that the premillennial doctrine in the BPC would be clear and not be obscured for posterity.<sup>14</sup>

However, in *Heritage & Legacy*, Daniel Chua claimed that McIntire had “urged tolerance of other eschatological views.” He based his claim on one of McIntire’s statements concerning this issue:

It is of historic significance that the Synod took action clearly setting forth the teaching of the Bible concerning the Lord’s return. This is an important doctrine, but it is of a different nature from the issue of the apostasy of our day and the denial of the blood of Christ and the resurrection of Christ on the part of men in the visible church. In this connection the Synod was careful to recognize the liberty of men to have different views concerning the Lord’s return.<sup>15</sup>

Chua opines that that was the precedent set by the BPC in America for us today. But there is a problem here. What Chua fails to mention is that the BPC took a strong stand on the doctrine of premillennialism in 1956 when there were detractors who sought to depart from it.

After that division the BPC position on the premillennial return of Christ seemed to harden and to become specifically pretribulation. The board of Faith Theological Seminary issued a statement in 1959 stating that it “interpreted the statement that the Seminary was premillennial to mean that the pre-tribulation rapture was in the premillennial view of the return of Christ,” and that the ministers of the Synod are “man for man believers in the pre-tribulation, premillennial return of Christ.”<sup>16</sup>

McIntire’s non-tolerant view within the denomination was witnessed in this example:

The New Jersey – Philadelphia Presbytery was holding up the ordination of three men, two of them graduating from Faith Seminary, because their eschatology was not premillennial and pretribulation. The presbytery referred these men to the Faith Seminary faculty to have their views corrected.

When the Bible Presbyterian Synod met in October 1982, Dr. McIntire and others wanted a resolution passed supporting the pretribulation position of the church. This position had never before been specified in official church documents. The resolution was introduced and passed on the last day of Synod. It stated that the “imminent return of Christ in His

Second Coming has been the Blessed Hope of the Bible Presbyterians from the beginning,” and further, “The church will not go through the Tribulation.” The resolution did note the First Synod’s declaration for eschatological liberty, but interpreted it **that no one will be disciplined for other views; it did not specify this liberty for new men coming into the church.** This liberty “in no way moderates the witness of the church to the imminent, pre-millennial return of Christ, taught in the Holy Scriptures.”<sup>17</sup>

Chua’s claim that McIntire took a tolerant view concerning premillennialism is therefore unfounded.

It must however be said that unlike the BPC in America, the BPC in Singapore does not insist on the timing of the rapture. In his book *Prophescope on Israel*, Tow said it is unnecessary to quibble over the timing of the rapture,

To the Reader, here is a more vital question to answer. When Jesus the Messiah descends from heaven to earth that soon coming Day, where will you be? Some argue Christians will be caught up to meet Him in a Pre-Tribulation Rapture, others say no, it is a Mid-Tribulation or Pre-Wrath or even Post-Tribulation Rapture. But if you have no assurance of salvation it is like a traveler studying three or four airline flight schedules from Singapore to New York, but he has not bought his ticket. Whichever plane is leaving now, this very hour, how can you join the flight? O to be stranded when others in your family are gone above!<sup>18</sup>

Nevertheless, the doctrine of premillennialism remains a foundational distinctive of the Church. The premillennial position of the BPC is clearly expressed in the statement of faith of the Far Eastern Bible College (FEBC): “We believe in the personal, visible and premillennial return of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ to judge this world, restore His chosen nation Israel to greatness, and bring peace to the nations as King of kings and Lord of lords (Jer 3:17, Zech 14:9, Acts 1:6, Rom 11:26, Rev 20:1–7).”<sup>19</sup> Further, all faculty members of FEBC are required to sign a position statement which includes the doctrine of the premillennial return of Christ and a distinction between Israel and the Church.<sup>20</sup>

### **The BPC Is Reformed in Theology and Not Dispensational**

The Singapore BPC subscribes to Reformed theology and covenant theology. The Constitution of Life BPC (mother church) states in Article 4.1: “The doctrine of the Church shall be in accordance with that system commonly called ‘the Reformed Faith’ as expressed in the Confession of

Faith as set forth by the historic Westminster Assembly together with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms.”<sup>21</sup>

Reformed theology embraces covenant theology. It is that system of theology which “represents the whole of Scripture as being covered by two covenants: 1) the covenant of works; and 2) the covenant of grace.”<sup>22</sup> Under the Covenant of Works, God promised eternal life to Adam and his posterity on the condition of his perfect obedience. Adam disobeyed God, and because of his disobedience, sin and death entered into the world. After the fall of man, God instituted the Covenant of Grace, by which He through the perfect obedience and sacrifice of Jesus Christ would freely bestow eternal life to all who believe (Rom 5:12–21).

Covenant theology stands in contrast to dispensationalism. C I Scofield defined the dispensations as periods of time which are “marked off in Scripture by some change in God’s method of dealing with mankind, or a portion of mankind, in respect of the two questions of sin and of man’s responsibility.”<sup>23</sup> Hence, a dispensation refers to “a distinctive way in which God manages or arranges the relationship of human beings to Himself.”<sup>24</sup> Scofield lists seven such dispensations—each begins with God’s revelation, results in man’s failure, and ends with God’s judgement. As such, dispensationalism in understanding God’s redemptive plan and history in terms of multiple and different tests and their resultant failures is a system of discontinuity. Covenant theology, on the other hand, is one of continuity which sees a unifying theme of one Saviour and one way of salvation under the Covenant of Grace (Rom 5:12–21). As such, the BPC rejects the dispensational system of theology and regards it as incompatible with the redemptive plan of God as revealed in Scripture.

### **The BPC Sees a Distinction between Israel and the Church**

The BPC however agrees with dispensationalism in seeing a distinction between Israel and the Church. The doctrine of the Church has these two aspects: (1) The invisible or universal church which “consists of the whole number of the elect that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all.” (2) The visible church which is also “universal under the gospel (not confined to one nation as before under the law) consists of all those, throughout the world, that profess the true religion, and of their children; and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus

Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.”<sup>25</sup>

What concerns our discussion is the church visible. In the OT, the visible church was manifested in the nation of Israel. Israel was the visible, national witness of God. Buswell referred to Israel as “the church of Israel.” He wrote that the nation of Israel in the OT “was not merely a political entity, but the nation as a nation was a ‘separated’ group, a ‘chosen’ people, a ‘called out’ congregation. Stephen refers to the ‘church in the wilderness’ (Acts 7:38).”<sup>26</sup> Buswell also wrote, “It is quite correct to refer to the visible people of God, as organized in national Israel, as the Jewish church.”<sup>27</sup>

In the NT, the visible church is manifested in the NT Church which comprises both Jews and Gentiles throughout the world. God does not have two different plans of salvation, one for Israel and another for the Church. Believers in the OT and the NT are both saved by the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. Whereas OT saints looked forward to the coming of the Messiah-Saviour, NT believers look back to Him—the Lord Jesus Christ—who had already come.

So, wherein is the distinction between Israel and the Church? There is a distinction between Israel as a national entity and the Church as a spiritual body. The NT Church did not replace the nation Israel (contra the replacement theory of amillennialism, postmillennialism, and historic premillennialism). God did not cast Israel away; there is a future for Israel.

In response to replacement theorists who say that Israel is no more and that the Church has taken over Israel, Tow wrote:

The key to the question whether the blessings promised to Israel are fulfilled in the Church or in Israel herself is found in the whole chapter of Romans 11.... This chapter on the restoration of Israel at the Second Coming of Christ is so clear that it needs no further explanation. Christ, the Virgin born Son of God, will return to our war-torn earth and establish a peaceful reign of a thousand years sitting on the throne of His father David.<sup>28</sup>

Buswell made a distinction between the “church of Israel” and the “church as organized from the day of Pentecost onward,” explaining that “the church today is not a nation in any literal sense of the word, but it was a nation prior to the time of Christ.”<sup>29</sup>

In summary, where the doctrine of salvation is concerned, we believe that God has only one plan of salvation for OT and NT believers,

for Jews and Gentiles—redemption through the perfect atonement made by the Lord Jesus Christ. But where the doctrine of the end-times is concerned, God has a distinct and unique plan for Israel. The prophecies and promises related to Israel must find fulfilment in Israel.

### **The BPC Interprets the Scriptures Consistently through the Literal Method**

Reformed theologians have traditionally adopted the literal as opposed to the allegorical method of interpreting Scripture. John Calvin for instance condemned the allegorical method as the “contrivance of Satan to obscure the sense of Scripture”.<sup>30</sup> This literal method is known as the grammatical-historical-canonical method of interpretation.

Reformed theologians also employ the principle of the “analogy of faith” in interpreting Scripture. This principle is based on the belief that all of Scripture is a unity and in harmony, and thus will not contradict itself. Scripture interprets Scripture. The Westminster Confession of Faith states this principle: “The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.”<sup>31</sup> Buswell likewise explained: “It will be discovered that the Bible interprets itself. Not only does each successive book in the time in which it was written presuppose the Biblical books which went before, but the earlier books in many passages were clearly intended to point forward to Scriptures which were to come later.”<sup>32</sup>

Although Reformed theologians tend to interpret Scripture literally, there are those who spiritualise away OT prophecies, especially when those prophecies concern Israel. Buswell wrote to reject such a method, “There are those who argue that we need a special kind of hermeneutics for prophecy,... I would vigorously deny that we need any special hermeneutics for prophecy or for figurative language, other than what is included in the grammatico-historical method.”<sup>33</sup> Those who employ the spiritualising method do so because they fail to see a distinction between Israel and the Church. As a matter of fact, they believe Israel is replaced by the Church.

Not only should the spiritualising method be rejected, the “already/not-yet” or “double fulfillment” method of interpreting prophecies too should be rejected. While dispensationalists have traditionally adopted a

literal form of interpretation, some of them have recently adopted a form of interpretation called “complementary hermeneutics.” The progressive dispensationalists like Blaising and Bock explain that there must be an “already/not-yet” or “both/and” perspective in certain passages of Scripture. Their “inaugurated eschatology” so called acknowledges the possibility of an OT prophecy having an initial or partial fulfilment with a view of a future fulfilment.<sup>34</sup>

Instead of a double sense or double fulfilment view, we hold to what Buswell called a “double lens” and “cosmic perspective” view of prophecy. Tow coined the term “prophescope” to describe this prophetic phenomenon.<sup>35</sup> This is where “a single prophetic text or passage in its distinctive or respective parts or verses can depict both immediate and distant scenarios.”<sup>36</sup> This prophesopic perspective sees the prophet looking into the future (both immediate and distant) with bifocal or even multifocal lens as required by the text and its context (both antecedent and subsequent) which rejects any sort of double meaning or double fulfilment.<sup>37</sup>

### **The BPC Takes a Pro-Israel Premillennial View of the End Times**

The premillennial position of the BPC and the FEBC is the dispensational premillennial or pro-Israel premillennial position. This position not only recognises the literal and physical rule of Christ on earth for a thousand years, it also sees a distinction between Israel and the Church in God’s eschatological programme. The dispensational premillennial view is not to be confused with dispensationalism as a theological system. It must be categorically stated that the BPC is not dispensational or dispensationalist. Every dispensationalist is dispensational premillennial in his eschatology, but not every dispensational premillennialist is a dispensationalist.

The dispensational premillennial position differentiates from the historic premillennial position. While historic premillennialists accept the literal reign of Christ in a literal kingdom on earth, they do not see any future plan for Israel as a nation. They hold that Israel will be assimilated into the Church during the millennium. They like the amillennialists and postmillennialists do not interpret OT prophecies regarding Israel literally.

The millennium literally means 1000 years and it refers to Christ’s rule on earth when He returns. Tow in his article—“Bible-



Presbyterianism and the Premillennial Doctrine of Israel”—described the millennium as follows:

How does the thousand years come in? The thousand years is mentioned six times in Revelation 20. In verse 6 is the statement, “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.” Rev 5:10 states further, “And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.” These statements include both Jews and Gentiles who are born again, but the Jews will be at the head....

That Israel who has been dispersed to the four corners of the earth for 2,000 years will be regathered and restored with the services of Gentile nations in the Millennium is the teaching of the whole of Isaiah Chapter 60....

During the Millennium there will be no more war on the earth. Jerusalem will be the capital of the world, and there will be no more the United Nations with headquarters in New York....

In order that Israel might play the major role in God’s plan of salvation in the end times, leading to Christ’s second coming and millennial rule on earth (Rev 5:10), God will gather the dispersed people of Israel as a restored nation a second time (after Babylon the first time)....<sup>38</sup>

As regards the rapture, the BPC does not have an official position. The BPC is charitable to all the pre, mid, and post-tribulational rapture views. However, the post-tribulational rapture view appears untenable in light of Israel’s ethnic and national place in the millennium.

### **The Compatibility of Pro-Israel Premillennialism with Reformed Theology**

The sovereignty of God and the faithfulness of God are the two major tenets of Reformed theology. The faithfulness of God especially is what makes a pro-Israel premillennial position consistent with Reformed theology. Terms in Scripture such as “covenant”, “testament”, “promise”, “remember” are based on the doctrine of God’s faithfulness. The oft-repeated theme, “I will be thy God,” expresses the faithfulness of God to His people. Jonathan Edwards, in his work—*A History of the Work of Redemption*—rightly observed:

From what has been said, we may see the stability of God’s mercy and faithfulness to his people; how he never forsakes his inheritance, and remembers his covenant to them through all generations. Now we may

see what reason there was for the words of the text, “The moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool; but my righteousness shall endure for ever and ever, and my salvation from generation to generation.” And now we may see abundant reason for that name of God which he reveals to Moses, Exod. 3:14, “And God said unto Moses, I am that I am:” i.e. I am the same that I was when I entered into covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and ever shall be the same: I shall keep covenant for ever: I am self-sufficient, all sufficient and immutable.<sup>39</sup>

Reformed theology which presupposes the faithfulness of God to His people must involve the salvation not only of the Church, but also His chosen nation Israel. Israel as a nation has been promised many things by God. In Genesis 12:1–3, God established a covenant with Abraham. There are three promissory aspects to this covenant: (1) promises concerning Abraham himself, (2) promises concerning Israel, and (3) promises concerning all nations.

In Genesis 13:16, God promised that Abraham’s seed would be as the dust of the earth. The “seed” is an important aspect in the Abrahamic covenant. Scripture speaks of the “seed” of Abraham in several ways: (1) the Lord Jesus Christ as the promised “Seed” who will save the world (Gal 3:16), (2) the spiritual seed of Abraham, ie all who have faith in Jesus Christ (Gal 3:6, 9), and (3) the natural descendants of Abraham, ie the Jews. From the natural descendants of Abraham, God promised to make a nation (Gen 13:16, 15:5, 17:2). This nation would come through Isaac (Gen 17:19), Jacob (Gen 28:13–14), and the 12 tribes. God’s covenant with Israel therefore involves Israel as a distinct entity. This covenant was formally inaugurated in Genesis 15 through a covenant-cutting ceremony. The sign of circumcision was attached to the covenant in Genesis 17 and God reaffirmed His covenant with an oath in Genesis 22.

God not only called Israel to be a chosen nation distinct from the rest of the nations, God also promised Israel a land. Several characteristics regarding this promise can be observed. First, the land that comes with the Abrahamic covenant is an everlasting possession (Gen 17:7–8). The land is mentioned in the covenant not as a sign but as a promise. Second, the land promise to Israel is for Israel’s possession. The promise which was given to Abraham was reiterated to Jacob, “*the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it and thy seed*” (Gen 28:13). This everlasting nature of the land promise is reaffirmed in Psalm 105:8–11, “*He hath remembered his covenant for ever, the word which he commanded to*

*a thousand generations. Which covenant he made with Abraham, and his oath unto Isaac; And confirmed the same unto Jacob for a law, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant: Saying, Unto thee will I give the land of Canaan, the lot of your inheritance.”* Third, the land that God had promised Israel is a specific and exact piece of land. The boundaries of the land are clearly delineated to Abraham by way of geographical landmarks. God told Abraham in Genesis 13:14–15, “*Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.*” The land is described as “all the land of Canaan” (Gen 17:8). The extent of it is delineated in Genesis 15:18–21, “*In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: The Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, And the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, And the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.*” Israel has yet to possess this land in its entirety. This promise, yet to be fulfilled, points to a future fulfilment. This will happen when Israel is converted and restored at the return of Christ.

### **Importance and Implications of Premillennialism in the BPC**

Since the founding of the BPC, the doctrine of premillennialism has been a core distinctive. The new BPCIS has attempted to undermine this doctrinal distinctive by calling it a “non-essential” and dismissing it as “secondary” and “peripheral.” How can it be a non-essential when it has serious implications on other doctrines? The premillennial doctrine is key to understanding prophecies in Scripture. This is no small matter since Scripture is full of prophecies. According to the *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy*,

out of the OTs 23,210 verses, 6,641 contain predictive material, or 28½ percent. Out of the NT’s 7,914 verses, 1,711 contain predictive material, or 21½ percent. So for the entire Bible’s 31,124 verses in the Bible, 8,352 verses contain predictive material, or 27 percent of the whole.<sup>40</sup>

That is one quarter of Scripture. A lot of the prophecies relate to Israel, and how one interprets them will affect one’s understanding of Israel and the doctrine of the end-times. A pro-Israel and premillennial understanding of the end-times affirms God’s faithfulness to His people, to both the Church and Israel. Further, a premillennial understanding of the end-times will lead to a correct worldview which sees this world

as becoming more and more wicked culminating in the rule of the Antichrist. This will prepare Christians for the imminent coming of Christ by discerning the signs of the times through the lens of prophetic Scripture (Matt 16:3). If one does not hold to the premillennial doctrine, then one has to spiritualise away the prophecies concerning Israel and undermine the faithfulness of God in His promises to Israel. Such a position contradicts Reformed theology and hermeneutics.

### **The BPCIS Has Confused the Doctrine of Premillennialism with the Practice of Separation**

The new BPCIS has confused the doctrine of premillennialism with the practice of biblical separation. There is a difference between holding a doctrine as a distinctive and practising separation for holiness and purity. One should not conflate the two. The BPC does not separate from other Christians or churches just because they hold to a different millennial view. We had in the past invited those who were amillennial to speak to us (eg Dr Peter Masters of Metropolitan Tabernacle). It is however quite a different matter altogether to say that premillennialism is a “non-essential” in the BPC. There is no need to separate with others over differing millennial views, but the premillennial doctrine has to be upheld as an essential Bible-Presbyterian distinctive for the sake of doctrinal clarity, unity and ministry within the BPC itself. As required by the Constitution, a person who wants to be a member of the BPC should subscribe and submit to its statement of faith which declares premillennialism as an essential doctrine among other doctrines. If he disagrees, he is free to join another church and worship and serve God freely there.

The claim of the new BPCIS and their book *Heritage & Legacy* that upholding the doctrine of premillennialism detracts from a proper understanding of Bible-Presbyterianism is extremely misleading and very untrue. Upholding a biblical doctrine will never detract one from understanding the good old Bible-Presbyterian faith as defined and taught by our founding fathers especially the Rev Dr Timothy Tow. Further, the upholding of Bible-Presbyterianism has never been the cause of division. It is unbelief and compromise that has caused division. It is departure from those biblical doctrines and introduction of carnal practices that have brought about divisions in the past.

May the Lord protect and preserve His Church from the sweeping tide of unbelief, compromise, and worldliness in these last days.

## Notes

<sup>1</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 Press, 2007), 431

<sup>2</sup> Chua Choon Lian, gen ed, *Heritage & Legacy of the Bible-Presbyterian Church in Singapore* (Singapore: Finishing Well Ministries, 2018), 525pp.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 498.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 496.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 502.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 512–513.

<sup>7</sup> Timothy Tow, *Story of My Bible-Presbyterian Faith* (Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College Press, 1999), 12–13.

<sup>8</sup> Timothy Tow, *Asian Awakening* (Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College Press, 1988], 38.

<sup>9</sup> Tow, *Story of My Bible-Presbyterian Faith*, 13.

<sup>10</sup> Timothy Tow, *Son of a Mother's Vow* (Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College Press, 2001), 422.

<sup>11</sup> Tow, *Story of My Bible-Presbyterian Faith*, 15.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Timothy Tow, *The Singapore B-P Church Story* (Singapore: Life Book Centre, 1995), 35.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>15</sup> Chua, *Heritage & Legacy*, 514.

<sup>16</sup> John A Battle, "Eschatology in the Bible Presbyterian Church", *Western Reformed Seminary Journal* (2004): 10

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 11 (emphasis mine).

<sup>18</sup> Timothy Tow, *Prophescope on Israel* (Singapore: Christian Life Publishers, 1992), 122.

<sup>19</sup> Tow and Khoo, *Theology for Every Christian*, 656

<sup>20</sup> Tow, *Story of My Bible-Presbyterian Faith*, 119.

<sup>21</sup> Timothy Tow, ed, *Fifty Years Building His Kingdom: Golden Jubilee Magazine (1950–2000)*, (Singapore: Life Bible-Presbyterian Church, 2000), 51.

<sup>22</sup> *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, sv "Covenant Theology".

<sup>23</sup> C I Scofield, *The First Scofield Study Bible* (Iowa Falls: World Bible Publishers, 1986), 1572

<sup>24</sup> Craig A Blaising and Darrell L Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 11.

<sup>25</sup> Westminster Confession of Faith, 25:1–2.

<sup>26</sup> J Oliver Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* (Singapore: Christian Life Publisher, 1994), 1:420.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 2:489.

<sup>28</sup> Tow, *Story of My Bible-Presbyterian Faith*, 16–18.

<sup>29</sup> Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, 1:420.

<sup>30</sup> Henry A Virkler, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1981), 66.

<sup>31</sup> Westminster Confession of Faith, 1:9.

<sup>32</sup> Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, 1:25.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 2:427.

<sup>34</sup> Darrell L Bock, “Hermeneutics of Progressive Dispensationalism” in *Contemporary Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 91.

<sup>35</sup> Timothy Tow, *The Gospel Prophets* (Singapore: Christian Life Publishers, nd), 11. Tow coined the term “prophescope” to describe it: “Like a man looking out of his window into the distance, the seer and the prophet, insofar as prophetic history is concerned, can see a panorama of four mountain ranges...”.

<sup>36</sup> Tow and Khoo, *Theology for Every Christian*, 480.

<sup>37</sup> For an example, see Jeffrey Khoo, “The Sign of the Virgin Birth”, *The Burning Bush* (1995): 5–33. See also his paper “Dispensational Premillennialism in Reformed Theology”, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (2001): 697–717.

<sup>38</sup> Tow, *Story of My Bible-Presbyterian Faith*, 18–20.

<sup>39</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 2:618 (emphasis mine).

<sup>40</sup> J Barton Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 13.

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## **THE DIDACHE AND PEDAGOGY OF JESUS: LESSONS FROM THE GOSPEL OF LUKE**

Michael Koech

Jesus was a master teacher and He was able to make an impact on the people in both formal and informal settings. The message He preached had eternal value. Though He also preached in the temple and in the synagogues often, He was able to attract large crowds in informal places. He went to where the common people were and He shared His message with them and attended to their needs. The people addressed Him as Rabbi, a title given to a qualified religious teacher. There are great lessons to learn from Jesus in the simplicity of His approach to teaching. He was able to discern the hearts and satisfy men's inner desires. He spoke with convincing authority.

### **The Teacher and the Calling of His Disciples (Luke 5:1–16)**

Jesus did not have a planning committee to prepare the venue for His addresses. Modern public address systems also did not exist in those days. He simply used His natural voice in a convenient place. Sometimes He had to improvise on the venue so that it would serve Him and His audience well. At Gennesaret for instance, He saw two boats by the lake. He stepped into one of them and taught from it as the people stood on the shore. He had good eye contact. He also made sure everyone could see Him.

Jesus came to the seaside to share the gospel with the fishermen. As much as His meetings were informal, He also lent His hand to the fishermen so that they could complete their job. Peter was already His disciple but he had not entirely left his work as a fisherman. Peter and his friends were skillful in catching fish at night, but they were not always successful. That morning when Jesus met them, they had been trying hard but caught nothing. Jesus saw their predicament and told them to launch into the deep and let down their nets for a draught. Peter said that they had toiled in vain all night, but agreed to do as told.

Peter and his fellow fishermen caught such a great multitude of fish that their nets almost broke. They were not able to carry the fish in one boat and had to ask others from another boat to assist them. Both were full and were about to sink, however they made it to shore. The power of the Son of God over nature is unlimited because He is the Creator of the universe. The conduct of all wild creatures is under His control. Scientists have made extensive studies on the physiology and behavior of animals on land and in the sea. They have made many discoveries. But all these were in existence from the beginning and God knows every detail. It was easy for Him to command the fish to gather into the net. Jesus used this miracle to call His disciples to a higher vocation.

Peter and they that were with him were amazed at the miracle of the multitude of fish. Peter fell at Jesus' feet and confessed that he was a sinner and desired that Jesus departed from him. James and John the sons of Zebedee were also fishermen and were partners with Peter. Jesus calmed Peter down as He announced His appointment of him to a higher calling. He said to him, "*Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men*" (Luke 5:10c). He said the same to James and John as recorded in the other gospels. It was after this calling that they forsook their nets and boats and followed Jesus. Adam Clarke commented, "Thou shalt catch men alive; this is the proper signification of the word. Fear not: these discoveries of God tend to life, not to death; and ye shall become the instruments of life and salvation to a lost world. These fish are taken to be killed and fed on; but those who are converted under your ministry shall be preserved unto eternal life."<sup>1</sup>

Fishing was their direct means of livelihood. When Jesus called them, He did not give them an alternative means. He was their assurance and they were contented to obey and depend on Him. When He sent them to preach in the villages, He also taught them a lesson on their livelihood. They learnt it well and were contented to follow His instructions.

Jesus chose His earliest disciples to be trained to carry out the ministry of preaching the gospel. He told His disciples who were fishermen that He would make them fishers of men. After His ascension to heaven, these who were called "Apostles" accomplished the Great Commission of Christ.



## **The Teacher and His Contention against False Teachers (Luke 5:17–26)**

The Pharisees were religious leaders who considered themselves as authority above the biblical law. The Pharisees and doctors of the Law were often present when Jesus taught. They often found fault with all that He said or did. Jesus had answers to all their questions. Jesus carried out His ministry unhindered despite their opposition.

There was this instance when Jesus was teaching and many people crowded around Him. There was a group who brought a sick man with palsy to Jesus for healing. When those men could not get to where Jesus was in the house they decided to break the roof and lower the sick man on a couch to where Jesus was. Jesus saw their faith and told the man that his sins were forgiven. Jesus did this on purpose. He wanted to highlight the importance of forgiveness. Forgiveness was more important than physical healing because of sin. Jesus also did it intentionally to provoke a reaction from the religious leaders who were present.

The Pharisees as expected found fault with Jesus' teaching. They accused Him of blasphemy since only God could forgive sins. Jesus perceived their thoughts and confronted them, saying, "*What reason ye in your hearts? Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (he said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house*" (Luke 5:22–24). Jesus performed another remarkable miracle. A man who was carried in on a couch was now going home carrying the couch himself. He departed glorifying God. Those who compassionately carried him to Jesus were equally amazed and glorified God.

Jesus through this miracle asserted His deity. He told them that the Son of man has power on earth to forgive sins. Though He referred to Himself as Son of man, He was indeed the Son of God as well. He possessed all the attributes and authority of God.

## **The Teacher and His Calling of Unusual Disciples (Luke 5:27–39)**

Jesus called Levi the publican to follow Him. Publicans or tax collectors were despised by the Jews. They were thought to be dishonest and were considered thieves. As far as the Jews were concerned, they did

not deserve any mercy. Jesus called Levi (aka Matthew) and used him as an object lesson on how to deal with sinners.

Indeed a majority of these tax collectors were indeed guilty of dishonesty and theft. Nevertheless, Jesus called Levi and Levi obeyed and followed Him. Later Levi honoured Jesus with a feast in his house. Jesus went to the feast. This was against the expectation of the Pharisees. They accused Jesus of eating and drinking with sinners. Jesus gave them an answer for His actions thusly, *“They that are whole need not a physician: but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance”* (Luke 5:31–32). It takes simple reasoning to answer such misguided complaints; yet these religious leaders were never satisfied and always sought to find fault with the actions of Jesus.

The appointment of one into church office is very important indeed. The first officers of the Christian church were the twelve apostles appointed by Jesus Himself. Prior to choosing the twelve, He prayed to the Father: *“And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God”* (Luke 6:12). After praying and seeking the Father’s will, He called twelve to be His apostles and they were *“Simon, (whom he also named Peter,) and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called Zelotes, And Judas the brother of James, and Judas Iscariot, which also was the traitor”* (Luke 6:14–16). He named them “apostles” meaning “sent-out ones”. After Christ ascended to heaven, they were sent out to spread the Christian faith. Their success was anchored on the fact that they were a well-chosen band.

The practice of prayer before ordination was followed by the apostles when it was their time to appoint church officers. Paul also counselled against haste in appointing anyone into office. It is a clear pattern for the church as prescribed by the Jesus Himself. Acts 13:2–3 records the first commissioning of missionaries, and it says, *“As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.”* Their act was very much in line with the example of the Lord Jesus. The apostles that were chosen came from different backgrounds. At least four of them were fishermen and one was a tax collector. The others were ordinary folks who did not come from the Pharisaic or priestly

class. Only the apostle Paul who came later was from that religious and scholarly class.

It is of interest that Jesus also chose Judas Iscariot—another unusual disciple. Jesus knew all along that he was not a genuine disciple; yet he was numbered among the apostles. John revealed that Judas was a thief. Judas betrayed Jesus and it was part of God’s eternal plan. The choosing of Judas was a manifestation of sovereignty of God.

### **The Teacher and His Godly Code of Conduct (Luke 6:27–49)**

The eternal principle of love for one’s neighbour whether practised or not comes out clearly in everyday life. A person’s attitude towards his enemies reveals the kind of heart he has. Jesus taught against revenge and asserted that we must do good to our enemies, not expecting anything in return. He forbade a judgmental attitude and also taught a strong lesson on giving. Such conduct must not be for a season only but must consistently be seen in one’s life.

There is wisdom in doing good even to our enemies because such actions can prevent strife. God is love and His followers must show a godly character in their attitude towards their enemies. Jesus added that the disciples must bless and pray for those who did them wrong. This teaching surprises many because the carnal reaction is often revenge.

In the world of great conflict it will be amazing to see the humble reaction of a Christian to the violence of an adversary. Jesus said, “*And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloak forbid not to take thy coat also. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again*” (Luke 6:29–30). He said this not as a way of surrender to the enemy but a means of subduing the enemy.

A story is told of a woman giving out gospel tracts in the street, and she offered one to a man sitting in his car. He responded by spitting on her face. She was not deterred. She took out a handkerchief, wiped her face, turned to the man again and told him that many did the same to her Lord and Saviour. The man was touched and subsequently became a believer. Such treatment of the enemy is alien to two world religions that are related to Christianity. Since they do not believe in Christ, they advocate revenge and this has resulted in unending wars in the Middle East. There is no opportunity for reconciliation and enmity has persisted. Matthew Henry commented, “These are hard lessons to flesh and blood.

But if we are thoroughly grounded in the faith of Christ's love, this will make his commands easy to us. Every one that comes to him for washing in his blood, and knows the greatness of the mercy and the love there is in him, can say, in truth and sincerity, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? Let us then aim to be merciful, even according to the mercy of our heavenly Father to us."<sup>2</sup>

The words of Jesus are anchored on the commandment to love our neighbour as ourselves. This has become known as the golden rule: "*And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise*" (Luke 6:31). This statement of principle serves as a yardstick for Christians in dealing with other people. God knows what is best for man and He gives these guidelines for the promotion of human welfare. When a person does good for others, it also serves his own good. Also the success of any institution depends mainly on good public relations guided by the same principle of love. Christians are to have such a testimony.

Mutual love among people is the same. Jesus told His disciples that even sinners love those who love them. When Christians do good to those who do good to them, they are no different from unbelievers who do the same. Jesus was telling them that they needed to do something out of the ordinary and this requires sacrifice on their part. The conduct of a believer must be distinct from that of unbelievers. He told them not to judge or condemn but to forgive. Jesus prayed the Father to forgive those who had crucified Him for they did not know what they were doing. He also forgave the thief on the cross who repented. Such acts go a long way in changing the lives of our adversaries.

Jesus teaches His disciples to give. Generosity is a virtue that is appreciated by all but in return one must be able to give to others. "*Give, and it shall be given unto you, good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over; shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.*" (Luke 6:38). Paul quoted Jesus in Acts 20:35, "*it is more blessed to give than to receive.*" Giving in the form of tithing as found in the Old Testament was ten percent of total income. This is still a valid guide to giving.

A commentator added that we have another law which can be applied in two ways, practically and spiritually. On the human level, generosity tends to be contagious or at least reciprocal even among unconverted men. Beyond that, God promises direct reward to those who are generous to others.<sup>3</sup> Believers give their gifts to the church to support

the pastor, to build God's house and other needs in the church's ministry. They also give to maintenance of equipment and to help needy people. Well wishes without giving will come to nothing. It misses out on God's promised blessing. In the Lord's work, faith cannot be separated from giving. They go hand in hand. Jesus knows the importance of giving and He gave guidelines on how to do it.

### **The Teacher and His Teaching Skills (Luke 8:1–25)**

Jesus was a teacher and He knew the needs of His audience. He spoke in parables using common things in life to teach His truths. He was also ready to give an answer to every inquiry. He also used miracles to reveal the truth of who He was and what He wanted to teach. Jesus went to every village and city to preach and teach. This was a form of practical instruction to His disciples. Jesus was preparing them for the life-long ministry of missions and evangelism.

Jesus used parables to teach many a message. Parables are allegorical relations of something real in life from which a truth is drawn for instruction.<sup>4</sup> Jesus used them as effective tools in teaching. The parable of the sower is a classic case in point: "*A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit a hundredfold*" (Luke 8:5–8). Agriculture was the main occupation in those days. His hearers could readily follow what He was trying to say. If they paid close attention to His parables and received them with the right attitude, they would have learned a great deal, "*He that hath ears to hear, let him hear*" (Luke 8:8).

Jesus told them the meaning of the parable. The seed is the Word of God and the sower is Jesus Himself. This disclosure made the parable easier to follow. At any rate, the parable was further explained. The seed fallen on the wayside refers to people who hear the Word but allow the devil to come and take it away. They will not believe and will not be saved. This in effect also instructs the hearers to be careful and to hold on to the Word and not allow it to be taken away from them. This warning is given severally in Scripture and those who listen faithfully will greatly benefit from the Lord's salvation.

The seed fallen onto rocks refers to those who do not give thought to the Word and are only short-term believers. They are merely professing believers. This is a dangerous position to be in. They believe superficially and thus cannot live a life pleasing to God.

The seed fallen among thorns represent those who are drawn away by the cares, riches and pleasures of life. These professing believers have a heart that is divided and does not seek eternal values. They are enticed by temporal and material things and are driven to lust after them. They eventually give up their faith.

The seed that fell on good soil refers to those who do the will of God. They yielded fruit a hundredfold. They received the Word in a full or wholesome manner. It is like lighting a lamp and putting it on a stand so that it gives the intended light. Jesus said that there is nothing that is kept secret that shall not be made manifest. He urged His audience to listen well for their salvation.

Jesus taught His disciples to deny themselves, take up their own crosses and follow Him. He explained that this might mean disagreeing with or leaving close family members. When His brothers and mother were not able to get to Him because of the crowd and called for His immediate attention, He said, *“My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it”* (Luke 8:21b). This showed His commitment to God and the divine task.

Jesus is God and He used His full knowledge of all things to teach great lessons. He also used this ability at the right time to strengthen His words. The words that are written are the same seeds that He sowed and they must bear fruit continually. Those who listen to Christ have all knowledge. He is the gift of God to mankind and He gives eternal life.

### **The Teacher and His Emphasis on Truth and Understanding (Luke 9:43–62)**

Jesus did not run short of lessons to teach His disciples. He desired that they listen to Him and learn everything He taught them. When He talked of His coming crucifixion, He wanted them to know its purpose. He also answered simple questions and rebuked their misconceived ideas. In the end, He wanted them to be disciples committed to the task of preaching. Jesus did not miss the opportunity to teach these lessons.

Jesus wanted the disciples to understand Him. He wanted them to understand the significance of His coming crucifixion as prophesied in Isaiah 53:7–8 which says, “*He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.*” Jesus wanted to prepare them for that occasion. He knew their hearts and wanted to assure them that there was no cause for fear. However, the disciples were not at all perceptive.

The disciples had other interests in mind. They began to ask who should be the greatest among them. Some have begun to think ambitiously of themselves as qualifying for leadership positions. Jesus also knew what was happening and He taught them an object lesson on leadership. He took a small child and put him in their midst and told them, “*Whosoever shall receive this child in my name receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me receiveth him that sent me: for he that is least among you all, the same shall be great*” (Luke 9:48b). The leadership they would have was a spiritual leadership and God Himself was their Leader. Jesus’ intention was to show them that leadership was to be guided by humility and servanthood and not by pride and pomp as seen in the worldly leaders of the Jews and the Romans.

John told Jesus that he had forbidden someone from casting out demons in His name since he was not one of them. Jesus corrected John by telling him, “*Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us.*” Jesus wanted to build unity among the believers and the unifying factor was their faith. The apostles were a special team of disciples and had to learn what leadership was all about. They were to share their faith with others and lead them to the fellowship of Jesus Christ. They had to overcome the notion of elitism or lordship over God’s flock and receive into fellowship everyone who believed in His name. Jesus thus sought to enshrine the moral code of virtues the disciples needed to be servant-leaders of His people. This was His approach in tutoring them for the great task ahead.

Jesus gave His disciples a lesson on what it meant to follow Him. He told him that foxes have holes and the birds have nests, but He did not have a place to lay His head. He was teaching them not to think of

comfort and luxury if they wanted to follow Him. Discipleship involves commitment. It requires full surrender.

### **Jesus' Teaching on Evangelism (Luke 10:1–20)**

Evangelism is a means of building the church. The main motivation of evangelism is the love of God and the peace that it brings. Rejection of Christ can only bring misery and grave consequences, but receiving the gospel will bring eternal blessings. Jesus knew of the great need for people to hear the gospel. He observed that the harvest was truly great but the labourers were few. He prayed for labourers to be raised to do the work.

In the evangelistic mission, the disciples were to enter every village and city to which they were sent. They were sent as lambs among wolves. They were entering a hostile world. As such, they were to be wise as serpents but harmless as doves. They needed to have the qualities of humility and wisdom to be able to withstand and overcome difficult and even dangerous conditions.

Jesus also, as in the earlier commission, taught them how to reach out to the unsaved. They were to approach their mission by faith in terms of their daily necessities. He instructed them to *“Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes: and salute no man by the way. And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house. And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it: if not, it shall turn to you again. And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the laborer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house. And into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you”* (Luke 10:4–8). The message of peace that they carry was a demonstration of God’s love for the people who needed salvation. The counsel for them not to carry anything extra was meant to consolidate their faith in God. They did not have to provide for themselves but to wait for the hand of God to provide for them. God would always supply their needs according to His riches in glory.

The message of Jesus was guided by love: In the gospel of John, Jesus uttered this golden verse: *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life”* (John 3:16). This is a summary of the whole gospel. Peace defines the character of Christ and God is the source of love and salvation. Peace is the outcome of that love as one is saved from sin and has hope of eternal happiness in the Lord. That blessing comes



to every home that welcomes the messengers of God. On the other hand, God's curse is upon those who are hostile to the gospel of peace.

In addition to preaching the gospel, Jesus also commanded His disciples to heal the sick. Physical suffering is painful and it is a great relief when one can be freed from that agony. Jesus knew of this great need among many and He Himself healed the sick wherever He went. This also reveals the power of God as the Creator. Sickness is part of human suffering that came as a result of sin. It is sad today that this good work of the Lord has been made a reference for counterfeit healing by many preachers. They use many tricks to fake the healing for monetary gains. God heals but none of us should take credit for it, neither should it be used for personal gain. In the mission of the disciples, all the healing is attributed to Christ. There is a need to pray for the sick today and also to provide medical help. Every good and perfect gift comes from God, even modern medicine. Thus we pray to God for healing but we also need medical help.

The seventy rejoiced that the devils were subject to them. This was foremost in their minds as they reported to Jesus about their mission. Jesus saw a developing spirit of pride in the disciples. This is always a temptation to those whom God uses to manifest His power. Thus He cautioned them saying, "*I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you*" (Luke 10:18–19). Jesus was saying that without Him they could easily be defeated by Satan and He wanted them to acknowledge in humility the source of their power. Matthew Henry made this good observation,

All our victories over Satan are obtained by power derived from Jesus Christ, and he must have all the praise. But let us beware of spiritual pride, which has been the destruction of many. Our Lord rejoiced at the prospect of the salvation of many souls. It was fit that particular notice should be taken of that hour of joy; there were few such, for He was a man of sorrows: in that hour in which he saw Satan fall, and heard of the good success of his ministers, in that hour he rejoiced. He has ever resisted the proud, and given grace to the humble. The more simply dependent we are on the teaching, help, and blessing of the Son of God, the more we shall know both of the Father and of the Son; the more blessed we shall be in seeing the glory, and hearing the words of the Divine Saviour; and the more useful we shall be made in promoting his cause.<sup>5</sup>

Jesus told them that their ultimate joy must not lie in temporal victory but in their victory over the world and in their eternal destiny. The advertising of crusades and the promise of miracles are not uncommon today. People are deceived. They are not so much concerned with salvation from sin but on miracles and wealth. Carnality and simony do not glorify God. Beware of becoming a Judas Iscariot.

### **Jesus' Teaching on Prayer (Luke 11:1–13)**

Prayer was part of the life of Jesus on earth. The disciples knew the necessity of prayer but did not know how to pray rightly. One day they observed Jesus as He was praying and they asked Him to teach them to pray. Jesus then taught them what came to be known as the Lord's Prayer. Jesus not only taught them to pray, He also stressed the need to be importunate in prayer. He showed that God answers prayer as one keeps asking, seeking and knocking.

Jesus set the example for the disciples in His spending time with the Father in prayer. It was common for Him to have such a time of prayer. In John 17, His lengthy prayer is recorded word for word. The disciples knew that they too had to learn to pray. However they saw themselves as babies in the faith and did not know what to say in addressing the Heavenly Father. Thus they asked Jesus to teach them to pray. They were eager to learn how to have a meaningful communion with their Father. Jesus was agreeable to their request and taught them the pattern of prayer. In it there are six petitions.<sup>6</sup> This has been adopted and used by Christians in their daily prayers. The petitions of the Lord's Prayer are of a representative nature and serve as a good guide in making specific requests.

Jesus told the disciples that their prayers to God are not in vain. God is sovereign and He answers according to His will, regardless of how we ask. He knows best our needs. Thus He instructed them of the three approaches to prayer, and shared with them the common reactions in everyday life: *“And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how*

*much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"* (Luke 11:9–13).

Jesus also stressed the need of persistence in prayer and gave the example of a friend who came at midnight to borrow bread to feed a stranger. Though the friend was reluctant to wake up and give him what he needed, he did so because of his importunity. Prayer must follow the same pattern.

Prayer is necessary as an effective communication with God. It is a natural desire for everyone who loves God. Jesus gave guidelines on what to ask of God and how to ask. This means that the regularity of prayer has to be on a daily basis. The assurance is that God hears and answers prayer. The key factor is that, in all things, His will is to be done. Pray and wait for God's answer.

### **Jesus' Teaching about Overcoming Satan (Luke 11:14–26)**

The unbelievers deny God and also the existence of Satan. Such denials are part of Satan's scheme to win more people to his evil ways. In the text, Jesus confronted Satan and exposed the evil of his ways and how to overcome him and his evil. He also warned against laxity in our faith towards God which makes a person easy prey for Satan.

Jesus met a man who was dumb and knew that he was possessed of the devil. He cast him out of the dumb man and when the devil was gone out the man spoke. Devils are able to live in a person and to deform the person's physical abilities. When the man was restored, the people wondered at the power of Jesus. He is the Creator and He has power over all spirit and evil beings. He was able to identify that it was the devil that had caused the man to be dumb. Jesus has power over the devil. By His command, the devil came out of the man. However the Jews were hardened and did not want to believe in Jesus. They proceeded to find fault with Him.

Jesus asked the Jews how their exorcists cast out devils. They could not answer Him. He then told them a story to prove His point. He said that when a strong man was armed, he kept his palace and his goods were safe. But when a stronger man came upon him and overcame him, and took away his strength, then he would be able to spoil his goods. Meyer gave a fitting commentary on this passage:

The strong man of this parable is evidently Satan, who guards the palace of man's nature, to which he has no right. It is the palace of the King,

which has been captured by His direst foe. The demon-possession of the body is a parable and illustration of the terrible results of the possession of the soul by the demons of jealousy, passion, etc. Satan is strong – stronger than Adam in his innocence or David in his palace. He is armed with the lie; is always on the watch to lull us into false security; but the peace which He gives is of death.

Thank God, Christ is stronger! In the wilderness and on the Cross He proved Himself so. He took away His foe's armor and bruised his head. When Christ takes up His residence in the heart Satan may rage outside and fling in horrid suggestions, but the door is kept closed against his return. They are to be pitied who make a reform in their own strength – Satan will return. Only Christ can work permanent deliverance.<sup>7</sup>

Victory over Satan can only come through Jesus Christ. Jesus demonstrated this fact before the eyes of His audience. Believers always have this privilege over Satan.

The evil one works round the clock to ensure that he retained those whom he had ensnared. This is the story as told by Jesus, "*When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out. And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh to him **seven other spirits** more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first*" (Luke 11:24–26). This is a scenario that is witnessed every day in the lives of many professing Christians. Many writers have illustrated this story in different ways and it will help us to remember easily when it is related to the breaking of the Ten Commandments.

The seven spirits motivate man's carnal desires. **The first spirit** ensures that the man's unbelief is sustained. He will keep him away from reading God's Word or praying and prevents any form of communication with God. **The second spirit** ensures that there is no harmony in the man's family. The command to honour father and mother is rejected and the humanistic law of individual freedom is stressed. Thus that basic unit of the society is destroyed. The second spirit comes with a sword of revenge, thus violence will become a means of solving any issues in the home and society at large. Domestic violence becomes the order of the day and at times leads even to multiple deaths. The command not to kill is all forgotten. **The third spirit** represents that old sin of Sodom and Gomorrah. Adultery coming with its lusts brings untold evils of

homosexuality, incest, and contamination with sexually transmitted diseases. This also leads to death and the breaking up of family units. **The fourth spirit** makes the man a habitual thief. **The fifth spirit** keeps the man's lips with lies; he will lie as an instrument of Satan. **The sixth spirit** ensures that he covets anything and everything so that he will break all other commandments. **The seventh spirit** keeps the door to ensure that the man receives no help to overcome his sinful habits. These are man's ideas but they are realities in the lives of many today.

A popular old booklet used this story as an allegory with ten pictures and the author remarked, "You are either ruled by Satan or by God; you are a slave to sin or a servant of God. If sin rules your life do not deny it, but cry to God. He will set you free through Jesus Christ who came to this world to save sinners, to break the power of Satan and sin over us."<sup>8</sup> There is always a great warfare against the devil. The Lord Jesus Christ has power over all evils and devils. Any transgression of the Law of God is playing the devil's game. Come to Jesus and you will have victory over the devil.

### **Jesus' Teaching on Discipleship (Luke 12:1–40)**

The popularity of Jesus brought multitudes that came to hear Him. Most had believed in Him and were willing to give of their lives to follow Him. Others came out of curiosity to see His miracles. Yet others sought Him to settle their earthly matters or to find a better way of becoming rich. All of them needed to learn the right direction from Him and to receive spiritual edification. Jesus was always ready to teach them. He found many opportunities to show them what they needed. His lessons touched on many issues pertaining to true discipleship. There was the need for them to know God and His power. Discipleship involves a wholehearted commitment and a proper handling of earthly wealth.

Jesus taught about the power of God. There were threats against His disciples for their faith in Him. Jesus also knew what would befall them after He departed from them. They would be persecuted. Their persecution would end up in the death of a number of them. Thus Jesus told them not to fear those who could kill the body but after that had no more power. They should rather fear God who has the power to cast both body and soul into the lake of fire. There was life beyond death and God alone has power over life and death. The disciples needed to be prepared for a time when they had to take a stand for their faith.

The words of Jesus were prophetic. Stephen, one of the seven deacons who were chosen to assist the apostles became the first martyr. He was a man full of the Holy Spirit as the Scriptures revealed. Those who opposed him could not resist the wisdom and power with which he spoke. By the grace of God he went beyond the calling of his office and preached the Word of God powerfully. The Jewish religious leaders could not stand to see their authority being challenged and in the end they stoned Stephen to death. The testimony of Stephen at his death tells how the words of Christ lived in him. This is Luke's testimony of him, "*And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep*" (Acts 7:59–60). James the apostle was another early martyr. John was the last of the apostles to die and spoke of his own exile to the isle of Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. Jesus said He knew that all these things were coming. However, that did not cause them to give up.

Regardless of martyrdom, Jesus assured His disciples that they were all very valuable to Him. As God took care of the sparrows, so God would watch over them. Jesus said, "*... even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows*" (Luke 12:7). It is estimated that there are about two hundred thousand hairs on a human head. One or two may fall off, yet God as Creator takes notice. He is thus able to protect those who are persecuted for His name's sake.

Jesus taught about the need for wholehearted commitment. A Christian must be a living witness for Christ at all times. Jesus said that those who confessed Him before men, He also would confess them before the angels of God. Likewise those who denied Him before men, He also would deny them before the angels of God. The testimony of a believer is not only in the attendance of worship services, but also in his daily conduct outside the church, day and night. This is when unbelievers can see Christ in the life of one who follows Him. Denying Christ is not necessarily in speech, but also in failing to live a life worthy of Him. The inability to defend Him when His name is attacked is also denying Him.

The Holy Spirit is ever present to support believers in their quest to stand for their faith. Jesus told the disciples to expect accusation before authorities and assured them of spiritual assistance with these words,

“*And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say: For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say*” (Luke 12:11–12). This was true in the case of Stephen cited above. This would be a pattern for all believers to follow and to stand on the divine promise. Apart from the early church as recorded in the book of Acts, church history also gives a picture of a persecuted church and speaks of lives of many who have stood bravely for their faith.

Jesus taught about the handling of earthly wealth. This came up when a man asked Jesus about the sharing of family inheritance with his brother. Jesus turned down the man’s request, saying that He was not a judge or divider over them. He warned against covetousness and remarked, “*...for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth*” (Luke 12:15b). He told of a man who had anticipated an abundant harvest and that he would have grain enough for many years. His barns were too small and were not sufficient to store the fruits, so he decided to pull down the existing ones and build bigger ones. He saw himself enjoying his fruits for a long time. He had hoped for happiness in this life only. God called him a fool for his soul would be required that night. Then Jesus posed the question, “*whose shall those things which he had provided?*” and concluded, “*So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God*” (Luke 12:21). Jesus was teaching the need for contentment in the material things we possess and the need to pursue godliness in our communion with Him.

God is pleased to give His children the kingdom. As part of their pilgrimage towards heaven, the believers must make use of their possessions to help others. Jesus told the disciples to sell what they had and give alms. In so doing they would be storing up heavenly treasures for themselves. Jesus said that where their hearts were, their treasures also would be. Their goals had to shift from terrestrial to celestial. He told them to have their lights burning as they await His return. Those who are found watching would be blessed.

### **Jesus’ Teaching about Wise Stewardship (Luke 12:41–59)**

The word “steward” comes from the Greek *oikonomos* which literally means “law of the house”. When applied to a person, it refers to a household manager. One of the qualities a steward must have is

faithfulness. Christians are seen as stewards of God's business and Jesus spoke of the need for wise stewardship. Jesus said, "*Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing*" (Luke 12:43). A wise steward fulfils his duty as given to him by his master.

There is always a danger of careless stewardship. For example, when one occupies a high office, there is the temptation to misuse one's position to mistreat others. Usually a high office is a position of trust, and a steward is expected to abide by the rules of that office. Professional guidelines today have been refined in order to prevent the abuse of office. Regardless of all these, faithfulness still stands out as the chief requirement. A steward caught abusing his office will be reprimanded, suspended or dismissed depending on the nature of the offence. The rules were the same even in the days of Jesus and He told of the punishment meted out on offending stewards. He said, "*The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers*" (Luke 12:46). There are temptations that all people face, to love the things of the world more than to love God. Jesus knew that all these would come upon His disciples and thus He gave this warning of the need to be a faithful steward. He also stressed that the unfaithful steward will face a painful punishment from his master. An immediate example would be Judas Iscariot. He was a disciple of Jesus but only outwardly. Even before he sold Jesus away and betrayed Him, he was already covetous and a thief. He was driven by the love of money. His end was disastrous.

Jesus' requirement for His disciples is stated in these words, "*For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more*" (Luke 12:48b). This is a logical statement of expectation. A commentator added, "... the more knowledge a man has, the more practice is expected from him; and the greater his gifts are, the more useful he ought to be, and diligent in the improvement of them: ... not more than what was committed to him, but more than from him, who has less committed to him; in proportion to what a man is entrusted with, the greater increase and improvement it is expected he should make."<sup>9</sup> The master expected from a steward a worthy portion depending on how much was committed to that steward. He was stressing to the disciples that it was necessary for them to labour



and to bring returns worthy of their labour. This is expected of every generation till Jesus returns.

What is the cost of faithful stewardship? Jesus said that division was a necessary part of faithful stewardship. A faithful steward will offend those who are not willing to work according to the law. Division, persecution and death would be part of the cost of faithful stewardship in things pertaining to heaven. He said that He came not to bring peace but division. What He was saying was already obvious when one considered the reaction that the Jewish community had shown to Him and His gospel. The sect of the Pharisees led in the opposition and that extended to division within the family. This was a picture of the conflict that came with trusting in Jesus Christ.

Every Christian is a steward of Jesus Christ and they need to attend to their duties faithfully. Follow His words and you will be accounted a faithful steward and you will have His reward. Amen.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible* (obtained from e-Sword Version 10.4.0).

<sup>2</sup> *Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary* (obtained from e-Sword Version 10.4.0).

<sup>3</sup> John Blanchard, *Luke Comes Alive*, (Durham: Evangelical Press, 1986), 49–50.

<sup>4</sup> *Noah Webster's 1828 Dictionary of American English* (obtained from e-Sword version 10.4.0), sv "Parable."

<sup>5</sup> *Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary* (obtained from e-Sword Version 10.4.0).

<sup>6</sup> The version of this prayer recorded in Luke slightly differs from the one in Matthew 6. Jesus taught the same prayer under different circumstances. Matthew's record is more comprehensive and is chosen here for exposition.

<sup>7</sup> F B Meyer, *Through the Bible Day by Day* (obtained from e-Sword, Version 10.4.0).

<sup>8</sup> J R Gschwend, *The Heart of Man or Spiritual Heart Mirror* (Pretoria: All Nations Gospel Publishers, 1929), 2–3.

<sup>9</sup> *John Gill's Exposition of Entire Bible* (obtained from e-Sword, version 10.4.0).

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## THE TITLE “REVEREND”

Gia Hien Nguyen

The term “reverend” was mentioned together with the God’s name in the King James Bible (KJV) in Psalm 111:9, “*He sent redemption unto his people: he hath commanded his covenant for ever: holy and reverend is his name.*” Since the term “reverend” is used of God, should pastors or ministers use the title “Reverend” for themselves and let others address them as “Reverend”? Let us study this term “reverend” in the original language Scriptures to understand its meaning and to find the answer to the above question.

(1) In Psalm 111:9, the holiness of God’s name is emphasised and then the reverence, “*holy (qādos) and reverend (yare) is his name.*” The translators of the KJV kept the correct order of the words in their translation according to the order found in the Hebrew text. Usually, a word is put first in a sentence for emphasis.

(2) “Holy” is an adjective describing the holiness of God’s name. The word “reverend” is also an adjective describing God’s name as “fearful”, “awesome”, or “respectful”.

(3) “Reverend” in Hebrew is from the verb *yare*, which means “to fear, to respect, to reverence”. In Psalm 111:9, *yare* is in the passive voice mode, which means “to be feared, to be respected, to be revered.” Thus, God’s name should be feared, respected, or revered by everyone.

(4) It should be noted that an adjective is used to describe God’s name. It is not a noun like the title “Reverend”, or like those found in Isaiah 9:6 where God’s name is “*Wonderful (from the Hebrew noun *pelē* — a wonder, a miracle), Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace*”.

(5) It should also be noted that the Hebrew verb *yare* in Psalm 111:9 in the passive voice which means reverend, respectful (adjective) is different from the title “Reverend” (adjective or noun, always capitalised),<sup>1</sup> which is used for pastors or ministers nowadays. The title “Reverend” is used of a preacher who has been ordained.

(6) The Hebrew verb *yare* is not only used for God's name, but also for honourable people like parents and God's servants. Thus, it is not wrong to address godly servants of the Lord as "Reverend".

(7) It is good to study more about the verb *yare* in the Old Testament, and then to study equivalent terms in Greek in the New Testament.

### ***Yare* – “Fear” and “Reverence” in Hebrew**

*Yare* has 314 occurrences, and the KJV translates it as “fear” 188 times, “afraid” 78 times, “terrible” 23 times, “terrible thing” six times, “dreadful” five times, “reverence” three times, “fearful” two times, “reverend” once, “terrible acts” once, etc. According to the Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon, the verb *yare* means:

(1) Fear, Be Afraid:

*“And he (Adam) said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid (yare), because I was naked; and I hid myself” (Gen 3:10; cf. 18:15).*

(2) Fear, Reverence, Honour:

(a) Fear God:

*“Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear (yare) the LORD, and depart from evil” (Prov 3:7).*

*“So Samuel called unto the LORD; and the LORD sent thunder and rain that day: and all the people greatly feared (yare) the LORD and Samuel” (1 Sam 12:18).* This verse shows that the verb *yare* is used both for the LORD and His servant Samuel.

(b) Honour Parents:

*“Ye shall fear (yare) every man his mother, and his father, and keep my sabbaths: I am the LORD your God” (Lev 19:3).*

(c) Honour God's Servants:

*“On that day the LORD magnified Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they feared (yare) him, as they feared (yare) Moses, all the days of his life” (Josh 4:14).*

(3) Inspire Reverence, Godly Fear, and Awe:

*“God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence (yare) of all them that are about him” (Ps 89:7).*

*“He sent redemption unto his people: he hath commanded his covenant for ever: holy and reverend (yare) is his name” (Ps 111:9).*

## “Fear” and “Honour” in Greek

The Greek equivalent term for “*respect, fear, honour*” is the verb *phobeō*, which has 93 occurrences; and the KJV translates it as “fear” 62 times, “be afraid” 23 times, “be afraid of” five times, “reverence” once, etc. According to the Greek-English Lexicon BAGD,<sup>2</sup> *phobeō* means:

(1) Fear, Be afraid:

“*Fear (phobeō) ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows*” (Matt 10:31). “*And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid (phobeō)*” (Matt 17:6);

(2) Have reverence, Respect:

(a) Fear God: “*Saying with a loud voice, Fear (phobeō) God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters*” (Rev 14:7).

(b) Honour men who command respect: “*Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence (phobeō) her husband*” (Eph 5:33). “*For Herod feared (phobeō) John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly*” (Mark 6:20).

Other Greek terms that denote “fear”, “honour” are *timaō*; *timē*; etc.

(1) *Timaō*

(a) Honour, Fear God: “*This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth (timaō) me with their lips; but their heart is far from me*” (Matt 15:8). “*That all men should honour (timaō) the Son, even as they honour (timaō) the Father. He that honoureth (timaō) not the Son honoureth (timaō) not the Father which hath sent him*” (John 5:23).

(b) Honour Parents: “*For God commanded, saying, Honour (timaō) thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death*” (Matt 15:4; cf. Eph 6:2).

(c) Honour God’s Servants and Honourable People: “*If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour (timaō)*” (John 12:26). “*Who also honoured (timaō) us with many honours; and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary*” (Acts 28:10). “*Honour (timaō) all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear (phobeō)*

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*God. Honour (timaō) the king*” (1 Pet 2:17). This shows that *phobeō* has a more respectful meaning with reverence.

### (2) *Timē*

(a) Honour, Respect, Reverence (to God and Honourable People): *“Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour (timē) and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created”* (Rev 4:11). *“But glory, honour (timē), and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile”* (Rom 2:10).

(b) Honour (to God’s Servants): *“Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour (timē), especially they who labour in the word and doctrine”* (1 Tim 5:17);

(c) Honour (to Wives): *“Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour (timē) unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered”* (1 Pet 3:7).

## The Term “Reverence” in the KJV

The translators of the KJV used the term “reverence” not only for God but also for respectful people.

### (1) In the Old Testament:

*“Ye shall keep my sabbaths, and reverence (yare) my sanctuary: I am the LORD”* (Lev 26:2). *“Then Bathsheba bowed with her face to the earth, and did reverence (shāchāh) to the king, and said, Let my lord king David live for ever”* (1 Kgs 1:31; cf Esth 3:2; 2 Sam 9:6). *“God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence (yare) of all them that are about him”* (Ps 89:7).

### (2) In the New Testament:

*“Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence (phobeō) her husband”* (Eph 5:33). *“Then said the lord of the vineyard, What shall I do? I will send my beloved son: it may be they will reverence (entrepō) him when they see him”* (Luke 20:13). *“Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence (entrepō): shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?”* (Heb 12:9). *“Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence (aidōs) and godly fear”* (Heb 12:28).

## Observations

(1) There should not be any confusion between “reverend” as an adjective (from the Hebrew root verb *yare* in passive mood, denoting “respectful, fearful”) which is used to describe God, with “Reverend” (adjective or noun) as a title for God’s servants who have been called by God and ordained into His ministry.

(2) It is not wrong to call God’s true and faithful servants with the respectful title “The Reverend” because God does honour His faithful servants (John 12:26) and teaches His children to honour them (1 Tim 5:17; 1 Thess 5:12–13; Heb 13:7,17). The title “The Rev” should be regarded just as a title for ordained pastors just as the title “Prof” is a title for university professors and “Dr” a title for physicians or those with a PhD.

(3) God’s true servants will be humble like Jesus Christ who is Lord of lords, King of kings, Master of masters, Doctor of doctors, etc, who was not offended or unhappy when men addressed Him just as “Jesus” without any title. Jesus Himself also addressed Himself as “Jesus” without any title (Luke 24:19; John 1:45, 6:42, 9:11, 12:21, 20:31; Acts 1:1, 11, 2:22, 32, 5:30; Rev 19:10, 22:16), except when He wanted to authenticate His Deity, Lordship and Messiahship (Matt 16:15–20; 26:63–64; John 13:13–14; Rev 1:8; etc).

(4) Jesus’ apostles were not offended or unhappy when they were addressed by name without any title. They also addressed themselves or other apostles by name without any title (1 Cor 1:12, 9:5; Gal 2:9; 1 Cor 3:21, 22; 2 Thess 1:1; Phlm 1:19; 2 Pet 3:15; Rev 1:4, 9), except when they wanted to authenticate their apostleship and their writings (Rom 1:1; 1 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:1; 1 Pet 1:1; 2 Pet 1:1; etc).

(5) Thus, God’s true servants will not be offended or unhappy when others do not call or address them as “Rev” or “Rev Dr” because “*all ye are brethren*” (Matt 23:8), and “*he that is greatest among you shall be your servant*” (Matt 23:11), and “*For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake*” (2 Cor 4:5).

(6) Those who claim to be God’s servants but love titles and do not submit themselves to the Lord and the authority of His Word in their lives and ministry will be despised like “*the salt have lost his savour; ... it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men*” (Matt 5:13). The worst is to be rejected when the Lord Jesus comes, “*Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into*

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*the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity”* (Matt 7:21–23).

(7) When God’s true servants serve the Lord faithfully according to His Word and guide others to the Lord and His Word alone, they should be still happy and thankful to the Lord even when they are despised, criticised or persecuted and when their names are cast out as evil for their Lord Jesus’ sake (Matt 5:11–12; Luke 6:22–23).

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> According to the classic Shorter Oxford English Dictionary: *Reverend* (adjective): (1) *Of a person*: deserving deep respect or reverence on account of advanced age, character, or (formerly) social status, personal ability, or great learning. Used specially as a title of or form of address to members of the clergy. (2) *Of a thing, place, etc.*: deserving or inspiring reverence. Formerly also, sacred, hallowed, holy. *Reverend* (noun): A member of the clergy; a cleric, a divine, a preacher. Now also used as a form of address. According to the classic Random House Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary and Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, *Reverend* also has definitions like those in Oxford Dictionary but less detailed. According to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English: *Reverend* (noun): a title of respect used before the name of a minister in the Christian church; and *reverend* (noun): a minister of a Christian church. Observation: No dictionaries define *Reverend* as a title for God or a respectful term used for God’s Name alone.

<sup>2</sup> William Arndt, F Wilbur Gingrich, Frederick W Danker, Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

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## HOLY LAND PILGRIMAGE TESTIMONIES

### Testimony of Rachel Leong

Thank God for the opportunity to go for the Holy Land Pilgrimage to Israel from 18–30 November 2018 organised by the Far Eastern Bible College (FEBC). This trip was my first time travelling to Israel, a place I had always wanted to go at least once in my lifetime. God is gracious to allow me to go at the halfway mark of my studies at FEBC. This trip served as an encouragement and booster to my spiritual life and walk with God. Before the trip, Dr Jeffrey Khoo spoke to us on how to have a meaningful trip. Firstly, we have to go with an open Bible. This means that we should be ready to see the amazing places that God has revealed in His Word. Secondly, it is to have a prayerful and thankful heart. A heart that is willing to believe and accept God at His Word will bring us much benefit. This helped to make the trip not just an educational tour but one with spiritual blessings.

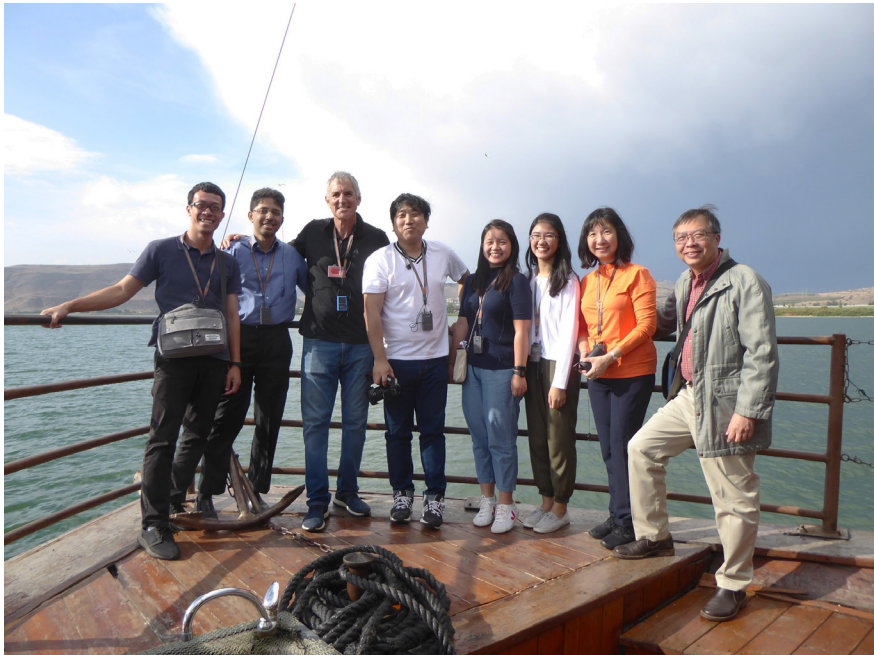
I am also thankful for the people I met on this trip. It is amazing how people from 12 different churches can come together and live with each other for almost two weeks. Through the sharing of the different people, I have come to see and understand what Christian unity is. I saw the love and care everyone had for each other in looking out for one another. “*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!*” (Ps 133:1). During the trip, I also learnt what it means to put others before myself and to care for the needs of others. I learnt compassion from the Lord Jesus for “*when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.*” (Matt 9:36). Jesus was always compassionate and loving to the people, even those who eventually betrayed Him.

Here are some spiritual lessons I learned throughout the trip.

First, the Bible is what makes the land alive. It is common to think that it is the Bible that becomes alive after seeing the land of Israel. But truly, it is the other way round—the land of Israel coming to life



because of the Bible. When I saw the Sea of Galilee at the start of our trip, I was in awe of the beautiful sight. The Sea of Galilee was huge and still very much alive. This was the place that Jesus called some of His disciples like Andrew and Peter. In Matthew 4:19–20 we read, “*And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him.*” This is what made the Sea of Galilee so significant to me. The Sea of Galilee was a fruitful place for fishermen but these fishermen were ready to give up their all to follow Christ. I pondered on this and wondered if I had readily given up my all to follow Christ. As I had already professed a calling to serve the Lord full-time, I know I must be like the disciples and be single-minded in following Christ and serving Him. I will not return to the riches and pleasures of this world, but be willing to suffer hardships and persecution for Christ’s sake.



Second, the Bible is perfect in every word. There were certain places that the guide could not be sure whether that was the exact, accurate location that the events occurred. For example, the birthplace of Jesus was said to be at the Church of Nativity, which is one of the oldest churches around. But there is no proof and no one can be sure. There are

also controversies about the burial place where Jesus was laid. It could either be at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre or at the Garden Tomb. Again, no one can say for certain. Thus, at times it felt quite meaningless to go to these places since we can have no confidence those places were the exact places. But I have come to realise that the places are not what gives me the confidence about past events. God's Word is the thing that gives me confidence and is what my faith is based on. God's Word says that those events happened. I just need to believe what it says. God's Word comes first and remains true till the end of time. I cannot doubt God's Word just because there are no archaeological proofs. Man may debate over where the exact location might be, but these are not of utmost importance. Even if the places we visited are not the exact places that Jesus was at, it does not affect my salvation nor my faith. The important thing is to know that there was such a place and what happened there according to the Bible. The Bible takes precedence over all. Although I was only enlightened to this after the trip, I am thankful to be sure about this than to constantly be in doubt.

During the trip, we also went to Qumran where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in 1947. These Dead Sea Scrolls contain copies of the Hebrew Scriptures and other kinds of literature. These copies were made by Jewish cult groups in the past. Dr Khoo reminded us that the Dead Sea Scrolls are testimonies to Scripture but they are not what we should base our faith on. At the close of the Biblical Canon, there are no more additions to the Bible. Neither do we subtract from Scripture. We already have the complete Scripture and it is fixed. The Dead Sea Scrolls do not change what has been received as God's Word as a whole and in its parts throughout the ages by Israel and the Church. We know for certain that God has preserved His inspired words, and what we have in our hands today is the text which God wants us to have and rely on. No new discoveries alter this fact and text.

Third, Jesus Christ's active obedience is manifested through His passive obedience to the Father's will. Jesus truly exemplified what John 4:34 records: "*Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.*" Jesus was not concerned about the worldly pleasures and enjoyment that this world could offer. He was single-minded to do God's work. He knew all His works would culminate in His death, which was the prime reason why He was sent to earth. The sufferings of Christ included being mocked at by others, being betrayed

by His disciples, being tempted by the unbelieving religious leaders. Yet He endured them all in order to please His Father. I must do likewise. Jesus always had the wisdom to respond perfectly to situations, but sometimes I respond angrily or sarcastically, which is not godly. I pray that I will learn to remember my purpose on earth so that I will respond correctly to sufferings. James 1:2–4 says, *“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”*

At the Garden Tomb, we had a Holy Communion service to remember the life and death of Jesus Christ our Saviour. I felt very emotional during that service because I felt humbled to be chosen by God to be His child even though I do not deserve it. The great sacrifice of God in sending His only begotten Son, and the amazing humility of Christ and His perfect keeping of all the law of God stirred in me a greater desire and passion to serve Him faithfully. Amazing love! In return, I ought to serve this great God with my whole life and do my best for Him with whatever time I have left on this earth.

Fourth, the true gospel gives life and joy to a believer. The true gospel presented in the Bible includes the perfect life of Christ, the death of Christ and the resurrection of Christ. Jesus conquered death and gives life to all who believe on Him. Yet till today the spiritual state of Israel is one of unbelief. At the Western Wall in Jerusalem, I saw many people crying and wailing with the Scripture in their hands. Some ladies were not just sobbing but crying their hearts out. Apparently these people believe what the Talmud says, that when the temple is destroyed, all the gates of heaven are closed except the gate of tears. Thus, they see this as a place to pray and cry mournfully to God to save them. I felt sad at the spiritual state they are in. These people do not seem to understand the finished work of Christ on the cross. They are still looking for the Messiah and are stuck in their man-made laws. But the true gospel gives life and joy. God’s plan of salvation through Jesus Christ is a perfect plan for all who will believe. God’s Word also tells us how we should worship God – in spirit and in truth. I thank God that I have found this true peace and joy, and I hope that the people in Jerusalem will truly come to know the true gospel. I also thank God that my church is worshipping God in a biblical and reverential manner that pleases God.

Last but not least, I learned that the judgment of God is sure. God judged the cities of Chorazin, Capernaum and Bethsaida because they remained hardened after seeing many miracles of Jesus (Matt 11:21–24). These three places are commonly known as the evangelical triangle because they form a triangle at the tip of the Sea of Galilee. Today, they remain in ruins. God also destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah with sulphur and fire. Those two cursed cities were located around the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea also known as the Salt Sea is a lifeless place with no water outlet. Its salt content is so high that no creature can live in it. It is dead; a reflection of God's judgment. From these places, it is very evident that God is true to His Word and He does not take sin lightly. When He says that He will judge, He surely will. The thought of the surety of the judgment of God is a scary thing. *"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."* (Heb 10:31).

At the end of the trip, we had a whole day to tour Ethiopia due to a long layover. The highlight of this tour was the visit to Gethsemane Bible-Presbyterian Mission Church and Bible Institute. I felt extremely happy to see the people there because this is one proof of God's faithfulness. God's faithfulness is seen in how the gospel has spread far and wide to the Africans, and also how a Bible-believing college can be established despite their physical lack. Gethsemane Bible-Presbyterian Church (Singapore) had supported the building of the place. It was a good conclusion of the trip as it strengthened my faith and trust in God to provide all things.

Looking back, I am thankful that God has drawn me closer to Him and given me a deeper passion and understanding of His Word.

### **Testimony of Theya Lagapa**

The Lord's goodness is beyond measure. He gave me this opportunity to visit and see for myself the land where my Saviour once walked. I had the desire to go and the Lord was working. When the news about the trip was posted on the FEBC whatsapp group, I just thought that it was not meant for me. But God's amazing blessing was for me to go. He placed it in my hands, whether or not I wanted it. The Lord provided everything for me, even the finances. All I really needed to do was to pack up and go! Furthermore, the luggage that I used was not my own but was given to me. The warm clothes that I packed in it were the timely provision of a certain church member who gave

them away. From head to toe, God showered me with all that I needed, making me hold this verse dear to my heart—Philippians 4:19, “*But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*” Even now as I write this testimony, I cannot believe that I have been to Israel and that I actually walked in the Promised Land. When we met our guide at the airport, he told us “We’re going to have a wonderful time.” My heart was warmed and I knew right there and then that the trip cannot be taken lightly or for granted. Every minute in Israel was going to be precious.

Our first stop was Joppa where everywhere I turned was just so scenic. I could not imagine that such places could still be preserved. What I enjoyed most was our guide who was such a well-learned man and had a beautiful understanding of the Scriptures. One of the lessons that I learned most deeply and vividly was there in Joppa. It had a great message about missions. Here was where Jonah took the boat to Tarshish though he was commanded to go to Nineveh. It is to be remembered that Jonah was one of the prophets that had to prophesy to the Gentiles and not to his own people. Jonah was told to warn the people he hated most about the judgment to come if they did not repent. Jonah would gladly see the people receive their just punishment for the evil that these people abounded in. It was hard for Jonah to obey what God had commanded him to do. Would I be willing to go to a place I do not desire to go? Would I be willing to serve the people that I have not ever thought of or even cared for? I am reminded that if God calls me to a certain place, I must be willing to go no matter what. I myself did not deserve to be saved, but God was gracious and merciful to let me hear the gospel.

It was at Joppa that Peter saw the vision of the unclean animals on a great white sheet descending from heaven. God told Peter to kill and eat. This was to prepare him to enter into a Gentile house which was something he as a Jew could not see himself doing! But this was where he was led to go to the house of Cornelius, a Roman centurion, whose heart God had already prepared to receive the gospel and be baptised. Hearing all these accounts from the guide made me appreciate the land more than I thought I could. Joppa became dear to me for here we find God telling Jonah and Peter to preach the gospel to people who were not of their own. Missions has a special place in my heart, and to be in the place where God’s servants were called to “the regions beyond” moved my heart. I prayed that I would be willing to go anywhere and not take a

step back from what He wants me to fulfil. It is my desire that God would also use me powerfully as He did Jonah and Peter. May God use my life fully for the souls that He had predestined to love and save.



We visited Caesarea, a place that I did not really bother to know about. I did not realise how great things Herod had built in his lifetime. The Roman theatre struck me. It was huge and magnificent. This was where people in the time of Jesus sat also. The lesson here is sobering. This was where Herod Agrippa strutted in front of a full house in all his majestic regalia. The guide said that we have accounts outside of the Bible which described how Herod was wearing an outfit that had coins attached all over it. On a bright, sunny day, the coins would reflect the rays of the sun and produce a halo around Herod as he walked on stage. The people started to praise and worship him as if he was God. Herod did not stop them and was struck down by God right there and then. What a shocking contrast! The sight of a man alive and glorious at one moment and at the next dead and reduced to nothing. What a sombre reminder that pride is deadly. I learnt that there should be no moment in my life that I can be proud because all is of God. Man must never steal the glory due only to God.

## *HOLY LAND PILGRIMAGE TESTIMONIES*

Significant places that we also visited were the churches built in memory of a certain event or person. This makes the land of Israel look idolatrous as these churches abound with statues or icons. The churches with such statues and icons were either Roman Catholic or Greek Orthodox. This saddened me a lot. At the same time, I was thankful that there are a number of true churches in Israel. There are true believers who worship the Lord according to His Word. When we visited Baraka Bible Presbyterian Church in Bethlehem, there were only a few people and they were Arab Christians. Are there any Jews who are Christians in the land of Israel itself? It is quite mind-blowing that someone can live in the land where Jesus once walked and still not believe in Him. Yet, I see myself in their place too. Although I have seen the goodness of the Lord, I have often been unbelieving and putting other things in priority more than Him. I have my own idols in different ways and have neglected my personal devotions so many times. I reflected that I would also be as blind as these people if I continued to be stubborn and not walk closely with my Lord. May I never become blind and superstitious.

Not only did I learn lessons from the places I visited, I was also blessed by those who participated in this pilgrimage. Although we came from different churches, we all appreciated the lessons learned from the Bible. When our fellow pilgrims came to know that my friend and I were Bible college students preparing to serve the Lord, they were all eager to hear how we came to know our calling. This did not happen when all of us were in one place; so we had to repeat our testimonies when we were asked by different people on different occasions. I did not realise what a blessing it was to recall how God called me in my life. I am amazed and filled with wonder at how God works. It is such a beautiful way. To recall this in the land where Jesus called His disciples was very impactful.

Knowing that this trip to the Holy Land was a blessing from God, I knew that there is a purpose and reason for it. I thank God that I could be of help to those who were elderly. My friend and I came to know two elderly ladies. So, each of us took care of one during the trip. It was such a blessing to be able to help such wonderful ladies. I learnt a great deal from them. Even in their old age, they were joyful though they had aches and pains, difficulties in climbing steps or walking on rough terrains. They were always happy and grateful. I was blessed by their fellowship throughout the trip.

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All in all, the trip brought me nothing but joy. It was a perfect gift from God though I did not do anything to deserve it. I hope that whatever His purpose was for me to join this trip was fulfilled and that I would never forget this experience. May this opportunity help me to be more effective in my service for God, both in helping others love the Lord more and to teach them His Word.

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*Rachel Leong and Theya Lagapa are third-year students at Far Eastern Bible College in the MDiv and BTh programme respectively.*

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## College News

**FEBC opened its new semester** with a day of prayer on July 15, 2019. The Rev Dr Haposan Siregar was the Lord's messenger and he spoke from Matthew 11:28, "*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*" He reminded all to come to the Lord Jesus who is fully God and fully Man for salvation. He shared how the Lord had not only saved him spiritually but also physically—he almost died from a broken skull in a motorcycle accident but the Lord healed him. Haposan graduated from FEBC with his BTh in 1987. He later went on to earn his DMin from the Evangelical Theological Seminary of Indonesia. His son Martin has enrolled into FEBC for his BTh.

**FEBC is in the process of faculty upgrading.** Lecturers and tutors are encouraged to pursue their doctorate. With effect from last semester, Samuel Joseph who had just graduated with his ThM is appointed Greek tutor. He together with the Rev Clement Chew has commenced reading for their Doctor of Theology (ThD) degree. Two Kenyans, Nelson Were and Jonathan Langat, are in their final stages of the Doctor of Religious Education (DRE) programme. James and Shermaine Tan—missionaries to Kenya and lecturers at the Bible College of East Africa (BCEA) in Nairobi—have embarked on their DRE programme commencing January 2020. FEBC's doctoral programmes (DRE/ThD) are offered to all qualified alumni especially those involved in the Bible College movement.

**Eileen Chee** (MDiv 2011) has enrolled at the University of Haifa to pursue an MA in Israel Studies—a one-year programme which commenced on October 23, 2019.

**Ten new full-time students** joined the College last semester: (1) Eol Jeon (Korea), (2) Gracia Lee (Singapore), (3) Hadassah Chew (Singapore), (4) Go Hyeon Been (Korea), (5) Kharis Yonatan (Indonesia), (6) Kim Sangkwon (Korea), (7) Kim Semi (Korea), (8) Martin Eliezer Siregar (Indonesia), (9) Um Jinsun (Korea), (10) Roel de Gusman Requireme (Philippines).

**Total enrolment last semester (Jul-Nov 2019) was 619:** 86 day students (fulltime: 48, part-time: 38), 278 students in the Basic Theology for Everyone (BTFE) night classes, and 255 distance learning students. **Students enrolled from these 14 countries:** Australia, China, India,

Indonesia, Japan, Kenya, Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

**The lecturers/tutors and courses offered** last semester were: **Rev Dr Jeffrey Khoo:** Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology, Hebrews, Jude, Greek Exegesis I; **Rev Dr Quek Suan Yew:** Homiletics, Minor Prophets II, Contemporary Theology III, Hebrew Reading I; **Rev Dr Prabhudas Koshy:** Systematic Theology I, Ezekiel; **Rev Stephen Khoo:** Church History I; **Rev Dr Koa Keng Woo:** Bible Geography II, Church Music IV; **Rev Tan Kian Sing:** Ephesians; **Mrs Ivy Tow:** Greek Elementary I; **Mrs Jemima Khoo:** Introduction to Christian Education, Pianoforte; **Miss Carol Lee:** Sunday School Curriculum Development, Jesus the Master Teacher; **Dr Jose Lagapa:** Westminster Confession of Faith; **Rev Clement Chew:** Hebrew Elementary I; **Mr Samuel Joseph:** Greek Reading I; **Mrs Anne Lim:** English Intensive I; **Mrs Irene Lim:** English Intermediate I; and **Eld Han Soon Juan:** English Advanced I.

FEBC organised an outing for students to experience the **Singapore Bicentennial** at Fort Canning on September 9, 2019.

**The Rev Dr Raymond Carlson** wrote a letter to the editor in appreciation for the July 2019 issue of *The Burning Bush*:

*Dear Dr. Khoo,*

*Greetings in Jesus. It is with great joy that I can say thank you for “The Burning Bush”. This recent copy meant a great deal to me because of the four main articles, all were of great importance to me. I praise God for the continued light of God’s glorious Word. Your article on Biblical Separation was very well stated and not presented often. Your new teacher wrote so clearly on preservation. What a joy. Then to have Dr M. Koech’s article I learned a little. I didn’t know my outreach in evangelism at his home church had that impact. Finally the paper on this new book by Africans on Christianity was a joy to read. I’m glad Nelson has taken time from his teaching and thesis work to do this fine paper. My ministry now is confined to the throne of grace, holding your hands up before God, that you might be found faithful unto the end, proclaiming the message of our Lord’s loving salvation on Calvary.*

*In Christian love with prayers,*

*Rev R Carlson*

*1 Cor 15:57, 58*

*October 1, 2019*



**Student Outing to the Singapore Bicentennial  
at Fort Canning**

**FEBC's 20<sup>th</sup> Holy Land Pilgrimage (Israel and Ethiopia)  
Pilgrims at Gethsemane Bible-Presbyterian Mission Church and Bible Institute,  
Alem Gena, Ethiopia**

