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THE BURNING BUSH

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FEBC'S DIAMOND JUBILEE: SIXTY YEARS OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE

Jeffrey Khoo

Far Eastern Bible College (FEBC) celebrates her Diamond Jubilee this year 2022. She has reached 60 years of existence and service for the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. God has kept His School of Prophets by His good hand of providence. Throughout this time, God has not failed to provide for the needs of the College both physical and spiritual, to protect her from harm and danger, and to preserve her biblical witness and stand for Him.

Let me recount and highlight how the Lord had done this.

Founding of the College

FEBC opened her doors on September 17, 1962. According to the founding Principal—the Rev Dr Timothy Tow—the College was a “hall of majestic emptiness” when it first opened—a handsome building but not one stick of furniture. Nevertheless, Rev Tow on the very first opening day of prayer encouraged the pioneering students with these words from Psalm 34:10, *“The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the LORD shall not want any good thing.”* Let me read from this special Diamond Jubilee edition of *The Burning Bush* with regard to God’s providence in FEBC,

Throughout the decades of FEBC’s existence, Rev Tow testified of God’s unwavering providence shown towards the College. From its small beginnings of three students only, within 10 years the student body grew four times. Also, despite minimum tuition fees, the College has always been able to continue running without any hindrance due to the prayerful financial support and love gifts of church brethren. As principal, Rev Tow has always advocated frugality and economy in the College. This principle of economy and “maximum use”, he testified, “has saved the College

especially tens of thousands of dollars.” When there was a need to extend the campus capacity to accommodate the increasing student body, the Lord used the combined ministry of the FEBC with Life BP Church to enable the increase. Rev Tow likened the relationship between the Church and College to the widow of Zarephath and the Prophet Elijah. Both entities help each other for the glory of God. As Rev Tow mused upon God’s providence shown towards FEBC in the past, he echoed the words of Samuel, “*Hitherto hath the LORD helped us*” (1 Sam 7:12).¹

Indeed, as much as God has provided for the College in times past, we continue to trust in Him to provide for our needs ahead.

Now, if a College is to expect God’s provision, she must first have God’s mandate to exist. This mandate was given to the founding Principal as early as 1954 when he was convicted by the Spirit to start a Bible College. In his book *The Singapore B-P Church Story*, Rev Tow testified under the heading, “*Vision of a Bible College*”, how the Lord moved him to found a Bible College,

One vision that had been shared by elders of our Church Movement since as early as 1954 was the founding of a Bible College to train workers, not only for our expanding ministries, but also for the propagation of the Gospel and defence of the Faith throughout the Far East....

Theological training of our consecrated young people became such an ever-increasing burden upon the pastor’s heart... “*The Trend Is Toward the Trained*”: “*Hitherto we have sent some of young people to the West for theological training. But if the Lord will call another half dozen, how can we afford to send them all? The solution to training future ministers of the Gospel, I believe, is the founding of a Bible College in Singapore. Yes, a Bible College, a College that reverently teaches the Bible to be the infallible, inerrant Word of God, that seeks to obey all its commands, that will make no compromise whatsoever with the subtle forces of Satan that are so actively undermining theological institutions everywhere today.*”²

The Lord wonderfully provided both Life Bible-Presbyterian Church and FEBC with a spacious sylvan site at 9A Gilstead Road, a

very central and convenient location in Singapore. The Lord also provided the funds necessary for the construction of the buildings. The funds were raised not just in the name of the Church but also of the College. In fact, when it was announced that the Bible College would be built, the building fund saw a significant increase—people gave even more. In this way, the College was a real blessing to the Church, just like Elijah was a blessing to the widow of Zarephath, as we have read, *“And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah”* (1 Kgs 17:16).

Lawsuit against FEBC

One of the greatest crises FEBC faced was the lawsuit against her in 2008. Life Church sued to evict FEBC from 9A Gilstead Road. This was national news. After the verdict was out, *The Straits Times* reported on May 21, 2011, “Church fails to evict college over doctrine row”. FEBC believes in the verbal and plenary preservation (VPP) of the Holy Scriptures, Life Church did not. VPP is the truth. Psalm 12:6–7 says, *“The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever.”* (see also Matt 5:18, 24:35). The Westminster Confession of Faith states, “The Old Testament in Hebrew... and the New Testament in Greek, being immediately inspired by God, and by his singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentical: so as in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them” (1.8).

VPP upholds the present infallibility, total inerrancy, and absolute authority of the Holy Scriptures. The leaders of Life Church then called it a deviant doctrine, a heresy. They believed in VPI (ie the inspiration of the Scriptures in the Autographs) but not VPP (ie the inspired Scriptures we have in our hands today). Led by its leaders, Life Church gave FEBC an ultimatum: “Unless you sign an undertaking not to teach VPP, you have to vacate the premises.” FEBC’s reply can only be this, *“We ought to obey God rather than men”* (Acts 5:29).

Life Church filed a lawsuit to evict FEBC. The case was tried at the High Court and went all the way up to the apex court—the Court of Appeal. God in His providence saved FEBC. God is faithful and true to His promises, *“for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise*

me shall be lightly esteemed" (1 Sam 2:30). FEBC believes in the special providence of God. FEBC believes God providentially preserved His inspired words as He promised. By the logic of faith, we can know for sure what words are the inspired words and which Word is the authentic Word. It is the Hebrew Masoretic Text and the Greek Textus Receptus on which the Authorised Version (KJV) is based that show the marks of special providential preservation. The Bible we have in our hands today is 100% perfect without any mistake. Such a position is biblical, is truthful, is faithful, and it glorifies God.

God honoured and vindicated FEBC. God in His providence gave to us honest and honourable lawyers to defend us. We did not purposely seek or ask for them, but the Lord gave us the best—the #1 law firm in Singapore—Allen & Gledhill. Senior Counsel Ang Cheng Hock represented us but he has since been promoted to High Court Justice. We do not forget Professor Tan Yock Lin from the National University of Singapore Law School who is an expert in trust law.³ God sent him to the right place at the right time to help us. He explained to the Board of Directors the law of charitable purpose trust and how it is the case for us. Just as the Lord provided for King David a good counsellor in Hushai, so did the Lord provide for FEBC. In fact, we had many Hushais. Thank God for all the good and honourable Christian lawyers who helped us.

Another act of God's marvelous providence is in Rev Tow's recording of the history of both Church and College in his Weekly and in his books. Without the faithful, meticulous and accurate recording of the giving of the people and the building of the premises, FEBC would be hard-pressed to prove its case; *"he being dead yet speaketh"* (Heb 11:4). In addition, there was the 1970 Agreement between Church and College concerning the sharing of the premises, and this agreement reveals a charitable purpose trust over the property. This protects FEBC's rights to the land. Who knew FEBC would need such an agreement or document? God knew and He prepared the deliverance of FEBC way ahead of time, to make sure that the Church cannot evict the College. This is unmistakably an act of God's providence. We may not know, but He knows.

Thank God for the outcome. As you know, the High Court ruled in favour of Life Church.⁴ The High Court judge made a mistake, but God

makes no mistakes. He allowed this to happen for a reason. The case went to the Court of Appeal and the Court of Appeal comprising three senior judges ruled in favour of FEBC and completely overturned the ruling of the Court below. In the judgement dated April 26, 2011, all three judges ruled that FEBC has every right to occupy 9A and 10 Gilstead Road, and not only that, they also declared that “the College, in adopting the VPP doctrine, has not deviated from the fundamental principles which guide and inform the work of the College right from its inception, and as expressed in the Westminster Confession” and that “[i]t is not inconsistent for a Christian who believes in the principles contained within the Westminster Confession (and the VPI doctrine) to also subscribe to the VPP doctrine, and as such “we hesitate to find that the VPP doctrine is a deviation from the principles contained within the Westminster Confession.”⁵ God spoke through the Court of Appeal. This is most marvelous. He used the secular court to declare the truth of VPP and vindicate FEBC. *“The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will”* (Prov 21:1).

Covid-19 Pandemic

The Covid-19 scourge came quite suddenly in early 2020 as we all know. But it should not come as a surprise because the Scriptures already predicted that in the last days there will be *“wars and rumours of wars... For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.”* (Matt 24:6–8). These are the signs of the times. The Lord is coming back soon.

When Singapore went into a lockdown (“Circuit Breaker”), and physical classes had to be cancelled or replaced by virtual ones, we were ready. That was because we already have the experience and expertise in offering courses online since 2009. As such the transition was relatively smooth. Our IT personnel could get the classes online on short notice. Providentially, the lockdown came near the end of the semester—we just had two more weeks of classes before the exams, and so the disruption or inconvenience was not so great.

The government lockdown mantra was “Stay Home, Stay Safe”. What is there to occupy the people when they are cooped up at home?

Why not study the Bible! FEBC offered online courses for free from May 11 to July 5. Students could take them for credit. Praise the Lord a total of 818 from 136 churches signed up for the courses. That is a record enrolment for our online courses.

Although our online student enrolment went up, our on-campus full-time student numbers came down. We did not have any new full-time students in 2020. Borders were closed, no one could come. In 2021, we had three new students who managed to come despite the many administrative hurdles and quarantine restrictions. Last semester saw another three. I was praying for a dozen in the new year. God saw to it. Exactly a dozen from four countries have applied and been approved to come. God willing they should begin their studies in the new term starting July 18, 2022. *“The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest”* (Matt 9:37-38).

The Lord in His providence has provided for, protected and preserved FEBC all these years. Indeed, *“The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the LORD shall not want any good thing”* (Ps 34:10). Glory be to God.

Notes

¹ Jeffrey Khoo and May-Lynn Khoo, “Weekly Wisdom: The Theological and Pastoral Wisdom of the Rev Dr Timothy Tow from the Weekly of Life Bible-Presbyterian Church and True Life Bible-Presbyterian Church”, *The Burning Bush* 28 (2022): 47-48.

² Timothy Tow, *The Singapore B-P Church Story* (Singapore: Life Book Centre, 1995), 81-82.

³ Tan Yock Lin and T H Tey, *Halsbury’s Laws of Singapore: Equity and Trusts*, 2nd ed (Singapore: LexisNexis, 2012).

⁴ *Life Bible-Presbyterian Church v Khoo Eng Teck Jeffrey and others and another suit* [2010] SGHC 187.

⁵ *Khoo Jeffrey and others v Life Bible-Presbyterian Church and others* [2012] SGCA 37.

The above message was delivered at FEBC’s 47th graduation service, May 8, 2022. Rev Dr Jeffrey Khoo is Principal of Far Eastern Bible College and Pastor of True Life Bible-Presbyterian Church.

DEMONIC POSSESSION AND MENTAL ILLNESS

Cornelius Koshy

Introduction

This essay is an attempt of the writer to make sense of experiences he witnessed. Three accounts will be detailed first before a biblical evaluation of the observed phenomena is made. The motivations for writing are three: (1) the “victims” in these accounts were found in the church, and, in two experiences, were associated with the youth fellowship of the writer’s church. (2) A biblical response is crucial in attending to the spiritual needs of the victim, of the family, and of others who are in close ties with the victims. This essay does not attempt to establish a firm relationship between mental illness, personality disorders with demonic possession. Rather, (3) the correlation between possession phenomena and psychiatric illness is worth considering amidst increased public conversation about mental-health and wellness. If congregants in the church have begun showing support for mental health campaigns, surely the biblical response to these issues, especially its similarity and overlaps with demonic possession, is pertinent.

In the second section of the essay, “Observations of Three Accounts”, the writer occasionally refers to a dissertation written by Robert M Solomon in 1992, “Living in Two Worlds: Pastoral Responses to Possession in Singapore”.¹ Solomon is the former Bishop of The Methodist Church in Singapore, who served from 2000 to 2012. Particularly in chapters four to six, Solomon makes extensive references to three Bible-Presbyterian (BP) ministers, especially the works of Philip Heng and Tan Eng Boo on demon possession and exorcism. Solomon also frequently cites an interview he had with Philip Heng on 16 May 1991. Since the writer is acquainted with the past furore in the BP denomination over possession and exorcism, Solomon’s interviews and observations offer some interest in this

essay. However, the writer defers ultimately to Scripture's teachings to derive a biblical response to demon possession and mental illness.

Three Accounts

Jane

Jane (not her real name) was the daughter of economic immigrants from the Philippines who were previously Roman Catholics. Nothing peculiar or strange was observed about her personality or behaviour, apart from a girly-shyness which is characteristic of teenagers at that age. She was participative in the youth fellowship of the writer's church and even sang in the youth choir with a strong soprano voice. Jane frequently wore eye bags and dark eye circles. But apart from suggestions of fatigue from her appearance, she was a pleasant girl.

Somewhere in her mid-secondary school years, her parents noticed stark changes in her behaviour: aggression, insomnia, and radical changes in behaviour—from uncontrolled anger to a kind of defeated sadness. Her desperately worried parents sought medical help and Jane was warded in the Institute of Mental Health (IMH). During this time, the writer joined his pastor to visit her. In the single-ward, she was tied down to the bed with grip restraints to her wrists and ankles—an action consistent with the writer's knowledge of criminal persons-in-custody, just that it was not on a criminal but a violently aggressive youth. Pastor began speaking to Jane, but she vacillated between moments of unresponsive, dazed stupor to periods of normalcy. Her responses were not always coherent. Sometimes, they were reduced to strange sounds which her parents attempted to translate based on her facial expressions or hand gestures. Pastor read a psalm, and at that point Jane started to breathe heavily and frown. Noticing her change when the psalm was read, Pastor slowed down his reading, but persisted to complete the psalm despite the brewing anger in Jane. At times, Jane seemed to lose control of herself, and let off a disgruntled sound. She then calmed down briefly before entering another frustrated phase. The most shocking responses were displayed when Pastor asked questions to the effect of, "Do you trust God to help you in your troubles?", "Will you pray to Jesus to help you?". At the very mention of the name "God" or "Jesus", Jane's visible aggression

was unfiltered. Her face writhed with a mad distortion, her wrists clenched with great might till her veins popped at her forearms, and her complexion darkened and reddened. She protested furiously by shaking and pulling but was held back by the restraints, and by her frantic parents who placed their hands on Jane to push her down to the bed.

At one point, Pastor reached out to her with his hand. Jane took Pastor's hand in hers and exchanged a handshake. A closing prayer was made for the family and Jane, and we departed with heavy hearts.

Later, Pastor described the handshake as a crushing squeeze to his hand, with a gripping force only strong men would have. Pastor also commented that the temptation to "cast the devil out" was strong, because the signs of demonic possession were clear. But he held back, because it was not in his place nor power to attempt, only to fast and pray for her, for *"this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting"* (Matt 17:21). It was later discovered that Jane had secretly read all the series of "True Singapore Ghost Stories" by Russell Lee, and had even attempted to communicate with "spirits" after being entranced by guides to the spirit-world on necromancy websites. Some in Jane's family in the Philippines were also involved with witchcraft, which could have facilitated her introduction and involvement in such occultic practices. Her family soon returned to the Philippines and the writer has since lost contact with Jane.

A Mad Woman

The writer first noticed her attendance in the day classes of Far Eastern Bible College (FEBC) and frequent loitering outside the library. In the mid-semester break of 2019, she appeared for classes, but was informed that the school was on a recess break. Instead of going home, she remained in the compound, reading, and occasionally talking to students. Nothing particularly odd or inappropriate was observed. Though some students found something amiss about her when they talked to her, the writer was not bothered much, until about 10.30pm. Despite repeated persuasions by the proctor, she insisted that she wanted to remain in the school. Kind-hearted students prepared a chair for her to sit and spend the night, but the writer was a bit more insistent that she leave. Sensing that she was not in good mental state, the students locked the dormitory gates and went to sleep. In the middle of

the night, the writer was awakened by the proctor who requested for assistance. To the writer's shock, the woman's condition had worsened. She banged on the door of the principal's parsonage, and demanded to meet the principal, who at that time was overseas on a missions trip, claiming she had made a prior appointment. With a frenzied hair and sleep-deprived look, she was not a pleasant sight to behold at 3am. Our refusal to let her into the house did not dampen her persistence. The matron's voice from behind the door gave her more hope. But when her entrance was continually rejected, her wrath was gradually unleashed with crude words hurled at the matron, and quick paces at the cramped porch. Reasonable explanations to her were futile, and threats to call the police only aggravated the situation. After the police arrived, one hour of protocol negotiations by the police began. When clearance had been sought to arrest "one of unsound mind", a scuffle began between the woman and the female police officer. The writer stepped in to pin the mad woman down. It took two able-bodied men and the female police officer to subdue and handcuff a scrawny woman.

On hindsight, it seems hers was more a case of mental derangement than demon possession. Nonetheless, the writer remembers asking the woman if she is a Christian and if she believes in Jesus. The woman was infuriated with the questions asked. Was the anger incited with the writer's challenge to her faith, or because she was indeed demon-possessed? Considering her history of mental issues, the latter is unlikely. Still, this skinny woman possessed a lot of strength. From the writer's limited policing experience, two men are more than sufficient to take down a female-subject. In this case, three barely succeeded. She did possess unnatural amount of strength. In this case, the indicators of demon possession (anger at the mention of God/Jesus, unusual strength) overlap the symptoms of mental issues. Nothing conclusive can be drawn.

A Young Girl

A daughter of a preacher suffers from stress from the academic pressures of secondary school. According to the preacher and his wife, the daughter has lost all motivation to study. So severe was the stress that her mental state was affected. Not all the details are revealed to the writer because there is much embarrassment and anxiety felt by the

family of this youth. However, those close to the family know that hers is not a simplistic case. She has claimed to be able to “see things” in the spirit world, and can see into hearts of people. She claims to be able to tell if one is a “good” or “bad” person. When questioned by her parents, she resorts to vulgar speech and violence, which hurt the parents and the rest in the family. Many find it unbelievable, for this youth was known to be an incredibly talented girl, displaying skills superior to many others. Further, she remains “normal” in church, attending youth fellowship and worship services. However, close friends have noticed a change in behaviour. She prefers solitude and goes a-hiding immediately after the fellowship, taking refuge in the staircase landing. She stammers much in her speech and her eyes shutter speedily from the person she talks to, to others around her, as if she is looking at something else, or concerned at how others view her. Her conversation remains coherent, and she knows how to give the “right” answers when people ask of her well-being. Psychiatrists have prescribed strong medication which reduces her physical strength, and she enjoys longer hours of sleep, with periods of respite for her parents.

Today, she is admitted in IMH for observation, after refusing to eat for days and “relapsing” into greater mental problems. Her parents have decided to take her out from school entirely. Pastoral counselling seems ineffective, for she denies any issue at home and claims to be of stable and sound mind. Once she lashed out in anger but apologised subsequently. Under medical care, psychotropic drugs are her regular intake now. Her condition is stable only because she is “sedated” and physically weakened by the medication. True improvement is uncertain. Close friends in church and her family can only offer prayers with fasting for her.

Observations of Three Accounts

Since not all information of the three accounts is known to the writer, it is hard to be certain if the assessment of the young girl and the mad woman is indeed related to demon possession. It cannot be disregarded however that they do possess supernatural knowledge (the young girl’s ability to see spirits and into the hearts of man) and supernatural strength (Jane and the mad woman’s unusual strength).

None of these accounts are conclusive, for after all, no medical institute will diagnose anyone as being “demon-possessed”.

Robert Solomon observes that these two worldviews: the scientific and the spiritual paradigm, build their understanding on different bases. The former on empirical data while the later on Scripture. He explains that each particular perspective has its own terminology for the phenomenon.

For instance, psychiatric studies tend to use the term “trance states” or less specifically, “altered states of consciousness”. Psychological studies place the phenomenon within more general terms such as “hysteria”. Anthropological studies use terms such as “spirit-possession” and “shamanism”. Spiritual perspectives use the term “demon-possession” which is derived from biblical and traditional Christian sources.²

In his interview with 16 pastors in Singapore, Solomon writes that “pastors associate the relationship between negative and disturbed emotions such as fear, depression, bitterness, anger, and so on with the onset of possession.”³ With further citing of scientific research, Solomon shows that “the similarity of possession phenomena and psychiatric illness... suggests a strong relationship between the two and adds weight to our formulation of ritual possession as an acceptable form of ‘going crazy’.”⁴

Solomon’s observation of the similarity between mental illness and demon possession illustrates the difficulty of being sure if one indeed is demon-possessed, or if mental illness is symptomatic of demon possession, or if demon possession causes mental issues. It is likely that for this reason, Timothy Tow is careful to “diagnose” one with demon possession and prefers the term, “obsession”:

The reader will have noticed that I mentioned in the title “obsession” and not “possession”. The reason is I have not met with such a violent case as had gripped this boy who hurt himself in fire and water (referring to Matthew 17:15, 18; Mark 9:17, 25; Luke 9:42), nor have those who practise exorcism in Singapore today, I believe, dealt with a proven demon-possession case. If they have, they are very few!⁵

In a similar way, Philip Heng categorises demonic attacks into oppression, obsession, and possession, with detailed phenomena to take note of, based on his experience with demon casting.⁶ He denotes obsession as “an attack upon and control of the person’s mind by evil spirits from outside” while possession as the demon is in the person, controlling from inside.⁷ Biblically, it is true that while some physical illnesses are caused by demon possession (e.g. Matt 4:24, 8:16–17, Mark 1:32–34, Luke 8:2), others are caused by demonic oppression, such as in Job’s case, who God allowed to test Job’s faith (Job 1:12).⁸ Heng seems positively sure of his ability to discern the spirits, and devised a “Demon Test” with a dozen questions on the Incarnation, Death, Resurrection and Return of Jesus Christ, to decipher if one is indeed obsessed or possessed.⁹

Scripture provides the best answers. From its record of demon possession and the accompanying phenomena/symptoms of a demon-possessed person, the writer finds it conclusive that mental derangement, uncontrolled physical violence and hurt, extreme vexation and raging anger, clairvoyance and third-eye claims are definite symptoms of demon possession, though not all mentally unsound persons are necessarily demon-possessed. For example, two men possessed with devils in Gergesenes were “*exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way*” (Matt 8:28). Another man was described to be so strong that “*no man could bind him, no, not with chains*” (Mark 5:3), being able to break the metal fetters and chains into pieces, “*neither could any man tame him*” (Mark 5:4). The unclean spirit which possessed the man gave him the ability to identify Jesus as the “*Son of the most high God*” (Mark 5:7). Scripture makes the tight link between strange, abnormal behaviour and mental conditions, and demon possession. Today, it is difficult to determine if each encounter of mental unsoundness is definitely a case of demon possession. However, one must not rule out the strong possibility that the influence, oppression or possession of evil spirits are involved when one shows clear signs of mental and physical torment.

More important than the diagnosis is the treatment, for if indeed a mental or physical condition is consequent of demonic oppression or possession, then the cure is not physically rendered by psychotropic or

sedative drugs prescribed by medical doctors. Only the Spiritual Doctor can help!¹⁰

Biblical Response to Demonic Possession and Mental Illness

The spiritual response, according to Scripture, is not simply solved with an admission to a mental facility, or consumption of prescription drugs. Yes,

God has now given, by His common grace, the ministry of improved hospitals and mental institutions. Let the suffering patient be admitted to one of these institutions until such time as the doctor can let him out. Let us recognize also that modern medicine and surgery are a gift from God.¹¹

Yet at the same time, “we must not rely on human cure alone. The same spiritual therapy we apply to obsession cases is applied to the mentally weak.”¹² The biblical responses can be classified as preventive and prescriptive.

Preventive Biblical Response

Resist the devil. The downfall of many victims is receiving the devil, by communicating with the spirit world. The preventive response is to “*resist the devil*” entirely, and the promise is that “*he will flee from you*” (Jas 4:7). The exhortation is not to cast out devils but to stand opposed to the devil. “Resist” comes from the Greek word *anthistemi* which means to be antithetical to the motions, influences, pressures which come with demonic oppression, obsession. In the Gospels, when Jesus cast out devils, the Greek word *ekballo* is used to denote the throwing out of the devils by His word (Matt 8:16). “Resist” speaks of a mental preparation and resoluteness to be opposed to anything devilish, especially lusts to sin. Strong as the devil is, God never permits him to conquer the man who continues to resist him; he cannot force the human will. Such preventive measure is accompanied with the promise that he will flee from you.¹³

Prescriptive Biblical Response

Fast and pray. However, great caution should be exercised when applying James 4:7. “Resist” should not be misunderstood as rebuking the devil, to the effect of, “in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we can rebuke the demon to depart.”¹⁴ Such is a dangerous prayer to make for

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any unsuccessful attempt to cast out the devil in Jesus' name is taking His name in vain (Exod 20:7). Demon-casting, exorcism, is an unbiblical practice, based on a gross misunderstanding of the sign-gifts which were given to the Apostles only; *"these signs shall follow them that believe"* (Mark 16:17, "them" refers only to the Apostles of Jesus Christ, not general believers, nor pastors today).

Any attempt to commune with and chase away the spirits is dangerous! Tan Eng Boo recounts his experience to Solomon,

At one point of the battle, the spirit spoke to me and said that he was going to stop Tim from breathing, and he did it! Tim was not breathing when the spirit surfaced. What I did then was to command Tim to resurface and then he would breathe again.¹⁵

This must be avoided as Scripture speaks of the failure of such exorcism ministries.

Tow, in responding to the practice of exorcism in the BP circle, wrote, Hence there has arisen a ministry of exorcism amongst them, and even with a B-P minister (though only for a season). Such an exorcism ministry, like opening a medical clinic by a quack doctor, is bound to fail. The failure of the exorcism ministry is understandable when it is realised that the power to cast out devils is given primarily to the apostles (Acts 5:12) for the confirmation of their preaching ministry (Mark 16:20). Moreover as the early Church grew and became established, there were no more demon cases dealt with by the apostles that were recorded after Acts 19, nor are there any injunctions or prescriptions on demon-possession in all the Epistles.¹⁶

Therefore, when it comes to prescriptive measures to be taken, the best medicine would be that which Jesus the Great Physician prescribed, *"this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting"* (Matt 17:21). A vigorous exercise of faith, by fervent and importunate prayer, with abstinence of earthly comforts with earnest expectation of God's deliverance are required. The same is expected for those who are sick, even with mental sickness: *"Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven"*

him.” (Jas 5:14-15). Timothy Tow testified of the power of prayer, “I have prayed and the Church has prayed for cases of obsession and the Lord has heard our prayers. The soul restored now comes to prayer meeting and church service regularly.”¹⁷

Singing psalms and hymns. Not only in merry times “*let him sing psalms*” (Jas 5:13b) but also when disturbed by an evil spirit. Saul had David to play on his harp and the evil spirit departed from him (1 Sam 16:14-16). Tow added that “Martin Luther has used sacred music effectively as an antidote not only against the Devil but also the mentally affected. Singing of Psalms and hymns and gospel choruses can chase away the blues.”¹⁸

Read, study Scripture and attend worship, fellowships and Bible classes. Jesus used the Scriptures when the devil tempted him thrice. The Word of God is the “*sword of the Spirit*” (Eph 6:17) and it should not be neglected as a key prescription. As the Psalmist declares, “*Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me: yet thy commandments are my delights.*” (Ps 119:143). Honey is a common natural cure for simple ailments, so is the Word of God, “*How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way*” (Ps 119:103-104). Tow commented,

If the patient lives in the parents’ home where idolatry is practised, he should be removed to stay in a Christian environment. In this connection, FEBC (Far Eastern Bible College) has frequently been used to good effect to “quarantine” the spiritually sick. Next is the reading of the Bible, particularly the Psalms and the Gospel accounts of the mighty acts of Jesus — healing the sick and casting out devils. Oftentimes a person is obsessed through neglect in church attendance and the partaking of the Lord’s Supper. These are means of grace dispensed to every Christian for our spiritual nourishment. We neglect these spiritual exercises at our own peril. ...so is every Christian a total loss when he is cut off from his Saviour.¹⁹

Both Preventive and Prescriptive Biblical Response

Above all, Gospel preaching! This is both a preventive and prescriptive measure, for the gospel of Christ is “*the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth*” (Rom 1:16). No power is greater

than the power of God, not even the power of demonic possession and control.²⁰ Every child of God has the Spirit indwelling and once the Spirit indwells, demons depart, never to repossess again. 1 John 4:4 affirms our position as God's children: "*Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.*" The Spirit is greater than Satan.

Conclusion

The Bible provides an unmistakable connection between mental issues and demon possession. Not all cases of mental illness are definitely a "side-effect" of demon inhabitation, but mental issues as consequence of demon possession find strong Scripture precedent. While each case must be individually assessed, its possibility must not be ruled out. Not all mental illnesses should be simply reduced to lack of mental wellness, which is the common trend in this day and age of increased awareness raised on mental health. In some cases, it could very well be either a case of demon possession or demon oppression or obsession. The biblical response must never be an attempt to cast out the devil. Youths must be prepared early and take preventive measures, from demonic attacks, and that is to be saved by the salvation offered by Christ and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Be skilled in the handling of the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. "*Resist the devil, and he will flee from you*" (Jas 4:7).

Notes

¹ Robert M Solomon, "Living in Two Worlds: Pastoral Responses to Possession in Singapore", Edinburgh Research Archive, 1993. <https://era.ed.ac.uk/handle/1842/27437>.

² Ibid, 3.

³ Ibid, 164.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Timothy Tow, *Counselling Recipes: Through 40 Years Pastoring* (Singapore: Christian Life Publishers, 1994), 84.

⁶ Solomon, 102.

⁷ Ibid, 94-95.

⁸ Jeffrey Khoo, "Angels & Demons", Lecture Notes, Far Eastern Bible College, 30-31.

⁹ Solomon, 110.

¹⁰ Khoo, 31.

¹¹ Tow, 87.

¹² Ibid, 102.

¹³ Ibid, 87-88.

¹⁴ Ibid, 87.

¹⁵ Ibid, 97.

¹⁶ Ibid, 86.

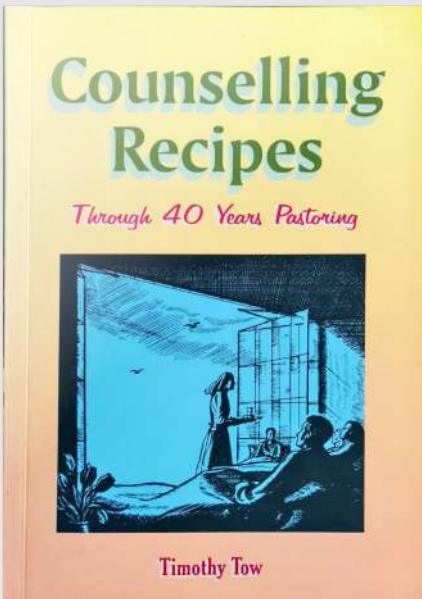
¹⁷ Ibid, 102.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid, 101-102.

²⁰ Khoo, 29.

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WHY UNGODLY CHILDREN DESPITE GODLY UPBRINGING?

Thessa B Lagapa

Introduction

When God created Adam and Eve, one of the commandments He gave to them was to be fruitful and to multiply (Gen 1:28). God did not just create Adam and Eve to exist all by themselves; He wanted them to reproduce and have children. This would have been man's greatest privilege to establish and build up homes that would be pathways to heaven. Parents would bear children, and generation after generation would be God-loving and God-fearing people. They would live in the world, obeying God's command to it and live with animals peacefully, cultivating the land and the plants that the Creator had wonderfully provided.

However, after the fall, though the commandment to be reproductive stayed the same, it has now been coupled with the curse of sin. Man is now ruined and the thought of a happy and perfect home seemed far away. "[God] multiplies the *pain* of the childbirth process (Gen 3:16), but he did not nullify the *blessing* inherent in bearing children."¹ Because sin had entered into the world, every human being born into this world—with the exception of the Lord Jesus Christ—will be born in sin and automatically have a sinful nature. This sinful nature rules in every sinner's heart, corrupting his thoughts, words, and deeds.

Both parents and children are two sinful parties dwelling together under one roof. The father and mother do not just observe their sinful children grow up, but they may also feel too sinful to be blessings to their children. Instead of families and homes being channels and pathways to heaven, the destination has been changed to the ever-burning Lake of Fire.

But God, in His infinite mercy and grace, covenanted with man to send His Son to be the Saviour of mankind (Gen 3:15). Sin might have destroyed God's creation, but God's grace can restore! Through His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, sinful man who will believe on His name, will be saved from the punishment of sin. This means that there will be two groups of people in the world. The first group who has been elected by God from eternity past before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4-5) to be saved and regenerated will be called believers, Christians, or the children of God. The second group who remains in their sin, rejecting the offer of salvation, will be the unbelievers, non-Christians, or the children of the devil.

These two groups of people cohabit together in the same earth that God has created and to whom He had appointed to multiply and fill the earth. To the believers, God additionally instructs through His Word that they must bring up their children in the fear of Him. This is so that there will be people on earth who can be His shining witnesses to point others to Christ in this sin-sick and dark world (Matt 5:16). God desires godly parents to bring up godly children. For comfort,

Every parent who is aware of his own shortcomings and longs for wisdom and grace must look back to the heavenly origin of family life. The God who created it has also redeemed it and makes it new. He watches over each family with tender interest, and gives His own Father-love to every parent who desires to be the minister of His holy purpose.²

One of the most well-known verses that speaks of this is Proverbs 22:6 which says, *"Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it."* The question now is, is this a promise or a hope? Will all children who will be trained in the ways of God by godly parents never depart from it, or can one only hope it will be the case?

Problem

It is an obvious concern in many Bible-believing churches today that there are more and more young people leaving the church. Many of them grew up in Christian families, attended Sunday School, and were brought up in the fear of the Lord, but why are there many godly parents and churches today grieving over young people who have deserted the faith and even claimed that God does not exist? What went

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wrong? Who is in the fault? The parents? The church? The children themselves? Why is it that even after bringing children up in a godly way, there are still some who would deflect from the strait and narrow path? When it comes to this sensitive topic, churches would wash their hands off, parents would get defensive with the way they have brought up their children, and the children in response would be accusive of everybody else but themselves. The Barna Group researched on this deplorable reality and says,

Most of them are pulling *away* from church, are spending *less* time alone studying their Bibles, are giving *very little* financially to Christian causes, are *ceasing* to volunteer for church activities, and are *turning their backs* on Christian media such as magazines, radio, and television. What does this look like numerically for today's 20-somethings?

- 61% of today's young adults who were regular church attendees are "spiritually disengaged." They are not actively attending church, praying, or reading their Bibles.
- 20% of those who were spiritually active during high school are maintaining a similar level of commitment.
- 19% of teens were never reached by the Christian community, and they are still disconnected from the Church or any other Christian activities.³

Christian parents may start asking whether there is any worth in trying to bring up their children in the fear of the Lord as doing so does not fully guarantee that their child or children will stay in that godly path. There may also be couples who, for this reason, do not want to have children. They use the excuse that it is just bringing another sinner into the world where he will be corrupted and polluted by its wickedness. They think it is better not to have any children at all so as to spare any from this toxic and sinful environment. This is unbiblical as God's mandate is to bear children, unless for biological or medical reasons, the Christian wife is unable to give birth.

Modern worldly philosophies insisting on the "best" ways to bring up children are also infiltrating into the church, affecting the way Christian parents are raising their children. Most of these philosophies are in direct opposition to God's commands, such as how there should

be no spanking in order not to lower the child's self-esteem, or letting them learn from their mistakes instead of warning them from it, etc.

The world also claims that deep inside every person, there is something good. Prisoners jailed for their heinous crimes are really good people deep inside. Someone just needs to "pull" that goodness out of them. This is their fundamental philosophy. They would then encourage parents not to discipline but to encourage and develop the child and his personality. No controlling and no punishment must be done or else that would restrict the child from growing to become his full potential self. One of the first to circulate this method of teaching is a lady by the name of Maria Montessori. She says that children should "decide for themselves, and choose for themselves, what they want to learn."⁴ This modern view of the human nature has pushed away the good, old-fashioned, and biblical methods in parenting. Instead of punishing, parents are told that they must show their children what is wrong, be good examples to them, and reward them when they do good. The positivity in the approach is emphasised.

These worldly counsels are plaguing the church so much so that when these collide with the principles and standards of God's Word, Christian parents are finding it difficult to follow and stand on what God has said. Because of this, children grow up confused whether they should solely follow God or they can at times follow the world too.

It cannot be denied that the current age is truly the last of the last days as described vividly and comprehensively in 2 Timothy 3:1-7,

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Knowing that his ultimate destruction and defeat are nearing, Satan is doing his best to stumble and turn as many people as possible

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from God's ways, and so the world is entertaining, tempting, luring impressionable children and teens into offering their lives to the devil for a temporary pleasure and presenting the church as a boring and strict place. With all these factors in place, Christian parents seem to be on the losing side, as the numbers of deceived children increase. "A majority of twenty-somethings — 61% of today's young adults — had been churching at one point during their teen years but they are now spiritually disengaged (i.e., not actively attending church, reading the Bible, or praying)."

Purpose

The aim of this study is to diligently research into the topic of why there are ungodly children despite their godly upbringing by humbly searching the Scriptures to have a biblical understanding of why this is the case and what are the possible ways this can be avoided in Christian families by looking into what parents, churches and the children themselves can do. The focus of this paper is to be Bible-centred, examining what God Himself says from His Word. He who has made man knows man's every thought, struggle, and need, which can all be met by the Scriptures. It is important that Christians go back to the Word of God, for it is the only place where truth can be found. There is no use in presenting the problem without presenting the solution. The only solution can only be found in God's Word.

This writer hopes and prays that grieving parents of children who have strayed away will have a renewed understanding of why it happened, what they can do, and repent of any shortcomings they might have had. For future or new parents, that they will endeavour to obey God's Word as closely as possible in raising up their children. For the children themselves that they should not harden their hearts but respond obediently to their parents and most of all to the call of salvation. For the church, that she will strive to pursue and fulfil the calling God has given her to be a people separated from the world and to be a shining witness for Him in this dark world of sin.

Presuppositions

Firstly, when speaking of "ungodly children," it does not just talk of children who are disobedient in terms of not doing their chores, talking back to their parents, or being grumpy when told to do

something. Although those characteristics described are not and should not typify a godly or a Christian child, it must be noted that just as no parent is perfect, no child is perfect either. Every child is sinful and *“foolishness is bound in the heart of a child”* (Prov 22:15). Therefore, in this thesis, when the term “ungodly children” is used, it specifies older children, who may be youths or young adults of the age of accountability and can decide on their own whether to receive or reject the offer of salvation of the Lord Jesus Christ. “Ungodly children,” albeit growing up and surrounded by a Christian environment, have decided not to place their faith in Christ and would rather that they give their life to and for the world. They may not directly deny the truths of the Bible, but they do not believe in them and certainly do not practise them in their lives. They may be living decently, even successfully in the secular sense, but they have rejected God in their lives and are on their way to eternal condemnation in hell.

Secondly, it is presupposed that the Bible is a timeless Book, meaning it is not bound by time. It is relevant in every age and for every generation. Everything written in both the Old and New Testament is still very much applicable in today’s context of the 21st century society and church, and even in the future centuries to come. Therefore, if there is any philosophy, teaching or counsel from renowned men with doctoral degrees, no matter how popular and how reasonable they may be to the human mind, if they disagree and clash with the Bible, man’s philosophies must stand corrected. The Bible must be upheld and placed on the highest pedestal, even if it brings the reproach of men. It must be the only guide for the believer in every aspect of his life.

Thirdly, it is affirmed that the Bible has no mistakes. It is infallible and inerrant to the very jot and tittle. The writer believes in the twin doctrines of the Verbal Plenary Inspiration (every word in the original of the Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek manuscripts was God-breathed) and Verbal Plenary Preservation (every word in the Scriptures is preserved by God till today). Because of these doctrines, the believer can rest assured that the Bible can and should be his life’s final authority in all matters of faith and practice. Surely, the God who has created families knows them best. Hence, the source and centre of the contents of this paper must be grounded in God’s Word. Moreover, the Authorised Version or the King James Version is the most faithful and the most

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accurate translation of God's Word and should be every English-speaking believer's Bible.

Fourthly, there will be a few statistics included in this paper. Most, if not all, statistics considered are obtained from the United States of America. However, this should not be a matter of concern, as much of the Christian influence the world has received over the years, such as Christian literature and missionaries, has understandably been from America. Therefore, it would not be improbable to say that statistics on Christianity gained from there would have similar results in many of the other countries.

Sometimes, in Christendom, statistics are looked down on or simply seen as the last option. This is because statistics seem to propagate situational ethics, where the results and the situation setting would determine what believers should do instead of the Word of God being the authoritative rule and guide. However, when guided by the discernment from and wisdom of God, coupled with a humble and prayerful spirit, the numbers that some researchers give can be very helpful to cause believers to reflect on what they can do better for the cause of Christ. Numbers do matter when interpreted correctly, though in the end, all should be left to the will and hand of God.⁵ The researchers of the statistics given in this paper assure readers of their determination not to receive "superficial" answers for their statistics. They wanted to know not just the *who's* but also the *why's* and the *what's*. They understood that spiritual matters are matters of the heart and not the mind or the intellect.

There are root causes. There are things that cause them to accelerate...Britt's data, as we expected, went deep. Rather than being satisfied with obvious observations...Britt went for the heart. ...Central to this study was the issue of belief. You simply cannot explain the behavior without understanding the beliefs behind the behaviors. "Belief is invisible." The only way to see it is through actions — yet the same actions might be the result of different beliefs. Remember that everyone in our sample of 1,000 grew up regularly going to church but seldom or never go today.⁶

Methodology

In order to have a biblical understanding of why there are ungodly children despite their godly upbringing, this paper will first start by laying down the doctrines and teachings of God's Word, especially those which pertain to and deal with the topic. Thus, the foundation of what will be subsequently written is strongly rooted in what God says. Words simply written out of the human mind can be vain words, and so doctrines are important. This paper will then go on to list and consider the biblical roles and what God expects from parents, church leaders, and the children themselves in order to have family units and lives that will please and glorify God. Though they are not exhaustive, it is the prayer of the writer that they can at least help guide families to be the families God wants them to be in one way or another.

Know Covenant Theology

God's Covenant for the Family

Covenant Theology is one of the major doctrines of the biblical faith. The God of the Bible is a covenant-keeping God, meaning when He makes promises, He will never fail to keep it. The two main covenants that God made with man are the (1) Covenant of Works and the (2) Covenant of Grace. What are covenants?

The word "covenant" (Hebrew *berith*, Greek *diatheke*) is used frequently throughout the Bible to mean any formal or informal arrangement, agreement, contract or treaty made between two or more parties. The word "covenant" can also mean a "will" or a "testament" (Heb 9:16-17). Sometimes a covenant simply means a promise made by one party to bless another without any conditions.⁷

The Covenant of Works

The Covenant of Works was made in the Garden of Eden at the very beginning. There are many people who misunderstand and think it is only about how Adam and Eve were not to eat the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. But this covenant actually consists of two commands. One is duty while the other is prohibition. Firstly, it was Adam and Eve's duty to "*Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth*" (Gen

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1:28), and secondly, God prohibited them: *“Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die”* (Gen 2:16–17). It was to test Adam and Eve whether they would be obedient to Him. At the time God created the world, everything was perfect and good. Adam and Eve had pure free will; they could choose to do good or evil without the depravity of sin. The image of God in them was not tainted.

The status of permanent spiritual holiness was not automatically given to Adam. He had to work for it. If Adam obeyed perfectly God’s covenant of works, he and his children would be eternally blessed by God with permanent spiritual sonship. If he disobeyed, divine judgment would come. So on the basis of his deeds, blessing or judgment would be determined.⁸

Sadly, Adam as well as Eve chose disobedience and judgment instead of obedience and blessing. Because of this, sin entered the world. All mankind plunged into sin and the judgment for sin is death. This death is not just physical but also spiritual and eternal.

The Covenant of Grace

But in the richness of God’s mercy and grace, He made another covenant with man—the Covenant of Grace. *“And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel”* (Gen 3:15). Through this covenant, Jesus Christ came down to earth to become man by virgin birth to fulfil what all men are supposed to fulfil but are unable to. Jesus perfectly obeyed all of God’s commandments, went to the cross to shed His blood and die for the sins of the world, and on the third day, rose from the dead. The Confession answers,

Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace; wherein He freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in Him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life His Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe.⁹

It is the desire of God that all would repent of their sins and come to believe in Him (2 Pet 3:9). Since man cannot work for his salvation due to his incapability to perfectly keep all the commandments and not fail, Jesus had to do all the work. *“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). This He accomplished through His active obedience of fulfilling all righteousness without any word of complaint but only willing and loving submission and His passive obedience of His death on the cross. His offer of salvation is free to all who will call on His name.

Undeserving men who are wicked and vile and who only deserve the hells of fire were granted the rich mercies and love of God. *“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).

The Familial Covenant

The God of the Bible is also a God of the family. This can be seen throughout the Scriptures in the manner God deals with not just the individual but also with his or her family members. This gives comfort to Christian parents that God is not just interested in those who believe in Him, but that He also extends His interest to the other members in the family. That is why the Apostle Paul said that even if only the mother or the father becomes a believer, *“...the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy”* (1 Cor 7:14). This sanctification and holiness do not mean that they are instantly saved, but that through the life of the believing spouse or parent, the rest of the family would be moved to see the blessedness of being a child of God, and they may be led to believe in Jesus Christ themselves. There will still be family members who will be stubborn and reject God’s grace even though it is right in front of their eyes. In light of this, the Rev Dr Timothy Tow and the Rev Dr Jeffrey Khoo state the following:

God is the God of those who, being born in a covenant family relationship, turn their backs upon Him. Those who, from this holy covenant relationship, reject the grace of God, are worthy of so much more severe punishment. From these references we see that the holy relationship in the family covenant is an extremely sacred

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matter, a matter which must not be trifled with. This covenant is the spiritual basis for the permanence of Christian marriage.¹⁰

Andrew Murray uses Noah as an example of a godly parent whose faith in his God not only obtained himself blessings but also his wife, sons and the sons' wives in how the whole family was saved from perishing in the Global Flood. *"And the LORD said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation"* (Gen 7:1). Later on, Ham would commit a terrible sin of shaming his father, and God, despite His omniscience, still saved Ham. In God's sight, the family is a unity with the father as the head. That is why God will deal with families with much grace. This is His covenant in the family.¹¹ The godly father and mother who are righteous in Christ, when blessed by God, will be blessed so abundantly by Him so that these spiritual blessings will flow throughout the house. The believing parents are channels through whom the children can witness and testify of the grace of God themselves.¹² It is God's desire that He will not only be the God of the parents but also to their children: *"...a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee"* (Gen 17:7).

Another example is how God took care of the families of those who sprinkled blood on the doorposts in Israel's exodus from Egypt. *"Take ... every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house...When He seeth the blood...the Lord will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses"* (Exod 12:3, 23). As long as the father believed in the warning and followed the command of sprinkling blood, the house was passed by and the eldest son was kept safe and not killed. Similarly, the blood of Jesus Christ, as the Lamb of God, which cleansed the father and the mother of their sins, though it will not be automatically extended to the children, are offered to them as well. The children must then make their personal decision.

There is a reason why God has elected a set of parents to be saved and how their children have the privilege to be born into a Christian family. Certainly, there is no coincidence, chance or luck in all these things. Most Christian parents of the Reformed faith would allow their children to go through infant baptism with the understanding that their salvation is included in the covenant as God had said to Abraham that *"...I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee,*

and to thy seed after thee" (Gen 17:7). This baptism will not save them, but it is a sign and seal of the Covenant of Grace that God is not just interested in the believer but also in the spiritual well-being of his children.¹³ Infant baptism is the New Testament replacement of the circumcision of the Old Testament. Male Jews who were eight days old were circumcised to identify themselves as the people of God and to enter into God's covenant promises. The Westminster Larger Catechism Question 166 says,

Unto whom is baptism to be administered? Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible church, and so strangers from the covenant of promise, till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him, but infants descending from parents, either both, or but one of them, professing faith in Christ, and obedience to him, are in that respect within the covenant, and are to be baptized.¹⁴

These children are indeed given such a wonderful and grand opportunity to be blessed by experiencing what it is like to be a Christian even before becoming Christians themselves, concerning at least the outward blessings. It is a favour given by God that He has withdrawn from others. The children get to read the precious words of God, hear it being explained, know the greatness, truth, and majesty of the living and true God, and distinguish what is truth from an early age. They attend church, experience the warmth of Christian fellowship and enjoy what it is like to have Christian friends. They see their parents, though not perfect but because of their desire to please Christ, how they desire to live as much in harmony and love with each other as possible instead of fighting and quarrelling all the time.

God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility

God's Sovereignty

Are the children's end in the hands of their parents? Are the parents like God who is in control? The answer is a definite 'no' for both questions. How the children turn out in the end is ultimately in God's hands.

God is sovereign over all things in heaven and on earth because He is the Creator of them all. Sovereignty simply means a complete, absolute and supreme rule. In other words, everything is under His

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control, and He has predestined everything even before the foundation of the world. Nothing takes Him by surprise, for He knows everything in the past, present and future. God's purposes and promises stand immutable. This provides another great comfort to believing parents and all Christians that they can rest assured, knowing that everything is in God's hands. Since God is perfect, then His will and purposes must be perfect too. Even if not everything may seem pleasing to man on earth or to be going the way he wants it to, the God in heaven who sees the whole picture, will work out everything for good, especially for His children. *"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose"* (Rom 8:28).

A question often asked by grieving parents of ungodly children is why this is the case. Murray replies:

Most parents seek the cause of unconverted and unsaved children in God — not in themselves. Has God's sovereignty nothing to do with the salvation of our children? Is there not such a thing as election? If so, how can all the responsibility be thrown on our unbelief? Scripture reveals to us most clearly God's sovereignty. His grace is electing grace. The final decision of the destiny of each man is in His hands. Scripture reveals, just as clearly, man's responsibility and all-prevailing power of faith. *True humility accepts both statements without reconciling them.* It bows under the solemn truth Jesus utters here [Mark 9:22-23] that, if the parent can believe, the child can be saved.¹⁵

Man's Responsibility

However, knowing the sovereignty of God should not dismiss or excuse parents from their great responsibility of training up their children. They should not apply situational ethics where, because this is how most of the cases would turn out if such and such an action is taken, it would not be a problem if steps that may not be morally good are taken, as long as the desired end is acquired.

Though they are not all-knowing and definitely do not know what is in the future, the primary duty of parents is simply *obedience to God's Word*. Whatever God says in His Word that parents should do, should be obeyed without question. The Word of God is the absolute and most reliable guide and manual in every area of a believer's life. The outcome and the result are not part of man's responsibility. That should be

reverentially left to God's sovereignty. As the parents exercise and apply their faith on the covenant and sovereignty of God, they are also to bring up their children with the Bible, counselling them each step of the way. They can help and lead the children to know, choose and love the same God they know, have chosen and love. They can only lead, but they cannot make or force the children to accept and believe. That is between the child and God.

Spurgeon drew a humorous yet realistic picture of just what it means to see and believe in the doctrine of God's sovereignty working together with man's responsibility. He said in his sermon entitled, "Faith in Perfection":

"The Lord will perfect me." Am I, therefore to say, "He will do it, and I will not pray?" No, because he will do it, therefore will I pray. Many persons have such shallow minds that they cannot perceive how God's determination and our own free action can go together. I never find these people making the same mistake in common life they do on religious subjects. A man says to me, "Now, sir, if God intends to save me, I need do nothing." He knows he is a fool when he says it; or if he does not know it, I will soon make him see it. Suppose he says, again, "If the Lord intends to feed me, he will feed me, and I will go without my dinner. If the Lord intends to give me a harvest, he will give me a harvest, and I shall not sow any wheat, and I shall not plough." Suppose another were to say, "If the Lord intends to keep me warm to-day, he will do it; so I will not put on my coat." Suppose a man should say, again, "If the Lord intends me to go to bed to-night, I shall go to bed; and, therefore, I shall not walk towards home, but sit here as long as I like." You smile at once, because the folly is self-convicting. But is it not just the same in religion? Because "the Lord will perfect that which concerneth me," am I to say I shall not pray? Why, no, my dear friends, the fact is, that a knowledge that a thing is certain prompts a wise man to action. What made Oliver Cromwell fight so bravely, but because he felt convinced that he should conquer? He did not say, "I know that I shall conquer, therefore I will not fight;" no, he said, "I know that I shall conquer; therefore keep your powder dry, trust in God, and at 'em!" So with you; if you believe the Lord will perfect that which concerneth us, begin with

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prayer; trust the promise, and let us go on cheerfully through the world, rejoicing in the Lord our God. Confidence must not lead to idleness, but to diligent activity.¹⁶

God's sovereignty and human responsibility are the two sides of one coin, and they go hand in hand. Yet, it must be remembered that all of man's responsibility will ultimately be under God's sovereignty. He may obey God as faithfully as he can, and he may be very diligent in all his endeavours for the Lord, but if it please God not to make the path smooth, God must still be glorified. This is the chief end of man according to the Westminster Shorter Catechism Question 1. It does not invalidate man's responsibility, but it should all the more make the believer commit all things into God's hands, knowing that he is just living under the mercies of God, without which, he will not be even alive.

The Doctrine of Salvation

"Salvation is of the LORD" (Jon 2:9). It must be understood that with regard to the doctrine of salvation, it is truly all the work of God and none of man. *"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). There is nothing that a believer can boast of when it comes to how he has been saved. Even the faith wherein a man comes to believe in Jesus Christ is given by God. John Calvin asserts, "When, on the part of man, the act of receiving salvation is made to consist in faith alone, all other means, on which men are accustomed to rely, are discarded. Faith then brings a man empty to God, that he may be filled with the blessings of Christ."¹⁷ It is only in the name of Christ that eternal life can be obtained. *"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved"* (Acts 4:12). Just because one's father is a pastor or a church leader and the mother is a Sunday School teacher, it does not make the child a Christian. It is not the label of calling oneself a "Christian" but truly the act of calling on the name of Jesus Christ, believing that He is the only one who can grant life and salvation. Growing up in church and serving the Lord will not guarantee entrance to heaven. Jesus says that not everyone who calls Him "Lord" will enter heaven (Matt 7:21).

“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (Rom 10:9). Salvation is also an individual and a personal matter, meaning the parents cannot believe for the children nor can the children do it for the parents. The decision must be made by the person for himself. Salvation cannot be treated as an inheritance that can be passed down to future generations, but God’s Word and all its precious teachings can be passed down by parents for the children to know and find the way to heaven.

The Dual Aspect of the Covenant

Then one may ask about Acts 16:31, which says, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and **thou shalt be saved, and thy house**” and Acts 2:38–39 say, “...Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. **For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.**” (Emphases added) Are these not God’s familial covenants? Are they not covenant promises? How can these verses be reconciled with the doctrine of salvation and the truth that not all children of believers, children of the covenant, will end up as believers themselves?

There are Reformed theologians who believe that all children of the covenant will *eventually* be saved as it is God’s desire and promise in His covenant. One such propagator, Abraham Kuyper, believes and promotes the doctrine of “presumptive regeneration” where children of believers are presumed to be elect as they are in the covenant.¹⁸

It must be understood then that there is a need to distinguish covenant membership from election. This is theologically called the *dual aspect of the covenant*. The dual aspect of the covenant consists of the (1) legal aspect or relationship and the (2) vital aspect or communion of life. In other words, both Christian parents and their children are in the legal aspect of the covenant, but only the Christian parents and the elect children can be in the vital aspect of the covenant or have the communion of life. Not all who are in the covenant are elected. Not all children of the covenant are children of the promise.

This is a historic Reformed view held by theologians like Louis Berkhof and Geerhardus Vos. It is different from and should not be associated with the group known as the Federal Vision.¹⁹ In an online

article titled “The Dual Aspect of the Covenant: Covenant, Election, and Infant Baptism,” Zachary Garris carefully and competently handles and writes on this doctrine while quoting from Scripture, Reformed Confessions, such as the Westminster Standards, and works of earlier theologians. Garris submits that there are elect and non-elect persons in the covenant just as how Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, were all in the covenant.

The promises and threats of the covenant are made to all its members — the elect will keep covenant and receive its saving promises through faith, while the non-elect will break covenant through unbelief. The reality of covenant breaking, which is taught throughout the Old Testament (Genesis 17:14; Deuteronomy 31:16–21) and in the book of Hebrews, necessitates such a distinction between covenant and election. Not all Israel is of Israel (Romans 9:6).²⁰

This doctrine was also taught and held by John Calvin. J Mark Beach writes on “Calvin and the Dual Aspect of Covenant Membership,” quoting Calvin’s commentary on Galatians 3:15–22 and Romans 6:9ff.

In this connection, Calvin shows us the two aspects of the covenant relative to the elect and the reprobate, calling us to keep in mind two things: “The first is, That the promise of salvation given to Abraham belongs to all who can trace their natural descent to him; for it is offered to all without exception, and for this reason they are rightly called the heirs of the covenant made with Abraham....” Thus Calvin notes how the covenant is sealed to Ishmael and Esau, along with Isaac and Jacob. The former are not “wholly alienated” from God; they are children of the covenant. But Calvin bids us to pay close attention to a second matter, when he writes: “The second point to be considered is, that the children of the promise are strictly those in whom its power and effect are found. On this account Paul denies here that all the children of Abraham were the children of God, though a covenant had been made with them by the Lord, for few continued in the faith of the covenant....” Even more explicitly he observes that among the covenanted, not all of them are to be regarded as “the seed,” though they are all natural sons of Abraham, for “the promise is specially fulfilled only in some”; and so with the apostle

Calvin reminds us that the promise “does not belong commonly and equally to all [in the covenant].” Among the covenanted, there are those who are elect and those who are reprobate. The latter are children of the flesh. Only the children of promise, not the children of the flesh, “are peculiarly selected by the Lord.” ... The offer of salvation, in the way of covenant membership, is not the same as the bestowal of salvation upon the children of promise in the covenant. According to his “hidden counsel,” God chooses those whom he pleases even from among those circumcised or baptized. For “not all natural sons are to be regarded as the seed, but that the promise is fulfilled in a special way only in some and does not belong equally and in common to all.”

This diversity of outcome which manifests itself among the covenanted is grounded in God’s purpose according to election. The higher explanation of this diversity is only understood from this perspective. “Those ... who enjoy the benefits of God are the children of the promise,” i.e., they are the elect. “[T]he whole cause” of their salvation or their saving response to the promises of the covenant may be ascribed to “the unmerited election of God, which in no way depends on men.”²¹

Simply put, the promise of salvation given to believers and their children does not necessarily mean that every member in the covenant will inherit the promise. It is simply the outward call and will continue as an inward call only to the elect. The promise is not distributed commonly and equally to those in the covenant, for within the covenant, there are both the elect (children of the promise) and the reprobates (children of the flesh) despite how they are all part of the covenant. Who the elect are and who the reprobates are will be all according to God’s perfect sovereign choice and should be none of man’s business. Salvation of any sinner is totally by God’s grace and bestowal. Even the faith that the sinner exercises when he believes is mercifully granted to him by God. The dual aspect of corporate election where, according to Calvin, those in the covenant are called to repent and believe and the special, soteric election which distinguishes the elect from the non-elect will reconcile the doctrine of God’s covenant with believers and their children and children who end up as unbelievers.²²

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God's will and purposes in salvation will always be accomplished. If parents are unable to understand why their children are not saved even though it is God's desire that all men be saved and that God's purposes are always accomplished, then they should see and understand the bigger scope of God's evangelistic purposes. "*[M]any are called, but few are chosen*" (Matt 22:14). God has certainly elected those whom He wants to save, but it is essential to know the difference between God's will in decree or His eternal purposes and His will expressed as desire. God never desired for sin to exist, but according to His eternal purposes, His will is still fulfilled and never perturbed even though sin is present in the world today. So, to pray for the children's salvation is according to God's desiderative will. Yet, man is left not knowing God's decretive will or who the elect are and who are not.

That is why, with the added grace of being born into a Christian home, the child who breaks the covenant will bear a greater judgment from God. "*Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?*" (Heb 10:29). Failing to receive the covenant blessings through faith is to break the covenant, proving that they are non-elect.

Though, they will not know whether their children are elected or not, the call still stands for parents to faithfully and actively engage in God's purpose to fulfil His will. Truly, "*O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen*" (Rom 11:33-36). All glory is still given to God.

Answering the Question

Why are there ungodly children from godly upbringing? As stated earlier, the controversial question of whether Proverbs 22:6 is a promise that parents can hold on to or only a method that they can hope would happen is debated. This verse is the basis of the majority of the discussions around this subject, "*Train up a child in the way he should go:*

and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” Some protest that there are parents who have tried their best, yet their children grow up defiant against their Creator. This makes them confused or doubt just what the verse means and entails. Roy Zuck wrote,

This proverb has brought encouragement, hope, anxiety, and guilt to countless parents who have faced the uncertainty and confusion of child-rearing. It has provided encouragement to those responsible parents who, after working to balance family, relationships, and careers, find reassurance that all of their labors ultimately will not be in vain. This verse has also provided rays of hope to those who, having reared their child in the best way they knew, have had their hearts broken as their child rebels and goes astray. They agonize under the pain that God recognized to be one of the deepest sorrows of human existence (Matt. 23:37; Hos. 11:1-2; Prov. 10:1). To those parents this verse gives hope that when he is old the prodigal will return. Another group of young parents, sensitive to daily feelings of inadequacy, experiences intense anxiety over the possible long-term damage they see themselves doing to their child. If the child does go astray, this verse seems to point the finger of guilt at them.

Assuming that Proverbs 22:6 is a proverb, and not a promise, the first question of interpretation must be: “What did this verse originally mean when it was recorded in the book of Proverbs?”²⁴

The Right Approach

“Humility, humility, humility,” instructed John Calvin to all who desire to study theology. This should be the approach of every Christian to studying anything that concerns spiritual matters. It is not any different with this particular topic of study. There should be no place for pride when it comes to approaching the sacred words of God. Pride is rooted in the attitude that man thinks he knows better than God, just like how Lucifer wanted to be God (Isa 14:13-14). Sometimes, in the pretext of gaining more knowledge of God’s Word and being inquisitive, man says too many words that can cross the line of reverence. The believer must remember who he is and who his God is. This truth must be constantly kept in mind. Believers must avoid the sin of pride. Horatius Bonar gave an instruction that is worthwhile,

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So, pride of intellect, confidence in human reason, eagerness to establish one favorite doctrine and to make everything bend to it, supersede and overturn the Word of God. Scripture is not implicitly relied upon, unless borne out by the systems or the syllogisms of reason and the conclusions of man's poor fallen intellect.

Cleave, then, to the Word of God. Distrust your own heart, "*lean not to your own understanding,*" but "*receive with meekness the ingrafted word.*" "*The world through wisdom did not know God,*" and we must stoop to "*become fools, so that we may become wise.*" The "*natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, for they are spiritually discerned.*"²⁵

Critical Analysis of Views

View of Promise

Majority of commentators hold to the view that Proverbs 22:6 is a promise and not a mere hope. They are convinced that as long as the parents try their best to bring up their children in the ways of the Lord, the children will one day adopt those ways as their own. They will surely remain and end faithful.

In this view, the responsibility is totally pushed to the parents. Since parents are the ones that God has given the responsibility to take care of, guide, and train up their children, then the fault should be theirs if their children do not end up fearing the Lord.

It is without a doubt that God will never be at fault in any way nor in any situation. Indeed, "*let God be true, but every man a liar*" (Rom 3:4). For every bad thing, man should be blamed, and for every good thing, God should be glorified. One of the supporters of this view, Charles Bridges, claims that if the promise does not come to pass, it is because the duty was not properly accomplished. He says that God also does not give His children a command that they cannot keep. There is no law that is impossible to obey. God will give the grace for His children to obey and fulfil the mandate. There may be much to be done in training up the children, and there may be times where it will feel almost insurmountable. Obedience to this command may be a painful process but the believer must remember that the God who gave this promise is the God who cannot lie and whose arm is never shortened. Nothing is too hard for Him. Christian parents must exercise their faith

to believe in what God has promised. As any other promise of the gospel, parents should also place their confidence in the consummation of this particular assurance. There may come a time where the child backslides and strays away, but the Christian parent must continue to be diligent in exercising his faith, patience and hope. God will work in His own time and will.²⁶

Andrew Murray contributes to this view by affirming that how a child is trained will determine how he will turn out in life. To him, the word “train” in Proverbs 22:6 goes higher than mere teaching and commanding the child. “Training can now be defined in this way: getting the child accustomed to doing easily and willingly what the parent commands.”²⁷ The child is, by nature, unstable and fickle-minded. It is the parents’ duty to instruct, show, and discipline them to do what is good. Murray reasons that because parents have been teaching their children what to do without disclosing and explaining the principles on why they do them, when the children are left to themselves in the future, they will depart. In the first place, they never understood why they had to do what they were taught to do. They simply obeyed as young children. But, Murray interjects, God’s grace will work where human efforts have failed. In His mysterious way, He will work in the salvation of these growing children’s hearts. He will remain faithful to His promises.²⁸

It will also comfort Christian parents that their labour to bring up their children in godly ways will not be in vain. They will receive their reward. However, he accentuates the importance of knowing the right interpretation of the phrase in the verse “*the way in which he should go.*” He interprets this “way” as Jesus Christ who said, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me*” (John 14:6).²⁹ Parents may desire that their children will be converted and saved, but they have not desired this way exclusively and finally for them. They also battle with their own ideas and opinions on how they want their children to become, some of which may get in the way of them fully going to Christ. They may forget that this way is a narrow and strait path. It should not be merged with the broad path or be clouded with worldliness.

These children will have enough maturity and accountability for that final decision they will make. While it cannot be denied that the

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parents do play a big role in the child's life, as he grows up, he will be making choices that not even his parents can make for him. The parents can only do so much but not everything. If they have done their best for the Lord, then the Lord will honour their faithfulness, and after that, the child will be free to choose his own ways and standards.

Likewise, Murray admits that there have been failures, meaning there are children who do not turn out to be godly in the end despite their parents' efforts. But, he says, to cast a doubt on the promise of Proverbs 22:6 is to undermine the covenant of God. The fault would then lie on the parents who did not lead their child to "*the way in which he should go*" or the way they brought him up was not in accordance to God's Word.³⁰ He even goes to the extent to say that if believing parents have unbelieving children, the believing parents are pretentious in their faith.

It is clear to Paul that believing parents ought to have believing children. When such is not the case, he regards it as an indication that there has been some failure on the part of the parents. He concludes that their own faith and life has not been what it should be, and they are at once debarones of faith.³¹

Charles Bridges expands on this view of promise that for some Christian parents, the fruits are immediate and constant till the end. There are children who can comprehend the gospel truth at an early age, and they decide to place their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. By God's grace, they grow up with tender hearts, wanting to please their heavenly Father. Though they may wander off the path at some points, when they receive the painful but good chastening rod of the Lord, they are often ready to turn back to the Lord. However, in most cases, it takes time and maybe even decades for these children to want to become a part of God's family. They may have received the same godly upbringing but somehow, they are not as receptive. They go through years of rebellion and close their hearts from accepting the truths of God's Word with simple faith. They are more captivated with the lures of the world. Every child is different. Still, Bridges has hope that

Yet the fruit, though late, will not be the less sure. (Hab. ii. 3.) *The child may depart* when he is young. But *when he is old* — in after years, smothered convictions will bring back the power of early impressions. The seeds of instructions will burst forth into life. He

will find it “hard” in a course of sin “to kick against the pricks.” (Acts, ix. 5.) The Scriptures, fastened on his memory, will force themselves upon him with many a sharp and painful struggle. Conscience will disturb his pleasures, and embitter the sweetness, which he had found, or fancied that he had found, in his sins. The remembrance of his father’s house brings the prodigal “to himself,” and he comes home with shame in his face, tears in his eyes, and godly sorrow in his heart. (Luke, xv. 17–20.)³²

The strength of this view is that the supporters see that the upbringing of children should be taken seriously by the parents. This is not a duty that can just be pushed to the school, church, grandparents, and others. Parents must be concerned about their children’s spirituality, future, and how the children will continue to cope after their parents are taken home to glory. Another strength is the emphasis on God’s covenant-keeping character. Since these commentators see this view as a promise, they know that it will surely be fulfilled as God cannot break His word.

The weakness of this view is that all of the human responsibility is placed on the parents alone. If the children do not turn out to be God-fearing, then it would be wholly the fault of the parents. But the children themselves are not innocent and blameless, especially when they have grown up and are old enough to contemplate and make the decision for themselves. This view also lessens the sovereignty of God and makes the training of children a duty absolutely borne by parents. Those who hold on to this view apply the doctrine of divine sovereignty only at the end where the parents are already helpless and the children have by this time gone astray.

This view also denies the reality that there *are* parents who, though not perfect, have tried their best to obey the biblical principles of parenting but still have their children leave the church and the Lord in their later years. They believe that the parents did not fulfil their calling sufficiently. They then encourage the parents not to give up easily as they believe that the children *will* one day come back to the Lord. But the question is, what if they do not? The promise view is reassuring to parents only at the start of parenthood, but it can be discouraging at the end to some extent as it means they have to bear the full blame if their children do not turn out right. They may just end up

condemning themselves for the rest of their life and be crippled from doing much for the Lord. There must be something that can comfort these parents.

View of Hope

On the other spectrum, others see Proverbs 22:6 not as a promise, but simply as a hope or a general principle that may not necessarily apply to every Christian parent. Peter A Steveson, who holds to this view, points to other verses in Proverbs and argues the same way. He regards many of the proverbs as expressions of general principles and not specific postulates that promise fulfilment in every case.³³ For example, Proverbs 16:13 says, *“Righteous lips are the delight of kings; and they love him that speaketh right,”* but this is not always the case, for some kings would not be pleased to hear the truth just as how Herod Antipas was not happy when John the Baptist came to tell him about his sin of marrying his brother’s wife (Mark 6:17).

John MacArthur, who also thinks the same way, carries the same reasoning as Steveson and uses the verse in Proverbs 22:4, *“By humility and the fear of the LORD are riches, and honour, and life.”*³⁴ Not everyone who is humble and has the fear of the Lord will receive riches, honour and life. In other parts of Scripture, there are Bible characters who were humble and feared the Lord but were not rich, were despised by many, and did not live long. In the New Testament epistles, it is exhorted that the righteous will have to expect to suffer persecution (2 Tim 3:12) and are most often poor (Jas 2:5). Another Proverb he uses as an example is Proverbs 10:27, which says, *“The fear of the LORD prolongeth days: but the years of the wicked shall be shortened.”* In some cases, this is true, but not in all. One just has to remember Cain and Abel in Genesis 4. Abel was killed by Cain because of his offering that God accepted, while Cain, who disobeyed God’s commands and instructions on sacrifice, continued to live. All these made both Steveson and MacArthur conclude that Proverbs 22:6 is likewise not a “blanket promise” that covers everyone.

At the same time, Steveson also believes that there *are* some proverbs that are promises and will always be true in every case no matter the specifics of the situation. For example, in Proverbs 3:5-6 (*“Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy*

paths.”), the believer who trusts in the LORD with all his heart will always be directed in his paths by God. He believes that Christian parents who live out the godly standards, which they teach to their children, always seeking and depending upon the Holy Spirit’s guidance, can hope that their children when grown up, will adopt them as their own.³⁵

Moreover, Steveson encourages parents that they should also not give up so easily when their children have gone wayward but to continue praying for them. It may just be temporary. The New Testament is abundant in passages which speak of how children of Christian parents should follow and embrace the godly standards and principles they have been taught (eg, 1 Tim 3:4-5, 12; Tit 1:6). If parents start their godly training when the children are still very young, in fact, from their earliest years, the children will most likely not turn away from this training that they have received.³⁶

Roy Zuck also says that this verse is not a promise but a proverb; it does not represent the whole truth exhaustively. He defines a proverb as a “single component of truth that must be fit together with other elements of truth in order to approximate the more comprehensive, confused patterns of real life.”³⁷ He says that this verse cannot be applied as if it is some formula for every parent to be successful in bringing up his children.

To John MacArthur, successful parenting is measured by what the parents have done and not what the child becomes. He says there is no absolute guarantee from God’s Word if one is to base it on what the child turns out to be.³⁸

Sometimes children raised in fine Christian families grow up to abandon the faith. On the other hand, the Lord graciously redeems many children whose parents are utter failures. The outcome of the child, as a factor taken by itself, is no reliable gauge of the parent’s success.³⁹

MacArthur’s definition of the true measure of success focuses on the parents, how they have grown in their character, and whether they have tried their best to obey and follow God’s design and pattern for parenting. In God’s eyes, that is how parents can succeed. There is also much confusion in understanding the nature and interpretation of

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Proverbs. According to his belief, Proverbs are not rules that are invincible and unbreakable but are more of wise sayings and maxims. Because of this, he sees Proverbs 22:6 as only generally true. He further quotes Matthew Henry on this,

But Proverbs 22:6 is not a promise for Christian parents to claim that will guarantee their children will never depart from the way of truth. The great Puritan commentator Matthew Henry made these remarks about the truism of Proverbs 22:6, “When they *grow up*, when they *grow old*, it is to be hoped, they *will not depart from it*. Good impressions made upon them then will abide upon them all their days. Ordinarily the vessel retains the savour with which it was first seasoned. Many indeed have departed from the good way in which they were trained up; Solomon himself did so. But early training may be a means of their recovering themselves, as it is supposed Solomon did. At least the parents will have the comfort of having done their duty and used the means.”⁴⁰

Therefore, it is generally seen that if Christian parents have strived to follow God’s directions on how to train up their children, there will most probably be a positive effect on the children’s characteristics. Proverbs 22:6 does apply in that it does not render the diligent endeavour of godly parents useless or inconsequential. God is sovereign in the salvation of all children, but He is also pleased to use parents as channels of blessing and instruments in leading the children to Him.

MacArthur still holds parents as partly and generally to blame when it comes to children’s waywardness. This is because he sees that the upbringing of children is given by God specifically to them. He quotes an example of some parents who, after they have purposely disobeyed clear biblical principles of parenting and after their children have abandoned the faith, approach their pastor to seek validation that they are not the ones at fault but maybe society, their children’s peers, and other influences. It is wrong of the parents to discharge the blame to others when they did not even do their duty well and properly.⁴¹

This is where the knowledge of God’s sovereignty comes in with high importance. God’s sovereignty cannot be fully comprehended by finite, puny-minded men, and it can stay a mystery to them. There are times where God will choose not to reveal certain things, and believers should never try to pry into what is not meant for them to know. “*The*

secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Deut 29:29). The simple instruction here is that believers should be content with what God has revealed in His Word. A lifetime is not enough to unearth all of God’s rich and deep treasures that the sixty-six books offer. With that in mind, they should spend more of their time studying what is in the Bible instead of trying to ask questions about things too sacred and which are only for God to know.

God’s thoughts and ways are higher than what man can ever think or reach. *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa 55:8–9).* What man should do is to cultivate his fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom. Wisdom is not just to heap up one’s knowledge but also to know where to draw the line of being content with not knowing. This is called having faith in what God is doing and surrendering oneself to the will of God. One’s fear of the Lord should cause him to place restrictions on any confidence he may have in himself. Yes, all believers must take heed and obey the wisdom found in Proverbs, but they should leave the rest to the Lord. *“The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the LORD. All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the LORD weigheth the spirits. Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established. The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil...The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD” (Prov 16:1–4, 33).*

The strength of this view is that those who support and take this view study the verse as part of the whole book of Proverbs and study it in the nature of what proverbs are. Proverbs are not promises for everyone, but are wisdom-filled principles for Christians to follow in order to live a life that is pleasing to the Lord. Another strength is that they accept and acknowledge that there are ungodly children from godly upbringing and that this does not necessarily mean that the parents were disobedient and unfaithful.

The weakness of this view is that the supporters of this view sound like they are lessening the authoritativeness of God’s Word, especially to less discerning Christians. They may read the book of Proverbs just

thinking that the proverbs are optional to follow since they will not necessarily apply to everyone and every case. Therefore, there is a need to expand and develop on the explanations that they give so that no one will be misled.

Conclusion

Knowing Proverbs, the Book of Wisdom

It is most important to firstly understand the context and nature of the book of Proverbs. Proverbs is one of the books of poetry or wisdom literature in the Bible along with Job, Psalms, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. Proverbs gives readers direct practical wisdom to apply in their day-to-day lives. The writer of Proverbs was King Solomon, the son of David.

There are around three thousand proverbs that Solomon had written, and many great men around the world, even those in royalty, were drawn to the king in amazement for the great wisdom that God had granted to him (1 Kings 4:32-34, *“And he spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five. And he spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes. And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom.”*). Derek Kidner conveys the criterion of the examples of characters quoted in Proverbs, which can all be summed up as, “Is it wisdom or folly?” He promotes this question as the unifying approach to life, placing great importance on wisdom.⁴²

Hebrew poetry uses parallelism to convey the contrast or comparison of the wisdom that is presented. The second sentence which is parallel to the first would either repeat or expand on the thought in the first line or present a different truth that would contrast with it. These parallelisms would either declare a reason, proof, purpose, or consequence of the wisdom. What makes this Book of Wisdom special is that this is not just Solomon’s wisdom, but really God’s wisdom that Solomon had penned down. This wisdom is inspired, or breathed-out, by God. These are not just man’s wise sayings. A K Helmbold describes the book as “designed to guide men in practical everyday conduct. The collection would be a useful

sourcebook for public or private study. It inculcates personal morality and plain horse sense.”⁴³ Given that it is God’s wisdom that will guide us, the Proverbs are not to be understood as promises, but more on how, if obeyed and followed, will lead the believer to a holier and godlier life. Like a hedge or a wall that will guard a house from thieves and robbers, these proverbs are God’s wisdom in short statements to keep the believer in wisdom and away from folly.⁴⁴

On Proverbs 22:6

In light of the topic at hand, it is an obvious understanding from Proverbs 22:6 that children should be taught the Bible and trained in the ways of the Lord. It is not an option but a command and instruction from God to every Christian parent. The phrase “train up” is a verbal imperative.⁴⁵ It is an order from the God who knows all things. Christian parents must take it upon themselves to obey this charge as best as they can. It is not just a single verse in the Bible, but there are many others that instruct parents on how they should bring and train up their children, even in Proverbs itself (Prov 13:24; 19:18; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15, 17; cf. Heb 12:5f). Many homes, even Christian homes, are suffering from the global problem of absent and preoccupied parents. It cannot be overemphasised how important a godly parental responsibility is.⁴⁶

Proverbs 22:6 says, *“Train up [or catechise] a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”* Teaching the Bible to our children is a must. This should be done right from birth. Mothers ought to pray and sing the words of Scripture when feeding, bathing, playing with their baby. Their first words should not only be Papa and Mama but also Jesus.⁴⁷

Christian parents should never see secular education as enough and sufficient nor should it be regarded as the first priority. What is most important and necessary is spiritual education as this will affect their children’s eternal destiny. Children should not simply become good citizens of the country but additionally godly servants of God’s kingdom. The question now is, when parents do obey God in bringing up their children in godly ways, despite their failures and imperfections, will their children really not depart from it? Is this a promise or something Christian parents can only hope for?

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A misunderstanding that is connected to this verse is that it talks about the salvation of children. If the parents are faithful and diligent in their training of the children, then the children will surely be saved. This would be against the truth of the doctrine of salvation. It must be remembered that salvation is only of the Lord and never by man's works. If this verse is indeed talking about the salvation of children, then it would be imposing that salvation of children can be attributed to how faithful parents were in their upbringing of the children. It is not that if parents pray earnestly every night, teach them God's Word daily, and make the whole family attend church every Sunday, then salvation is secured for the children. Even though the duty and responsibility of parents do play a big role in what children can become in the future as they grow up, they are not the deciding factor. Therefore, with this understanding, it cannot be referring to how children will truly be believers when they grow up. The parents may sow and water, but God will give the increase (1 Cor 3:7). The salvation of all children of Christian homes is still by grace, not the parents' works.

But it is by no means possible to argue back from a life wrecked by sin to parental blame, and to say that because a son or daughter comes to lead a life of wickedness, therefore the parents must certainly have been at fault. Who of us is sufficient for these things? It is, after all, only the grace of God that brings any to Christ and spares any a life of folly and ruin. Some godly and faithful parents have had wretched children, for the wreckage of whose lives they were not responsible.⁴⁸

It has already been established that the book of Proverbs is not a book of promises, as if these are formulas that can be followed and the result will always be good and according to how it is stated. For this reason, Proverbs 22:6 is wisdom from God that believing parents must follow. They must train their children up in the way they should go. When they do, most children will not depart from it, in the sense that the godly training will not leave them. It will stay with them, even if they do end up as unbelievers. Rev Timothy Tow befittingly restates the verse in his book, *Pearls of Great Wisdom*, as "Early training in childhood guarantees stability in adulthood."⁴⁹ The Pulpit Commentary expounds on this and says something that is worth considering:

“When he is old, he will not depart from it.” Age stiffens. It is well that it should grow firm in the right. Here is the reward of teaching the young. The work is slow and discouraging, and at first we see few results; perhaps we imagine that all our efforts are wasted upon thoughtless minds. But if the work is hard to begin, there is this compensation in it—**when it has fairly laid hold of a child, it is not likely to be ever effaced. The teachings of the Sunday school are remembered after many a long year.**⁵⁰

A fellow commentator, John Gill, contributes on the same note:

and when he is old he will not depart from it; not easily, nor ordinarily; there are exceptions to this observation; but generally, where there is a good education, the impressions of it do not easily wear off, nor do men ordinarily forsake a good way they have been brought up in; and, however, when, being come to years of maturity and understanding, their hearts are seasoned with the grace of God, they are then enabled to put that in practice which before they had only in theory, and so continue in the paths of truth and holiness.⁵¹

Moving along this line of argument, since this godly training will not easily leave the lives of the children, parents can and should hope that as long as there is still time, their children will realise the blessedness of being God’s child and be saved. They can continue to go down on their knees in prayer for the souls of their children. Yet, at the same time, they should remember that the purpose of prayer is simply to let their requests be made known to God (Phil 4:6). It is not to put themselves in control or to somehow twist the arm of God to do what they desire. They must submit to the ultimate authority of God. Once man places God in a box, it is equal to no longer regarding Him as God in his life.⁵² It is understandable in human terms that some Christian parents can feel “owed.” They have truly dedicated their children to God and followed the commands in the Bible on how to train up their children as best as they could, despite their failures and shortcomings, but their children simply turn away and may even deny the existence of God.

It is best if we push that feeling aside because if ever our motive in serving God is to get back from God, we are bartering with God. We are not serving Him, we are not loving Him with all of our heart, mind, and soul. We are not seeking His righteousness first.

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We are not depending upon His grace, His mercy, and His sovereignty. We are not trusting in His nature.⁵³

But when children do grow up to be ungodly, the parents who have done their duty faithfully can take comfort that in God's eyes, they will not be held accountable by the Lord for not accomplishing their part. Yes, there is no perfect parent and every parent would admit that he has shortcomings and weaknesses if he is truly a God-fearing, genuine believer. Surely, every parent can acknowledge that he has made wrong choices. He should pray for God's grace and mercy to forgive him. However, as long as the parents did not deliberately and wilfully disobey God in the area of bringing up their children, repented quickly and made the necessary changes and improvements whenever and wherever he has failed, then that is already successful parenting in God's eyes as stated by John MacArthur.

Those parents who have ignored and blatantly disobeyed the commands and instructions of God in the way they brought up their children will have their punishment. Instead of bringing up their children in a godly way, they prioritised the children's studies and how they can be successful people in the world when they grow up. If their children grow up to be ungodly, then they are fully to be blamed.

It may be that the spirit of the world has so invaded the heart and home, that the parent's life trains the children to have faith in the world, to surrender to its spirit and rule. Or it may be that, while we are earnestly engaged in religion and religious work, there is little true spirituality. There is no joy, love, or power of holiness which alone makes religion a reality. It may be that religion has become an occupation like any other, and the holy presence of Jesus has not been felt by our children. Or there may have been failure in our not devoting ourselves to the holy task of training our children. We may have neglected the self-denial and the study needed to equip ourselves for the work of ruling and guiding our children in the ways of the Lord. Let us seek very honestly and very earnestly to discover the reason for our failure.⁵⁴

There is a difference between Christian parents who trust in the Lord and do not lean on their own understanding (Prov 3:5) and those who do not even want to trust in the Lord and always lean on their own understanding and opinions. Then a question is encountered why

there are children who grow up to be godly even though their parents did not bring them up properly in the ways of God. These scenarios should not make anyone question the validity of godly upbringing, but these should direct the believers' thoughts into just how high God's ways are above man's ways. God is sovereign and in control. His decrees overrule whatever men do in the world. However, these parents will not be receiving any spiritual blessings and rewards in heaven for how they have brought up their children.

This is another thing that Christian parents must keep in mind: the real reward is the reward that God will give them when they go home to heaven at the end of their lives. *"Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire"* (1 Cor 3:12-15). Christian parents must make sure they will train up their children in a way that when tried by fire, will come out as gold, silver, and precious stones, not wood, hay and stubble.

The parents cannot be crippled by the outcome of ungodly children so much so that they are then unable to serve the Lord for the rest of their lives. This is to reject God's purposes and sovereignty and thinking that if he could do better, surely, things would have turned out better. Their children's rejection of God should not end their testimony and service for their Saviour and Master. Such Christian parents should not fix their eyes inwardly but upwardly at Jesus, the author and finisher of every believer's faith (Heb 12:2). How can they be healed from this grief? It is not sinful to be sorrowful about it, but it should be the right sorrow that leads to repentance of whatever failures they may have had. The danger is when parents decide to listen to the lies of the devil that God will not forgive them if their sin is too great. They must remember that God has forgiven all their sins through the work of Jesus Christ. To deny that would also be denying one's faith which is founded on the truth of God's forgiveness.⁵⁵

Regarding all the children who do end up ungodly and depart from the ways they were trained in, God's judgment will be greater on

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them because they have rejected the grace that was so readily offered to them all the years since they were born. They have a privilege not all children have, yet they rejected the greatest Gift of all—the Lord Jesus Christ. The consequences they will bear in their life on earth and after will be borne by them.

With all the wisdom that the book of Proverbs teaches, the believer must always practise faith and confidence in the LORD's sovereignty regarding every affair of man. He is ready to assist and bless those who are obedient to His Word, but the believer must also always be ready to accept that "*...the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD*" (Job 1:21). None of the proverbs would then benefit the believer if he denies the Lord's sovereignty.⁵⁶

Many are the reminders, however, that even the best training cannot instil wisdom, but only encourage the choice to seek it (e.g. 2:1ff.). A son may be too opinionated to learn (13:1; cf. 17:21). A good home may produce an idler (10:5) or a profligate (29:3): he may be rebel enough to despise (15:20), mock (30:17) or curse (30:11; 20:20) his parents; heartless enough to run through their money (28:24), and even to turn a widowed mother out of doors (19:26). While there are parents who have only themselves to thank for their shame (29:15), it is ultimately the man himself who must bear his own blame, for it is his attitude to wisdom (29:3a; 2:2ff.), *his* consent given or withheld (1:10) in face of temptation which sets his course.⁵⁷

Ultimately, God will choose to do what He has long decreed in the past. No man can change that. The believer must simply trust God even if he cannot explain why the situation has turned out to be what it has become. Job did not understand why God allowed Satan to take away all he had, but he did not curse God's name. "*What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips*" (Job 2:10). A mother who shared her testimony about how God saved her daughter from an unwise marriage is worthy of note.

This is a success story. But not every girl escapes an unwise marriage, and not all parents who pray and wait are favored with the miracle we had. Parents are those people who wait. They wait and have faith in the good seeds they've sown, but often there is a crop failure. Then what? Our children make their mistakes; God

gives us strength to suffer with them. There are regrets, but there need be no bitterness. That also is God's gift!⁵⁸

Keeping our hearts open to the heavenly Father so He can work through us is our greatest responsibility to Him and to our loved ones. This certainly will take great effort. It is not easy to accept such a tragic truth, for the love of parents is undeniably great. Any true, loving parent would give his life for his child. So, all believing parents in this situation should pray to God for true healing of their hearts and minds and for the ability and strength to press on in the race that has been set before them.

Notes

¹ John MacArthur, *Successful Christian Parenting: Raising Your Child with Care, Compassion, and Common Sense* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1998), 13.

² Andrew Murray, *Raising Your Children for Christ* (New Kensington: Whitaker House, 1984), 12.

³ Ken Ham, Britt Beemer, and Todd Hillard, *Already Gone* (Green Forest: Master Books, 2009), 24. Research done by The Barna Group, 2006. George Barna is the founder of the Barna Research Group in 1984. It is now "a leading marketing research firm focused on the intersection of faith and culture." He has been named as the "most quoted person in the Christian Church today." ("George Barna," Barna Group, accessed March 2, 2022, <https://www.barna.com/about/george-barna/>.)

⁴ D Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Raising Children God's Way* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2007), 38–9.

⁵ Ham, Beemer, and Hillard, 35.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 56–7.

⁷ Timothy Tow and Jeffrey Khoo, *Theology for Every Christian* (Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College Press, 2007), 152.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 153–6.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 200.

¹¹ Murray, 20–21.

¹² *Ibid.*, 22.

¹³ Tow and Khoo, 359.

¹⁴ Zachary Garris, "The Dual Aspect of the Covenant: Covenant, Election, and Infant Baptism," *Knowing Scripture*, last modified February 10, 2021, accessed April 6, 2022, <https://knowingscripture.com/articles/dual-aspect-of-the-covenant-covenant-election-and-infant-baptism>.

¹⁵ Murray, 194–5. Emphasis added.

¹⁶ Charles Spurgeon, "Faith in Perfection," *The Spurgeon Center*, last modified January 2, 1859, accessed March 28, 2022, <https://www.spurgeon.org/resource>

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-library/sermons/faith-in-perfection/#flipbook/.

¹⁷ John Calvin, *John Calvin's Verse Commentary*, Ephesians 2:8. Sword Searcher 9.0.

¹⁸ Garris, "The Dual Aspect of the Covenant".

¹⁹ "The Federal Vision was a loose affiliation of Reformed pastors and theologians that came together in 2002 for a conference called the Auburn Avenue Conference... Many of them advocated the position that distinguished between covenant and election, speaking of the 'objectivity' of the covenant into which the children of believers are baptized (e.g., Douglas Wilson)... Steve Wilkins applied soteriological language to all covenant members, including apostates. He therefore spoke of baptized children as having union with Christ and being elect, regenerate, justified, and adopted... He fails to make important distinctions within the covenant between the elect and non-elect." Garris, <https://knowingscripture.com/articles/dual-aspect-of-the-covenant-covenant-election-and-infant-baptism>.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ J Mark Beach, "Calvin and the Dual Aspect of Covenant Membership: Galatians 3:15–22—The Meaning of 'the Seed' Is Christ—and Other Key Texts," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 20 (2009): 49–73.

²² Ibid.

²³ Garris, "The Dual Aspect of the Covenant: Covenant".

²⁴ Roy B Zuck, ed, *Learning from the Sages* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 277–8.

²⁵ Horatius Bonar et al, *God's Will, Man's Will, and 'Free Will'* (Wilmington: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1972), 3–4.

²⁶ Charles Bridges, *A Commentary on Proverbs* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), 404–5.

²⁷ Murray, 131–6.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid, 298–9.

³² Bridges, 404–5.

³³ Peter A Steveson, *A Commentary on Proverbs* (Greenville: BJU Press, 2001), 300–1.

³⁴ MacArthur, 17–9.

³⁵ Steveson, 300–1.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Zuck, 290.

³⁸ MacArthur, 17–9.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Derek Kidner, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: The Proverbs*, ed D J Wiseman (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1964), 13.

⁴³ D D Hoffman, *Proverbs 22:6: A Parent's Promise?* (Np: Xulon Press, 2015), 62–4.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Zuck, 278–80.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Tow and Khoo, 201–2.

⁴⁸ John R de Witt, *Amazing Love: The Parable of the Prodigal Son* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1981), 23–4.

⁴⁹ Tow, *Pearls of Great Wisdom* (Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College Press, 2000), 101.

⁵⁰ *Pulpit Commentary*. Proverbs 22:6. *SwordSearcher 9.0*. Emphasis added.

⁵¹ John Gill, *John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible*, “and when he is old, he will not depart from it”, Proverbs 22:6. *SwordSearcher 9.0*.

⁵² Hoffman, 94–8.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Murray, 301.

⁵⁵ Hoffman, 113–4.

⁵⁶ Prabhudas Koshy, “A Teaching and Counselling Manual for Pastors from the Book of Proverbs” (ThD diss, Far Eastern Bible College, 2005), 77.

⁵⁷ Kidner, 51.

⁵⁸ Anna B Mow, *Preparing Your Child to Love God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), 151.

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COLLEGE NEWS

End of Term Thanksgiving Dinner and Service

How we thank God for another successful semester despite the hardships and restrictions due to the pandemic. As Psalm 91:3 says, *“Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence.”*



The College family had a blessed thanksgiving dinner and service on Friday April 29, 2022 at the College premises. We could enjoy once again a dinner buffet out in the garden under the evening sky. After dinner was the thanksgiving service at the FEBC Hall. Praise items were presented by students from the different countries, and graduands gave their testimonies. The Rev Clement Chew spoke on the topic “Labourers Together with God” (1 Cor 3:5-9).

Daily Vacation Bible College

The Daily Vacation Bible College (DVBC) from May 2 to 7, 2022 was opened to the public to attend physically since the lifting of the Covid-19 restrictions. Biblical Separation was taught by the Principal. Sixty students took it for credit.

47th Graduation Service

The 47th Graduation Service was held on the Lord’s Day, May 8, 2022 at Calvary Pandan Bible-Presbyterian Church. The Principal was the speaker and he spoke on “Sixty Years of God’s Providence” in commemoration of the College’s Diamond Jubilee (1962-2022). A special double issue (January/July 2022) of *The Burning Bush*—FEBC’s theological journal—commemorating the Diamond Jubilee was released. Remembering its founding principal, the feature article of this issue is “Weekly Wisdom: The Theological and Pastoral Wisdom of the Rev Dr Timothy Tow from the Weekly of Life Bible-Presbyterian Church and True Life Bible-Presbyterian Church”.



COLLEGE NEWS

A total of 32 graduated with their hard earned certificates and degrees: Certificate of Religious Knowledge (CertRK): Celina F Frianela, Chan Jia Hui Samantha, Cheow On Yik Victoria, Kovilpillai A/P David John, Lagapa Jose Trinipil II Ba-a, Lee Mei Hua, Lee Mei Yee, Ong Jia Ling Christine, Tan May Yoke, Wong Siew Ping Linda, Way Tan. Certificate of Biblical Studies (CertBS): Chui Ziyang Marcus, Jeffrey Setiawan, Cheow On Sung Sophia, Natalia Fernandez Heng, Ong Su Ling, Ong Wai Ling Angeline, Pang Yee Hong, Tay Kiat Siong Jonathan, Tham Nam Lei Samuel. Diploma in Theology (DipTh): Kwa Lye Huat Harry. Bachelor of Religious Education (BRE): Jenerose Brava Sagayoc, Lagapa Thessa Ba-a, Thang Deih Piang. Bachelor of Theology (BTh): Gyzza Berindez Dandoy. Master of Ministry (MMin): George Njeru Maina. Master of Religious Education (MRE): Lee Yun Ling Gracia, Cing Sian Lian. Master of Divinity (MDiv): Chew Kai Sheng David, Han Weiwei, Roel De Guzman Requirme. Doctor of Religious Education (DRE): Jonathan Cheruyot Langat.

Annual Retreat



FEBC held its annual retreat at Resort Lautan Biru (RLB) in Mersing from May 9 to 11, 2022. It was good to enjoy such a time in a “home away from home” after two years of lockdowns and closed borders due to the pandemic when hardly any overseas travel was allowed.

A total of 45 from FEBC camped at RLB this time. We thank God for the elderly—for Rev Koa Keng Woo, Mrs Ivy Tow, and Mrs Irene Lim (our English tutor), who could come. We also had the very young—Theophilus (just 5 months) and Trophimus (9 months), sons of Cornelius & Abigail Koshy and Jonathan & Damaris Langat respectively. The babies were the star campers—everyone enjoyed their company.



At the retreat, the day began and ended with devotions taken by Rev Jeffrey Khoo, Rev Koa Keng Woo, Rev Lee Kim Shong, Rev Clement Chew, Rev Jonathan Langat, and Rev Jose Lagapa. The recent graduates also got to present their respective theses with Q&A. Videos on John Bunyan’s “Pilgrim’s Progress” and “The People’s Preacher” a docudrama on Charles Haddon Spurgeon were screened at night. The second night saw us celebrating Rev Koa’s 93rd birthday. We prayed for his good health and strength so that he might continue to teach at FEBC.

The college family had a most blessed time at RLB Mersing. *“The LORD is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage”* (Ps 16:5–6).



A second retreat was held at the RLB from September 5 to 7, 2022. Usually, there would be just one retreat, but since there were no retreats during the COVID years of 2020 and 2021, the Principal thought it good to have another three-day retreat to celebrate this occasion and enjoy a double blessing.



There were a total of 41 participants comprising faculty, students, alumni and friends. We had worship and fellowship sessions in the mornings and evenings. On Monday night, the Principal delivered the first message on “Biblical Rest and Re-creation” (Mark 6:30-32). On Tuesday morning, the Rev Dr Koa Keng Woo spoke on “The Good Shepherd and His Sheep” (Psalm 23) and in the evening, the Rev Dr Jose Lagapa spoke on “For Such a Time as This” (Esth 4:13-16). On Wednesday morning, Pr Khoo Peng Keong spoke on “The Word of God in Our Hearts” (Prov 3:1-4) and the Rev Lee Kim Shong spoke on “The Holy Spirit’s Direction in Missions” (Acts 16:6-15). We had a blessed time of spiritual feeding from God’s Word. We also watched two video films—“God’s Outlaw: The Story of William Tyndale” and “Beyond the Night” which tells the story of John and Bettie Dreisbach who served as medical missionaries in West Africa. Our sister Jovena Choo of True Life BPC conducted a workshop on academic writing on Tuesday afternoon.

Day of Prayer

FEBC reopened with a Day of Prayer on Monday, 18 July 2022 at 8.30am. With the relaxation of Covid-19 rules, the College could return to the Life BPC Sanctuary at the College campus, 9A Gilstead Road, for its prayer meeting. A good number of alumni and friends turned up to support and pray for the College. There were about 80 in attendance.

The message for that morning was delivered by the Rev Dr Park Seung Kyu, an FEBC alumnus and Principal of the Bible College of East Africa (BCEA) in Tanzania. Rev Dr Park preached from Acts 12:1-11 and exhorted the students to be ready to die if they want to serve the Lord. After the message, time was given to the lecturers, tutors, and directors present to encourage the new as well as returning students. All are reminded to serve the Lord while there is still time, *“I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.”* (John 9:4).

Total Enrolment

For the July–November 2022 semester, there were a total of 635 students: 31 full-time residential students and 604 part-time/online students from 16 countries (Australia, Cambodia, China, Hong Kong,

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India, Indonesia, Kenya, Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Tanzania, Thailand, USA).

There were 12 new full-time students: Angelou Geralla Esto, Car Vincent Cuesta Magkidong, Cho Hyeon Ji, Francis Kyle Adonis Alvarez, Jose Trinipil B Lagapa II, Kelvin Lim Cheng Kwang, Nathanael Zechariah George, Ricardo Mejedo, Sophia Cheow On Sung, Tabita Karma Erniati, Tai Yan Yee, Willem Putra Kasih Zamasi. They come from India, Indonesia, Philippines, and Singapore.



Faculty and Courses

The lecturers/tutors (and courses) for the July–November 2022 semester were: Rev Dr Jeffrey Khoo (Theology of Marriage), Rev Dr Quek Suan Yew (Daniel, Homiletics, Hebrew Reading I), Rev Dr Prabhudas Koshy (Proverbs II), Rev Dr Koa Keng Woo (Bible Geography III, Cults I), Rev Stephen Khoo (Ezra), Rev Tan Kian Sing (Colossians), Rev Dr Jose Lagapa (Church History II), Rev Clement Chew (1 Corinthians), Miss Carol Lee (Thinking and Study Skills), Rev Zhu Jianwei (Life of Christ I [Chinese]), Joshua Yong (Greek Reading I, Contemporary Theology I), Joycelyn Chng (Childhood Education), Cornelius Koshy (Greek Elementary I), Samuel Joseph (Biblical Epistemology), Khoo May Lynn (Pianoforte), Mrs Patricia Joseph (English Intensive I), and Mrs Irene Lim (English Intermediate I).

Thirteen Basic Theology for Everyone (BTFE) courses were offered online to the public—Systematic Theology III, 2 Chronicles, Daniel, Theology of Marriage, Proverbs II, Cults I, Ezra, Colossians, Church History II, 1 Corinthians, Life of Christ I (Chinese), Contemporary Theology I, and Biblical Epistemology.

Wedding Bells



Congratulations to David Chew (MDiv 2022) and Gracia Lee (MRE 2022) who were joined in holy matrimony on September 3, 2022.

FAR EASTERN BIBLE COLLEGE
47th Graduation Service
Class of 2022



FAR EASTERN BIBLE COLLEGE
Retreat at Resort Lautan Biru, Mersing
September 5-7, 2022

