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THE BURNING BUSH

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THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS AND THE MINISTRY OF PRAYER: A REFORMED AND PROTESTANT PERSPECTIVE

Jeffrey Khoo

“But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant” (Heb 12:22-24).

As a community of saints, we pray or intercede for one another, and this we are enjoined to do by the Holy Scriptures (Jas 5:16, Col 1:9, 1 Thess 5:25, 1 Tim 2:1, Heb 13:18). We pray for ourselves; we pray for others. How about the saints already in heaven? Do they pray?

Our answers must come from the Scriptures which are the sole and supreme authority of our Reformed and Protestant faith and practice (*Sola Scriptura*). Although subordinate to the Scriptures, the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Apostles’ Creed, the Second Helvetic Confession, the Augsburg Confession, the Lutheran Book of Concord, and the commentaries of Reformed and Protestant theologians will be referred to for biblical and doctrinal insights.

Prayers of Saints in Heaven

Regarding what the saints do in heaven, we have some teaching from the Scriptures. The Scriptures do not tell us everything about heaven and the things that go on in heaven, but they do give us a glimpse of heaven which is sufficient for us to find hope and comfort, *“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). *“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.”* (Rom 15:4).

Such a glimpse of heaven is given to us in the final book of the

Bible—the book of Revelation. The accounts in Revelation generally present a future scene, yet they offer us timeless truths concerning prayer and intercession. In Revelation 5:8-10, 6:9-11, 8:3-4, we find the saints in heaven praying or the mention of the “prayers of (the/all) saints”. Revelation 5:8-10 says, *“And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.”*

The 24 Elders in Revelation 5:8 (cf 4:4) are the 12 Patriarchs and the 12 Apostles representing Old Testament and New Testament saints who have been redeemed by the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ. These Representatives are worshipping the Lord and offering to Him the “prayers of saints”. The fact that prayers are designated as *“golden vials full of odours”* teaches that prayers are an act of worship to God. We pray only to God and not to any creature—angels or humans or animals or nature. The prayers of the saints ascend to God as a sweet-smelling sacrifice. Concerning the ministry of prayer, the Baptist minister John Gill’s commentary is instructive,

[T]he prayers of the saints are compared to “odours”, or “incense”, as the word may be rendered, and as they are called, Ps 141:2; partly because as incense goes upwards, so do they go up to God, and are received, regarded, and had in remembrance by him; and partly because as incense is of a sweet smell, so the prayers of the saints, put up in the name and faith of Christ, are very grateful and acceptable to God: the “golden vials” said to be “full” of them, may design the hearts of believers, in which they first are, and from whence they proceed; true prayer is that which is inwrought in the soul, and comes from the heart, even from a heart pure like gold, purified by faith in the blood of Christ, a true heart, that asks in faith, nothing wavering; *such as are really saints, true believers in Christ, are praying souls; they are full of prayers for themselves and others; they pray always, and for all saints: this makes nothing for praying to angels and saints departed;...*¹

Who are “the saints” here who pray? The term “the saints” refers to those whom the Lord has saved and set apart through the Gospel throughout the ages (2 Cor 1:1, Phil 1:1 cf Rev 8:3, 4; 11:18; 13:7, 9, 10;

14:12; 16:6; 17:6; 18:20, 24; 19:8; 20:9; 22:21).

Moreover, in Revelation 8:3, we read of “the prayers of all saints”. The term “all” is inclusive and speaks of the prayers of the saints past, present, and future, and according to Methodist founder John Wesley, includes “the prayers of all the saints in heaven and earth”.² Thus, the saints in heaven like the saints on earth do pray, and their prayers to God are not left unattended or unheard. God hears the prayers of all His saints, but He may not grant to them what they prayed for unless it is in accordance with His will, “*Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.*” (Matt 6:10). Note that although the saints “are full of prayers for themselves and for others”, since “they pray always, and for all saints” as Gill intimated, it must ***not*** be taken to mean that we can pray to “angels and saints departed” or call upon them to pray for us which is idolatry and superstition.

Now, the saints in heaven also praise the Lord Jesus for making them “kings and priests” (Rev 5:10). This applies to all believers who are the elect of God and are called an “holy priesthood”, “*Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.*” (1 Pet 2:5), and a “royal priesthood”, “*But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light*” (1 Pet 2:9). One of the duties of a priest is to pray or intercede for others, “*I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men*” (1 Tim 2:1). Presbyterian theologian Albert Barnes commented,

The idea here is, therefore, that the representatives of the church in heaven—the elders—spoken of as “priests,” (Rev 5:10) are described as officiating in the temple above *in behalf of the church still below*, and as offering incense while the church is engaged in prayer. It is not said that *they* offer the prayers themselves, but that they offer *incense* as representing the prayers of the saints.³

We find here then that the saints in heaven continue in their priestly role and function. This priestly ministry given to them on earth continues in heaven and eventually the millennium, for He “*hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.*” (Rev 5:10). “*Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of*

*Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.” (Rev 20:6). It must be clarified that although the saints in Christ are “priests”, they are in no wise priests like their Lord and Saviour whose Priesthood is unique and eternal for He alone is *Theanthropos* (both God and Man in one Person). Hebrews 7:24-25 says, “*But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.*”*

For what do the saints in heaven pray? In Revelation 6:9-11, we find the saints in heaven pleading to the Lord for justice for themselves and their fellow saints who are undergoing persecution and martyrdom: “*And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.*” These saints when they were on earth obeyed the Lord’s command to love their enemies and not take revenge. “*But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.... Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you*” (Matt 5:39, 44); “*Recompense to no man evil for evil.... Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.*” (Rom 12:17, 19).

Now that the end is near, their prayer for justice for themselves and for others is a reasonable one. The prayer to “*avenge our blood*” must surely include those mentioned in Hebrews 11:35-38 where we read of “*others [who] were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:)*”. Then there were those in the first four centuries of the Church who suffered and died for their faith especially in the days of Nero and Trajan and all the other

wicked Roman emperors, those who were tortured and burned at the stake by the hands of Catholic inquisitors in the time of the Protestant Reformation, those in the future Great Tribulation under the tyranny of the Antichrist, and all others from all over who have paid the ultimate price for their faith. The Lord said He would avenge their blood, but not just yet, for there are other saints who must be martyred also, and after that is accomplished, He would take punitive action against His and their enemies once and for all (Rev 6:11; 11:18; 16:6; 18:20, 24).

It is good to know that the Lord Himself is not quick to judge and execute His justice for He *“is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”* (2 Pet 3:9). Now, can we say the saints in heaven also desire the salvation of the lost? It is interesting that in the story of the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man when he was in hell remembered his brothers and desired for them to be saved so that they would not end up in hell like him (Luke 16:27-28). This story tells us that those who have departed this life remember the life they had lived on earth and are concerned for the eternal destiny of those they have left behind.

In light of this, it is reasonable to believe that the saints in heaven remember their fellow saints on earth and desire for their spiritual success. Hebrews 12:1 says, *“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us”*. Here, Paul used the ancient Olympic Games to describe the saints’ journey towards heaven. There are athletes (the saints on earth) and there are spectators (the saints in heaven). Just as in the stadium the spectators cheer the athletes, so the saints in heaven cheer for their fellow saints on earth that they should complete the race successfully, to cast aside every burden that might hinder them from crossing the finishing line. This however does not mean the saints in heaven are watching every move of their fellow saints on earth on a heavenly television or live telecast and know their every activity, but that they are generally concerned and sincerely desirous of their comrades’ final completion and spiritual victory in fulfilment of God’s good plan and purpose for them. It goes without saying that those in heaven can confer no spiritual benefit or help to the saints on earth. The only one who can confer any spiritual benefit or help is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself who alone is the *“author and finisher of our faith”* (Heb 12:2).

The Communion of Saints

The Apostle Paul tells us that the saints on earth are spiritually joined to the saints in heaven in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ who is the Head of His Church, “*to the spirits of just men made perfect*” (Heb 12:23, Rom 12:4-13, 1 Cor 12:12-27). This is deemed the Communion of Saints which is affirmed in the Apostles’ Creed, which in the last part states, “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic [ie Universal] Church, *the communion of saints*, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.”

Likewise, the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) XXV.1 states, “The catholic or universal Church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all.” The doctrine of the Communion of Saints is tied to the doctrine of the Church invisible, universal and triumphant—the Church comprising all the elect. This is taught in the Westminster Confession of Faith XXVI.I-III,

All saints that are united to Jesus Christ their head, by his Spirit and by faith, have fellowship with him in his graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory: and being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other’s gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man.

Saints, by profession, are bound to maintain an holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God, and in performing such other spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification; as also in relieving each other in outward things, according to their several abilities and necessities. Which communion, as God offereth opportunity, is to be extended unto all those who, in every place, call upon the name of the Lord Jesus.

This communion which the saints have with Christ, doth not make them in any wise partakers of the substance of his Godhead, or to be equal with Christ in any respect: either of which to affirm is impious and blasphemous. Nor doth their communion one with another, as saints, take away or infringe the title or propriety which each man hath in his goods and possessions.⁴

The Bride of Christ is mystically and mysteriously united to Christ her Husband (Eph 5:32). Furthermore, in Christ, all the saints “*of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues*” (Rev 7:9) are united to one another in Christian truth and charity and as such “they have

communion in each other's gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man."

The Body of Christ which is the Church is thus totally dependent on Christ her Head and at the same time its members are interdependent on one another. As such, "they have communion in each other's gifts and graces" i.e., the spiritual gifts God has distributed to every member and the means of grace which God has bestowed for His people to grow and be strong in the faith. That is why the Second Helvetic Confession (1562), Chapter XVII.4 states that the Church is both

MILITANT AND TRIUMPHANT. For the one is called the Church Militant, the other the Church Triumphant. The former still wages war on earth, and fights against the flesh, the world, and the prince of this world, the devil; against sin and death. But the latter, having been now discharged, triumphs in heaven immediately after having overcome all those things and rejoices before the Lord. Notwithstanding both have fellowship and union one with another.⁵

The Communion of Saints as expressed in the Westminster Confession and the Second Helvetic Confession has practical value for it is a solemn call to the duty of "fellowship and communion in the worship of God". How is this applied? G I Williamson gives an example,

For example, the Scripture teaches that we are to worship God on the Sabbath. This is the Fourth Commandment. But some have argued that they can worship God by themselves, or at least without any commitment to membership in the visible Church. Others seem to feel no obligation to loyal and faithful attendance at the services of worship in a particular congregation at its stated times of worship on the Lord's Day. We do not here maintain that there are no other grounds upon which to urge this duty. But we can see that this section of the Confession would condemn such an attitude apart from other grounds. Membership in the Church of Christ is part and parcel of union with Christ. He who is united to Christ is united to other believers. And being united to other believers necessarily entails solemn obligations to them. Thus in the matter of worship, we are not only to consider the Fourth Commandment (which requires the individuals to worship God on the Sabbath), but also "let us consider one another, to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is" (Heb. 10:25). Faithful assembly with other true believers is a distinct and compelling consideration.⁶

As such, the saints on earth who worship God in Spirit and in truth

join in the worship of God in heaven as well, and a worship service on earth that is patterned after the Holy Scriptures and done with the right spirit of love for God and for fellow believers would be a taste of heaven on earth. The saints in heaven yearn for the saints on earth to be with them, and the saints on earth yearn to join their heavenly counterparts as well on that final day or as soon as the Lord will permit. The great Princeton theologian Jonathan Edwards captured this beautiful spirit well,

As the streams tend to the ocean, so all these are tending to the great ocean of infinite purity and bliss... to be united to them there.... [E]very Christian friend that goes before us from this world, is a ransomed spirit waiting to welcome us in heaven... with whom we shall renew the holy fellowship of the saints, which was interrupted by death here, but shall be commenced again in the upper sanctuary, and then shall never end.⁷

Truly, “heaven is a wonderful place, full of glory and grace,” as we often sing—for then shall we be in the very company of the Patriarchs, the Prophets, the Apostles, the Church Fathers, the Reformers, and all the heroes of faith whom we have only read about in Holy Scripture and Church History—not to mention our loved ones, our friends, and our fellow servants in the Lord who have gone before us.

The Ministry of Prayer

The doctrine of the Communion of Saints teaches us that the saints on earth are spiritually united with the saints in heaven, and how the latter are desiring and praying for our spiritual success. 17th century Dutch Reformed theologian Herman Witsius commented,

The Scripture more expressly teaches *the communion of saints on earth with the blessed spirits above*.... Those that are on earth, are associated with the blessed in heaven. “Ye are come,” says Paul, “unto mount Zion,—to the general assembly and church of the first-born which are written in heaven,—and to the spirits of just men made perfect.” Now this communion consists in the following things. 1st, That having one God and one Saviour, and animated by the same Spirit, they constitute one body, whose parts are indeed widely separated from each other with regard to distance of local situation, but maintained in close mutual connexion by the same Spirit of Christ. 2dly, That the souls of the blessed, although they be entirely ignorant of the particular persons of believers on earth, and of their necessities, *yet by their earnest prayers unite with us in soliciting, and, so to speak, accelerating, the day of the complete redemption of the Church*; whilst the saints on earth are associated with those in heaven, in spirit, affection, and desire, having

their conversation in heaven.⁸

Calvin himself agreed that “In asserting the intercession of the saints, if all you mean is, that they continually pray for the completion of Christ’s kingdom, on which the salvation of all the faithful depends, there is none of us who calls it in question.”⁹ However, he cautioned anyone attempting to seek their intercession, for he saw no biblical basis for that whatsoever. Calvin in no uncertain terms wrote,

With respect to the saints who are dead in the flesh, but alive in Christ, if we attribute intercession to them, let us not imagine they have any other way of praying to God than by Christ. But it has been practised in some ages, and is now practised wherever Popery prevails, to pray through the saints. By this, they dishonour Christ, and rob Him of the character of the only Mediator. They defraud Him of the praise which is due to Him. They reject the goodness of God, who exhibits Himself as their Father; for He is not a Father to them, unless they acknowledge Christ as brother. Ambrose says of Christ being the sole Mediator, “He is our mouth, with which we address the Father; our eye, by which we behold the Father; our right hand, by which we present ourselves to the Father. Without whose mediation, neither we, nor any other saints, have the least intercourse with God.”¹⁰

Let it be reiterated that although the saints in heaven “by their earnest prayers unite with us in soliciting, and so to speak, accelerating, the day of the complete redemption of the Church”, it does not mean that they have taken the place of the Lord Jesus Christ who is the only Mediator and Saviour of His Church (1 Tim 2:5, Eph 5:23). The Westminster Confession itself rightly warned, “This communion which the saints have with Christ, doth not make them in any wise partakers of the substance of his Godhead, or to be equal with Christ in any respect: either of which to affirm is impious and blasphemous.” As such, God forbid that we pray to or through the saints in heaven. Praying to the dead or departed people is idolatrous and an abomination (Deut 18:11, Isa 8:19). We pray only to God the Father (Matt 6:6, 9, 7:11), through Jesus Christ His Son (John 14:13, 15:16, Eph 2:18), and in the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:26-27). As stated earlier, praying is an act of worship, and we must worship God alone, and not any of His creatures or servants (Rev 19:10, 22:8-9).

The Communion of Saints is a most unifying and edifying doctrine. Knowing and understanding it will cause us to live selflessly for others for we are not alone in our relationship with Christ our Head and there is

also His Body to which we belong. 1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 25-27 says, *“For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many.... That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.”* Acts 2:44-47, *“And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people.”* As a community of saints having communion with one another, we know how to *“Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.”* (Rom 12:15).

We are comforted to know that the saints in heaven are thinking of us, praying for our spiritual success and desiring for us to join them eventually according to God’s will and perfect time as much as we desire to join them and be with them to enjoy the very presence of God and our eternal rest in heaven (2 Cor 5:8, Phil 1:21-23, Rev 14:13). As much as we do not forget the saints who have already gone before us to heaven, remembering their good testimony and example (Heb 13:7-8), we are thankful that the saints who have already gone before do not forget us saints who are still here on earth and are seeking our spiritual good and success before our good God and Saviour Jesus Christ until the final day of redemption (Phil 1:3-14, 3:13-21, Heb 12:1-2).

Pray Not to Saints in Heaven

Although the Communion of Saints is a biblical doctrine, we must not apply it like the Roman Catholics do, to pray to the supposedly super holy “canonised saints” in heaven for their blessing or for their supposed treasury of merits which they think can be transferred to them. The Augsburg Confession of the Lutheran Church (1530), Article XXI, states,

Of the Worship of Saints they teach that the memory of saints may be set before us, that we may follow their faith and good works, according

to our calling, ... *the Scripture teaches not the invocation of saints or to ask help of saints*, since it sets before us the one Christ as the Mediator, Propitiation, High Priest, and Intercessor. He is to be prayed to, and has promised that He will hear our prayer; and this worship He approves above all, to wit, that in all afflictions He be called upon, 1 John 2:1: “If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father”, etc.¹¹

We do not talk to the dead, pray to the dead, or consult the dead, i.e. necromancy which is an abomination and clearly forbidden in the Scriptures (Lev 19:31, Deut 18:9-12, Isa 8:19). Neither do we pray to the saints in heaven, for prayers must only be offered to God alone for He alone is worthy and is able to answer prayers. The Lutheran Book of Concord (1580), Article XXI, “Of the Invocation of Saints”, rightly warned, “Although concerning the saints we concede that, just as, when alive, they pray for the Church universal in general, *so in heaven they pray for the Church in general, ... yet it does not follow that they are to be invoked; although our Confession affirms only this, that Scripture does not teach the invocation of the saints, or that we are to ask the saints for aid.*”¹²

In heaven, only God, being all powerful and all knowing, can hear and answer prayers; the saints for certain cannot for they do not have those powers that belong only to God, and thus praying to them or calling for their help is in vain, and not only in vain, it is idolatrous and blasphemous—a serious affront to God (Exod 20:3-5 cf Rev 19:10, 22:9). Further, the saints have only one Mediator and He is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ and they pray only to Him who is the only Saviour of the world, “*For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*” (1 Tim 2:5), and the Great High Priest of His Church, “*Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*” (Heb 4:14-16).

Neither Pray for the Dead

As a communion of saints, we pray for one another, but not for the dead—not for the saints in heaven, nor for the reprobates in hell. Why? It is because once a person dies his eternal destiny is fixed and cannot be changed. Hebrews 9:27 says, “*And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.*”

The supreme authority to execute judgement is given to the Lord Jesus Christ (John 5:22). The saints whose sins are forgiven by Christ inherit eternal life and will stand before His Judgement Seat—The *Bema* (2 Cor 5:10 cf 1 Cor 3:10-15) to be rewarded for their services. The finally impenitent, on the contrary, will be judged for their unbelief and for their sins at the Judgement of the Great White Throne (Rev 20:11). All who are not found in the Lamb's Book of Life will be cast into the Lake of Fire for eternal punishment together with the Devil and his demons (Rev 20:12-15).

There is nothing in the Scriptures which teach that the saints should pray for the dead. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* makes this very clear in chapter XXXII:I,

The bodies of men, after death, return to dust, and see corruption: but their souls, which neither die nor sleep, having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them: the souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God, in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies: and the souls of the wicked are cast into hell, where they remain in torments and utter darkness, reserved to the judgment of the great day. Beside these two places, for souls separated from their bodies, the Scripture acknowledges none.¹³

As such, there is no purgatory, no transit or holding place in between earth and heaven for the dead, no soul sleep, and hence no reason to pray or intercede for them. It is of no use and in vain to pray for the dead. The Roman Catholics teach purgatory and the Seventh-Day Adventists soul sleep, but we denounce such teachings as myths, devoid of any biblical basis.

The Scriptures present many examples of believers burying their loved ones, and we do not find any of them offering to the departed any sort of prayers. For example, King David stopped praying for the life of his baby boy the moment he knew he was dead. *"Then said his servants unto him, What thing is this that thou hast done? thou didst fast and weep for the child, while it was alive; but when the child was dead, thou didst rise and eat bread. And he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether GOD will be gracious to me, that the child may live? But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."* (2 Sam 12:21-23).

John Calvin in his *Institutes* strictly opposed the practice of praying

for the dead. He argued,

The plea of an ancient tradition will not do. When our adversaries say that prayers for the dead have been offered for the last thirteen hundred years, I ask them, on the contrary, by what Word of God is it sanctioned? They have no answer from Scripture, nor any example from Scripture. Neither the fathers, who offered up prayers for the dead, could find a Divine command nor a legitimate example.

The Scripture, however, teaches “*Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord,*” and adds a reason, “*that they may rest from their labours*” (Rev 14:13). Now, since there is not a syllable, in all the law or the Gospel, which allows us to pray for the dead, it is a profane abuse of the Name of God, to attempt more than He enjoins.¹⁴

There is thus no need to pray for those who have already died, for those in heaven have no need of our prayers for sure, and those in hell are already there without any reprieve, for their eternal fate is sealed and there is nothing we can do to change that.

Q&A

Here is a summary of what is presented above in the form of a Q&A:

Q1: Do the saints in heaven pray unto the Lord?

A: In Revelation 5:8–10, 6:9–11, 8:3–4, we find the saints in heaven praying (specifically, we find the mention of the “prayers of [the/all] saints”). The 24 Elders in Revelation 5:8 (cf 4:4) are the 12 Patriarchs and the 12 Apostles representing Old Testament and New Testament saints who have been redeemed by the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ. These Representatives in heaven are worshipping the Lord and offering to Him the “prayers of saints”. The fact that prayers are designated as “golden vials full of odours” teaches that prayers are an act of worship to God. We pray only to God and not to any creature—angels or humans or animals or nature. The prayers of the saints ascend to God as a sweet-smelling sacrifice (Ps 141:2). Moreover, in Revelation 8:3, we read of “the prayers of all saints”. The term “all” is all inclusive and speaks of the prayers of the saints past, present, and future, and according to John Wesley, includes “the prayers of all the saints in heaven and earth”.

Q2: Are there millions or billions of intercessors in heaven other than Jesus Christ alone?

A: God forbid! The Bible is very clear, “*For there is one God, and*

one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5). We who are on earth pray and intercede for one another as commanded in James 5:16 and 1 Timothy 2:1. When we do so, do we thus deny that the Lord Jesus Christ is our only Mediator and Intercessor? Of course not! Likewise, when the saints in heaven pray (eg Rev 6:9-11), they are not intercessors like Christ, for we do not pray or intercede based on our own name or merits (for we have none), but only in and through the name of Christ and Christ alone. The Bible is clear on the teaching of prayer: We pray to God the Father (Matt 6:6, 9; 7:11), through Jesus Christ His Son (John 14:13, 15:16, Eph 2:18), and in the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:26–27).

Q3: Should we tell the saints in heaven what our needs are so that they can pray for us?

A: We should never talk to the saints in heaven and tell them to pray for us. The Bible commands us not to converse with or consult the dead (Lev 19:31, Deut 18:9–12, Isa 8:19).

Furthermore, why would earthly saints tell their earthly needs to the saints in heaven when they have the Lord Jesus Christ who alone is all they need? They can tell Him all their needs for He is their Great High Priest, *“Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”* (Heb 4:14–16). The Lord Jesus not only feels for all of us, He is also able to provide for all of us. The saints in heaven are not omniscient or omnipotent and as such are totally helpless to come to our aid. Only God, being all knowing and all powerful, is able to help us, and Jesus is God. Pray only to Him.

Q4: If we cannot share our prayer items with the heavenly saints, then how do they know what to pray for?

A: We do not need a prayer list before we can pray for others. We can pray when we are burdened to pray according to what we already know and remember (cf Luke 16:25–28, Rev 6:9–10). It must also be clarified that the saints in heaven are not privy to everything that is happening on earth or in our lives. That is not their prerogative, nor their privilege. Only the Lord Jesus Christ has that prerogative and privilege for only He *“is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask*

or think, according to the power that worketh in us” (Eph 3:20). It is also enough for us that our Father in heaven knows, for He “*knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.*” (Matt 6:8). In addition, nowhere in the Bible are we told to pray for the departed saints.

Q5: Are the prayers of the saints in heaven more efficacious because they are in heaven and therefore nearer to God?

A: The answer is no. Whether a prayer on earth or in heaven is efficacious or not depends not on any human being or his merits or his location, but only on God, His Person and His will. That was why the Lord taught us to pray saying, “*Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.*” (Matt 6:9–10). The Lord Jesus Himself set the infallible example by praying, “*Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.*” (Luke 22:42). Note that the prayers of the saints in heaven were not answered immediately (Rev 6:9–11). The Lord said His justice and judgement must wait to be carried out according to His plan and schedule. His will be done!

Q6: Do we inevitably cry to dead saints in times of distress and desperation?

A: No, we do not and should not cry to dead saints in times of distress and desperation. In times of distress and desperation, we cry unto the Lord, like the saints in heaven, “*And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?*” (Rev 6:10). We cry like the Psalmist, “*LORD, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph? How long shall they utter and speak hard things? and all the workers of iniquity boast themselves? They break in pieces thy people, O LORD, and afflict thine heritage.*” (Ps 94:3–5).

Q7: Is the teaching of saints praying in heaven for saints on earth a Roman Catholic teaching and a heresy?

A: No, the teaching of saints praying in heaven (rightly understood) is not a heresy. It is the praying to the departed saints and seeking their intercession that is a Roman Catholic teaching and a heresy.

Calvin himself affirmed, “In asserting the intercession of the saints, if all you mean is, that they continually pray for the completion of Christ’s kingdom, on which the salvation of all the faithful depends, there is none of us who calls it in question.” He explained in his Institutes,

“With respect to the saints who are dead in the flesh, but alive in Christ, if we attribute intercession to them, let us not imagine they have any other way of praying to God than by Christ. But it has been practised in some ages, and is now practised wherever Popery prevails, to pray through the saints. By this, they dishonour Christ, and rob Him of the character of the only Mediator.”

Q8: Are heavenly saints duty bound, when they arrive in heaven, to pray without ceasing?

A: Prayer and praise are part and parcel of the worship of God in heaven. *“And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne. And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.*

“And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever.” (Rev 5:6–14).

“Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.” (Rev 7:15).

We look forward to the day when we *“are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem,*

and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect” (Heb 12:22–23). What a gathering of saints that will be when we will worship the Lord together and forever!

Notes

¹ John Gill, *John Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible* accessed on May 9, 2025, <https://johngill.thekingsbible.com>. Italics mine.

² John Wesley, *John Wesley’s Notes on the Bible*, accessed on May 9, 2025, <https://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/john-wesleys-notes-on-the-bible>.

³ Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament* (London: Blackie & Son, 1884), 127.

⁴ “The Confession of Faith” in *The Constitution of the Bible Presbyterian Church* (USA: General Synod of the Bible Presbyterian Church, 1989), 22–23.

⁵ The Second Helvetic Confession. Retrieved from <https://www.ccel.org/creeds/helvetic.htm>. Italics mine.

⁶ G I Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1964), 198.

⁷ Jonathan Edwards, *Heaven: A World of Love* (Pensacola: Chapel Library, 1998), 7–8.

⁸ Herman Witsius, *Sacred Dissertations on What Is Commonly Called The Apostles’ Creed* (Glasgow: Khull, Blackie & Co, 1823), 2:379–80. Italics mine.

⁹ John Calvin’s Letter to Cardinal Sadoletto (1539). Retrieved from <https://www.monergism.com/john-calvins-letter-cardinal-sadoletto-1539>.

¹⁰ Timothy Tow, ed, *An Abridgment of Calvin’s Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Singapore: FEBC Press, 1997), 296.

¹¹ The Augsburg Confession of Faith. Retrieved from <https://bookofconcord.org/augsburg-confession>. Italics mine.

¹² The Book of Concord. Retrieved from <https://bookofconcord.org/augsburg-confession>. Italics mine.

¹³ “The Confession of Faith” in *The Constitution of the Bible Presbyterian Church*, 27.

¹⁴ Tow, *An Abridgment of Calvin’s Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 239.

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HONOURABLE HOMILETICS

Samuel Joseph

“Hear; for I will speak of excellent things; and the opening of my lips shall be right things. For my mouth shall speak truth; and wickedness is an abomination to my lips. All the words of my mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing froward or perverse in them.” (Prov 8:6-8).

This is a foolish age, a foolish time – as we look around us, we see foolishness: not just in an intellectual sense, but most of all in a moral sense. This moral blindness, the moral foolishness of sin, leads to heinous abominations not only tolerated but championed: things that are destructive to humanity welcomed and celebrated. Just in the previous chapter we see the folly of fornication vividly depicted, as something that leads to the depths of hell and death (Prov 7:27), yet we see practically the whole world given over to this folly. Other examples could be cited.

The great need of the day is wisdom: this is what we want for ourselves, and for our children, &and our grandchildren, if the Lord tarries. But where is it to be found? There is such confusion; in this digital age we are surrounded by a cacophony of voices – this is supposed to be age of information, but there is so much disinformation. Where is the voice of wisdom to be heard? Is it something hidden, far away? Is it a weak, feeble voice, easily drowned out by the ubiquitous voice of folly?

Wisdom is represented here as crying out, putting forth her voice; it is represented as something broadcast, far and wide, for all to hear. Far from hidden away, wisdom speaks, wisdom cries, wisdom calls: the question is whether or not *we* will *hear*. Wisdom speaks in the word of God, the law of God, as it is taught from one generation to the next. We see this reflected in the emphasis throughout Proverbs on such teaching (e.g., Prov 6:1, 7:1); this is fatherly teaching, in line with the command given to Israel (cf. Deut 6:6-7), and something that should be taken to heart today, as we seek to ensure the word of God is taught in our homes, to our children, as God’s wisdom for our lives (cf. Deut 4:5-6).

But supremely today, wisdom speaks in the word of God, as it is preached from the pulpit of the church. Thus, Paul writes to Timothy, commanding him to “preach the word,” in light of God’s purpose in giving us His word (2 Tim 3:16-4:2). The preached word of God is the voice of divine wisdom for life and godliness. But who stands in the pulpit to preach? It is men, called by God: this what God has ordained, and so He has *given* to the church His servants (Eph 4:11-12). Yet there is an element of human responsibility, for such men do not appear on the scene fully formed as it were, but must be trained, as even the apostles were trained by the Lord, during the years of His public ministry. This is where you come in, as students in the Bible college, called to preach and teach the word of God. You must be the voice of wisdom; you must speak as wisdom speaks: of things excellent and true, and in righteousness. This is your duty, to practise *honourable homiletics*.

Speak Excellently

The “excellent things” in verse 6 are noble things, things that are worthwhile, and highly to be esteemed; that is, we may say, to speak of excellent things is to preach *the word* – the things of God, not the things of man. It is the things of God that are worthwhile, noble, excellent! Indeed, the faithful preaching of the word of God is more *excellent* than anything in this world, more to be desired than the ungodly entertainments of the world, than the false philosophies of the world.

These are the things we must *savour*: the excellent things, the things of God, not of man. This means that our affections must be set on things above, not on earth (Col 3:1); the things of Christ and His kingdom, not the things of the world. These are the things that must occupy us, the things we must love and cherish; these are the things we must hope and long for, that we must look into and study, so that we can say with the apostle Paul, that we esteem the knowledge of Christ above all things (Phil 3:8, 14).

This is the joy and privilege of all Christians, to look on the things that are eternal, to learn and know the things that even the angels desire to look into (1 Pet 1:12) – but it is especially your joy and privilege, your duty, as students in the Bible college. This is your business! And as the semester closes this must *remain* your focus – for if you will not savour and love these things, how will you be of benefit or blessing to the church of God?

But then also, if we are to represent the voice of wisdom, we must *speak* these excellent things. Here there is a contrast between the excellent things of God, and the things of man; the things of Christ's kingdom, and the carnal things of the world; the things that please God, and the things that please man. We are warned that the world of fallen mankind has no love for excellent things (cf. 2 Tim 4:3-4); even we as believers still struggling with sin, sometimes disdain to hear the things of God. We want to hear the things that please us; we want to be affirmed in our ways – we don't want to be commanded to conform to God's way.

In these last days *many* will turn away from the truth, from excellent things: they will want something that scratches their itching ears, that pleases them; they will want what sounds eloquent, what is rhetorically pleasing, rather than spiritually edifying; they will want the folly of man, rather than the wisdom of God. But the measure of success for us, as servants of God, is not popularity but faithfulness – the two are not necessarily aligned! The question to ask is not, are people pleased with my preaching, am I telling them what they want to hear – but rather, is God pleased with me, am I faithfully telling the people what God says – am I speaking of excellent things, measured according to the standard of God's word. This was the office of the prophets, who were often most despised; there were multitudes of false prophets, enjoying the favour of the king and the people, while the true prophets were despised (cf. 1 Kgs 22:8). But it is not wisdom to win man's approval at the expense of faithful service to the Lord God.

Speak Truthfully

Secondly, in verse 7, we recognise that speaking the things of God means speaking the truth; this in turn means we are *bound* by what is real and true, and we are not at liberty to invent things of our own. The truth is narrow, while falsehood is broad. If we are to serve the Lord in preaching His word, we must be servants of truth, speakers of the truth – so how to tell the difference?

We learn from scripture certain characteristics of the truth. The truth exalts God, whereas the lie exalts self; this was so from the beginning, when the old serpent began to speak (Gen 3:1-6). The father of lies is full of self, and so are servants of lie today. But if we are to keep our mouths speaking truth, we must keep our hearts filled with the glory of God, filled with love for Him. Then we will preach the things that bring glory

to God: this is the purpose of all creation, and that is why it is in nature of truth to glorify God.

Then also, we see that the lie is superficially comforting, while the truth of ultimately comforting: there is the patience and comfort of the scriptures (Rom 15:4) but this true comfort often involves much sorrow (Jas 4:8-10). The voice of wisdom speaks in words that are sometimes hard to hear – we must not shun to preach such things as sin, hell, repentance; we must not shun to rebuke, when necessary (2 Tim 4:2). Woe to the false prophets, who speak of peace, but only build up false confidence in the people, that will lead them to destruction (cf. Ezek 13:10-16)!

The message we preach is a message of peace: eternal, blessed peace with God, reconciled to us through the blood of Christ; but it is also a warning of judgment to those who will not repent and trust in Christ. The message we preach is a message of love and hope: the love of God for sinners, the hope of life eternal in Christ; but it is also a warning of the wrath of God abiding on sinners, and the eternal condemnation awaiting all those who are outside Christ. We must not shun to preach *all* the counsel of God (Acts 20:27), not only those bits that fall easily on the ear – because it is only the truth that can set us free, while the lie keeps us in bondage. Falsehood will not comfort for long, for in the end only truth will prevail. There is but one God, and He is the God of truth; all who have believed and served the lie, will perish (Rev 22:15).

Speak Righteously

Thirdly, we see in verse 8 that wisdom speaks *in righteousness*. The words that are spoken are right and true, the words spoken are such that the cause of right is maintained. There is nothing froward or perverse, nothing crooked, nothing that is wicked – no false doctrines, that promote evil. As it was in the early church (cf. Rev 2:14, 20), so also today, there are many professing to be Christian teachers who promote what is evil before God (cf. Isa 5:20).

By contrast, to speak with the voice of wisdom means to promote what is good and right – not according to the sinful folly of man, but the law of God. We must delight in the righteous *law* of God (cf. Ps 1:1-2); we must live, and speak, according to that law. Again, this is not what sinful man wants to hear! But it is what is needed.

Then also, to speak in righteousness means that there is no

unrighteous *motive* behind the words spoken. The words of wisdom cannot, must not, be used to serve selfish, carnal ends: God sees our hearts, and there is judgment for those making merchandise of His flock (cf. 2 Pet 2:3). We are warned against desiring merely the position of a master or teacher, out of a desire for fame and prestige (Jas 3:1) – yours must be a pure heart, without frowardness or perversity: because out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks (Luke 6:45). Ours must be a heart filled with excellent, true, righteous things; this is what the Lord wants, in order that we may serve Him, that He might use us mightily for His glory.

Conclusion

But what about the rest of us, those not called to be preachers? We also must recognise the value and importance of the preaching of the word; we must not despise it (cf. Prov 8:10-11). We must attend to it, for God as provided it for our good. We all are in need of the preaching of the word! Let us seek out preaching that is excellent, true, and righteous; let us esteem such preaching, and submit ourselves to the faithfully preached word, that God might work in us mightily, to sanctify us by His word.

As Moses reminded the people of Israel (Deut 30:11-14), so also there is no excuse for us: God has brought the voice of wisdom, His word, near to us. This is the word of faith (Rom 10:8); and such a faith as to lead us, not once but continually, to *seek* God's word, to rest in that word of God and live by it. The voice of wisdom is crying out, even in this age, in this time: the question is whether we will speak with that voice of wisdom, and whether we will hear it.

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COVENANT THEOLOGY IS CENTRAL TO THE GOSPEL

MATHEWS CHACKO

Early in the course on Covenant Theology, I read a quotation by Ligon Duncan III: *“Theology is at the heart of the Gospel ministry because Covenant Theology is the Gospel. We are talking about something that strikes at the very heart of our understanding of the person and work of Christ, of the Gospel of salvation, of redemptive history, of the relationship between the Old and the New Testament. Covenant Theology is that central.”*

Although I have been a believer for more than 30 years, this course was my first exposure to Covenant Theology. My understanding of salvation was developed in a vacuum, and this course helped to establish a biblical basis for the foundation of my salvation.

Through this essay, I seek to examine the belief that Covenant Theology is central to the Gospel. This starts from the premise of understanding that there were two covenants that God had placed in operation—the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace.

The Covenant of Works was established with Adam, and through him, all his descendants were offered eternal life on the condition of complete, perfect, and personal obedience. Adam was capable of keeping this covenant, but he was placed under probation in the garden and given a test to demonstrate his obedience. However, Adam failed the test, bringing condemnation upon all his descendants. After the failure of the first covenant, God instituted a second covenant—the Covenant of Grace—with Christ as Saviour.

This was a new learning experience for me. I had never realised that there was a second covenant. This truth was not only new to me but also deeply comforting, as the keeping of the covenant does not depend on me. If it depended on my faithfulness, I would have failed and faced the consequences of that failure. It is a great comfort to know that God made this covenant with His Son, and that I enter into it through Him.

The plan of salvation, as seen through Covenant Theology, became clear to me. All the passages that indicate salvation was through Christ became clearer when viewed through the lens of Covenant Theology. From this understanding, everything that followed made perfect sense.

God's Sovereignty and Faithfulness in Covenant Theology

If it was through Covenant Theology that God chose to deal with people, then it follows that He did so sovereignly as a demonstration of His faithfulness. His sovereignty is demonstrated through His decretive will. Paul makes this very clear in his epistles, particularly in Romans and Ephesians. Through the decrees of God, all that has been ordained comes to pass for the glory of the one who ordained it. Everything in this world, right from creation, has happened as a fulfilment of God's will, and the salvation of the elect is also God's decrees put into effect.

God had foreordained that there would be an elect people who would be saved from His wrath, and that they would be saved through the mediatorial work of His Son. This saving plan, accomplished by Christ, was applied by the Holy Spirit, who brings about faith and repentance in the elect.

God's dealings with people are also a demonstration of His faithfulness. That He made a covenant with His Son and made provision for human beings to enter into a covenant relationship with Him was a demonstration of His faithfulness. It was only the righteousness of the Righteous Son of God that could secure my righteousness. It was His atoning death that could expiate and propitiate the elect before God.

Through God's providential acts, He demonstrates His faithfulness. Through general providence and sustaining grace, God sustains the universe. This grace is available for all and is provided to all creation. The Lord declares, "*Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls?*" (Luke 12:24).

The God who created the universe is also mindful of His creation and provides for their sustenance. However, this is not salvific in nature and is only a demonstration of God's generosity and benevolence to all His creation. God's saving purpose is revealed through His special providence toward the elect, by which He sent His Son to secure their redemption. In this, He demonstrates His faithfulness to all with whom He has entered into covenant through His Son.

It is natural and logical to think that if God is a covenant-making and covenant-keeping God, and if He has communicated the covenant through written words, then He will take great care to ensure that those words are preserved for all generations. *“Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever.”* (Ps 12:7). *“For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.”* (Matt 5:18).

The covenant-keeping God confirms and preserves the words through which He conveyed His promises so that there will not be any error or doubt in the communicated word.

Covenant Theology and the Family

It was truly a blessing to see the relationship between Covenant Theology and the family. As a covenant-keeping God, He is pleased when a groom and bride make a covenant between themselves and strive to keep it. It is my understanding that God blesses that marriage in a special way because where husband and wife keep the covenant relationship and honour God, God, in turn, blesses the family with a deepening relationship between the husband and his wife.

This marriage is then a witness and testimony to the relationship that God has with His people. As a husband nourishes and cherishes his wife, and as the wife honours and submits to her husband, a godly testimony is sent out to an unbelieving world of the covenant relationship that God seeks with people.

The husband and wife also bring children into the covenant. Just as the children of Israel were born into a covenant community, children born into a believing family are children of the covenant. There is a godly blessing on these children, and all the blessings that God gives to a righteous man's generation belong to them as well.

Of course, it is the responsibility of the parents to bring up their children in the wisdom and fear of the Lord. Christian parents should not neglect their biblical duty to God and to their children: *“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”* (Prov 22:6).

No child born into a Christian family automatically becomes a Christian. However, the child has a far greater opportunity to hear the Gospel as he grows up and enter the kingdom. Christian parents have a godly responsibility to ensure this happens, and the instruction of the

child should begin at a very early age.

I was particularly challenged to hear the testimony of Dr Jeffrey Khoo, who shared the Gospel with his children at a tender age, and they responded to the Gospel and came to saving faith. In my case, I did not seize that opportunity and regret not doing so.

The church also has a responsibility in the nurture of children toward salvation and Christian maturity. The church is the bulwark against a marauding world that can turn our children against God and the Gospel. It is the responsibility of the believing community to stand in the gap for the children of the church and nurture them in godliness.

As covenant children respond to the Gospel, come to Christ, grow and mature, become adults themselves, marry, have children and bring them up in God's ways, the reality of a covenant-keeping God from generation to generation becomes evident. May our Christian families and churches wake up to the reality of a God who keeps His covenant for generations.

Covenant Theology and Soteriology

It was through this course and the accompanying course on Soteriology that I gained a deeper understanding of the process of salvation that God has ordained for His people. The Covenant view aligns closely with the Calvinistic view of soteriology, often summarised under the acronym TULIP, i.e. the five points of Calvinism: Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, and Perseverance of the Saints. This view of salvation provides a logical and clear framework.

In short, salvation can be explained through this system as follows: After the Fall, man is totally depraved. He cannot make a moral decision to follow God; he is incapable and spiritually dead. Not only is he spiritually dead, but he is also inclined toward evil rather than God. He is a moral agent of God's adversary, bent on continuing the rebellion that is in the world. In this moral state—destined for destruction under the full wrath of God—God, through His decree of salvation, elects a chosen people whom He is determined to save, not for any merit of their own but for the praise of His glory and according to the pleasure of His will. For those whom He has chosen, He has also made provision for their salvation by providing an escape from His wrath—the atoning death of the Messiah, the Christ, the Holy One of God. To those who are the elect,

God also draws them to Himself so that they put their faith in Christ, and He preserves them to the end.

Personally, I am convinced of this viewpoint of salvation and affirm that it is the most God-exalting view, leaving no room for man to exalt himself or contribute to his salvation. The only contribution man makes is his own sin; God does everything else. This, in a nutshell, is the viewpoint of salvation under Covenant Theology.

Covenant Theology on Justification and Sanctification

The Covenant view of justification by faith speaks of imputed righteousness, which comes from the complete obedience of Christ. By Christ's complete obedience—both active and passive—He fulfilled all the demands of the law (active obedience) and endured the penalty of sin through His vicarious death (passive obedience). The elect of God are imputed with this complete righteousness, leading not only to positional righteousness (justification) but also practical righteousness (sanctification).

The redeemed person loves the law of God after he has been clothed with the complete righteousness of Christ. He is not an antinomian who believes he has no obligation to the Ten Commandments. Covenant Theology upholds the Moral Law. I affirm the Westminster Confession of Faith XIX.5-7, which states that Christ, in the Gospel, does not in any way dissolve the obligation to keep the law but rather strengthens it. I also affirm the Lordship Salvation implied by this stance. I find that the non-Lordship view of salvation is the reason evangelical Christianity has been in decline for the last three decades.

While affirming that salvation is purely by grace and not conditioned on my good works, I have come to understand that this radical offer of grace compels me to total surrender—out of sheer gratitude for what He has done for me. But gratitude is not the only reason I hold this view. I also see the one who makes this demand on my life. If I truly believe His claims—not just over my life but over the entire universe—then the only reasonable response is to gladly surrender every area of my life to His Lordship.

In my personal experience over the past 30 years, this surrender has been deeply liberating. Thus, in Covenant Theology, the salvation equation is not *Faith + Works = Salvation*, nor *Faith = Salvation - Works*, but rather *Faith = Salvation + Works*.

Through this course, I also came to understand the salvific ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. Indeed, if there were elect people in the Old Testament era, they had to be saved the same way as those in the New Testament—through faith in Christ, wrought by the inward working of the Holy Spirit. The continuity of God’s plan of redemption is a central emphasis in Covenant Theology, in contrast to the discontinuity often emphasised in Dispensationalism.

Covenant Theology versus Dispensationalism

Covenant Theology, which holds to a covenantal approach in God’s salvific process—consistent and continuous in its understanding—has been challenged by the dispensational view. Dispensationalism holds to seven dispensations in which God tests man, man fails, and man faces punishment for disobedience.

This raises a question in my mind: *What does God have to prove, and to whom?* This seems to place God and man on the same level, giving the impression that God needs to prove something to man. Since the Fall, it has been evident that man is depraved in his actions, and there is nothing for God to prove to him.

In fact, this was disproven in the Garden itself when Adam attempted to cover his guilt with fig leaves. God rejected Adam’s effort and instead provided the covering Himself. From that moment, there has been only one way of redemption—through the atoning work of Christ, foreshadowed in the Old Testament sacrifices and fulfilled in the New Testament.

There is no reason to abandon the Reformed position of Covenant Theology in favour of newer teachings. The covenantal view is complete and consistent, whereas the dispensational view presents an inconsistent approach that seems uncharacteristic of God’s wisdom.

Covenant Theology and the Interpretation of Scripture

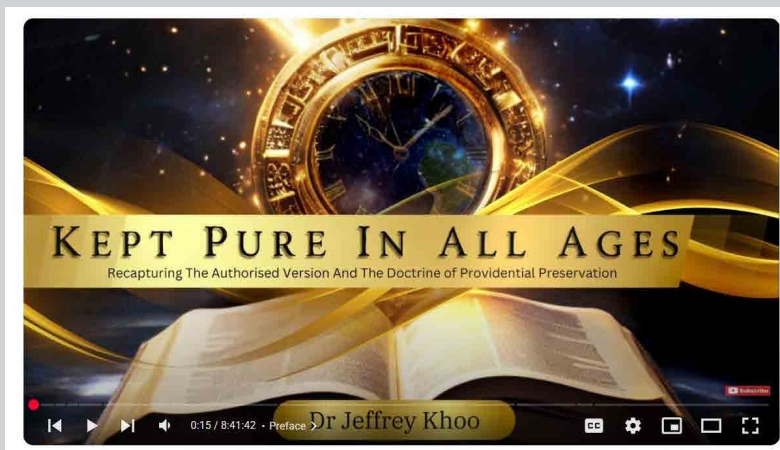
Covenant Theology that is coupled with a premillennial view of the end-times maintains a consistent view of God’s actions in history because of its method of interpretation: *“When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense.”* Every word is taken in its primary, ordinary, literal meaning unless the context demands otherwise. This method, known as grammatical-historical interpretation, avoids allegorisation and seeks the plain meaning of the text.

COVENANT THEOLOGY IS CENTRAL TO THE GOSPEL

From this course, I learned that those who hold to Covenant Theology may differ on eschatology. This surprised me, as a plain reading of Scripture seems to point naturally to a premillennial, pretribulational rapture view. I am grateful that Far Eastern Bible College holds to this position, which, in my humble opinion, is most consistent with the unifying framework of Covenant Theology.

Other views, such as amillennialism or postmillennialism, appear to deviate from what I understand to be the biblical position. In my view, we remain consistent with Covenant Theology only when we maintain a consistent eschatology. My understanding of eschatology was greatly helped by Dr Jeffrey Khoo's article, "*Dispensational Premillennialism in Reformed Theology: The Contribution of J. O. Buswell to the Millennial Debate*", published in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* in December 2001. I believe the Lord's imminent return will settle all doubts on this matter.

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Listen to an audio book version of "**Kept Pure in All Ages**" on YouTube and Spotify! The Rev Joseph Poon of Bible-Presbyterian Church of Western Australia (BPCWA) with his team of church members have converted several of FEBC's publications into audio books.

THE SINS OF THE TONGUE IN THE LIGHT OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

MILTON KIM-KUNG ANG

James 3:6 says, *“And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.”* It is clear from the epistle of James that the tongue is capable of sin, capable of condemning the body of the sinner to hell, even if only words are uttered without any action. Various other Bible verses also testify to this (e.g. Job 15:5-6, Pss 5:9, 39:1, Prov 15:28, 21:3).

Romans 7:7 says, *“... Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law”*. Since the Ten Commandments define sin, the various sins of the tongue will be examined under each of the commandments in reverse order.

Thou Shalt Not Covet

When one lusts after what others have, and obtains it, boasting is often the result. As James 3:5 points out, the tongue is capable of boasting great things, often to covet admiration from others: *“... their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men’s persons in admiration because of advantage.”* (Jude 16b). Here is one example: *“Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year; and buy and sell, and get gain...But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.”* (Jas 4:13,16).

An example in coveting ability is James 3:1 which warns those who do not have the gift of teaching to not do so. Obviously some have wickedly done so in coveting this ability as well as the respect from those who are taught, disregarding the harm they are doing to the latter. James 4:3 states, *“Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.”*

A related sin of the tongue is murmuring, verbally revealing how much one desires what others have that one does not, and even envying

them (e.g. Jas 3:14, 4:5). The classic example is how the children of Israel in the wilderness complained: *“We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick”* (Num 11:5). In contrast, James 5:9 rebukes those who envy: *“Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door.”*

Thou Shalt Not Bear False Witness

The obvious sin of the tongue here is blatant lying: *“A wicked doer giveth heed to false lips; and a liar giveth ear to a naughty tongue.”* (Prov 17:4). This includes deception: *“For the mouth of the wicked and the mouth of the deceitful are opened against me: they have spoken against me with a lying tongue”* (Ps 109:2, also Pss 34:13, 50:19, 52:2). Jesus adjures us to keep our promises to others and avoid half-truths: *“But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.”* (Matt 5:37). Indeed, in today’s world, fake news abounds, but some Christians sadly blame God when they should blame themselves for falling into sin: *“Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man”* (Jas 1:13).

We then have the sin of the tongue by false prophets and teachers: *“But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.”* (2 Pet 2:1). Sadly, some are attracted to these heretics with a low view of Christ and His Word (2 Pet 2:2-3, 2 Tim 4:3-4, Acts 15:24, Gal 1:6-7, Jude 4).

Although false teachers often deny Christ, sadly some commit the sin of verbally denying Christ out of fear of persecution, clearly seen in Simon Peter’s thrice denial of Christ: *“But he began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not this man of whom ye speak.”* (Mark 14:71).

Thou Shalt Not Steal

Stealing may appear to be a sinful act rather than a sin of the tongue, yet there are instances where it involves the misuse of speech. When David stole Uriah’s wife, he did so by issuing a verbal command to bring Bathsheba to him (2 Sam 11:4). Proverbs 21:6 applies to today’s money scammers: *“The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a vanity tossed*

to and fro of them that seek death.” Gehazi stole what was not his from Naaman by means of his tongue (2 Kgs 5:22). Withholding tithes from God is stealing from God, yet some even verbally deny this: “Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.” (Mal 3:8).

One can steal intangibles as well: *“And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool”* (Jas 2:3). Here what is stolen is the equal treatment the poor should have. Another example is found in 2 Samuel 15:6b: *“...so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel,”* referring to how Absalom usurped the loyalty that rightfully belonged to King David. Jeremiah 23:30 declares, *“Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, saith the LORD, that steal my words every one from his neighbour.”* False prophets steal the place of God’s Word from the Lord.

Thou Shalt Not Commit Adultery

So often the act of adultery begins with using the tongue for flattery: *“With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forced him.”* (Prov 7:21). Similarly Proverbs 6:24, *“To keep thee from the evil woman, from the flattery of the tongue of a strange woman.”* Revelation 2:20 speaks of a woman named Jezebel who through teaching seduced Christians to commit fornication: *“Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.”*

Thou Shalt Not Kill

Several sins of the tongue that fall under this commandment relate to character assassination. The first is gossip, which Proverbs 26:22 describes as deeply wounding: *“The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.”* This power to wound comes from the betrayal of secrets in order to gain favour with others: *“He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets: therefore meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips”* (Prov 20:19). The apostle Paul also warns against *“tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not”* (1 Tim 5:13). The Bible further describes them as “whisperers”: *“A froward man soweth strife: and a whisperer separateth chief friends”* (Prov 16:28).

A related sin of the tongue here is slander: *“Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.”* (Jas 4:11). Psalm 50:19-20 describes the slanderer: *“Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit. Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother; thou slanderest thine own mother’s son.”*

Another sin of the tongue is mocking: *“Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker: and he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished”* (Prov 17:5). Sanballat mocked Nehemiah and the Jews as they rebuilt the wall of Jerusalem (Neh 4:1), and children mocked the prophet Elisha (2 Kgs 2:23). Related to mocking are scorners or scoffers: *“Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts”* (2 Pet 3:3).

Perhaps the gravest sin of the tongue is using it to intentionally wound others: *“My soul is among lions: and I lie even among them that are set on fire, even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword”* (Ps 57:4). *“Who whet their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows, even bitter words: That they may shoot in secret at the perfect: suddenly do they shoot at him, and fear not”* (Ps 64:3–4). Finally, the tongue is often used to stir up strife. Proverbs warns, *“As coals are to burning coals, and wood to fire; so is a contentious man to kindle strife”* (Prov 26:21). A gentle tongue, however, has the opposite effect: *“A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger”* (Prov 15:1). The apostle Paul likewise instructs, *“Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers”* (2 Tim 2:14).

Honour Thy Father and Thy Mother

“For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death” (Mark 7:10). Christ quoted the fifth commandment as well as Exodus 20:17 and Leviticus 20:9 to rebuke those Jews who used their tradition of declaring a sum of money as “Corban” or a gift to God instead of using the money to provide for their parents in need. Even today, some verbally mock their parents: *“Woe unto him that saith unto his father, What begettest thou? or*

to the woman, What hast thou brought forth?” (Isa 45:10).

Remember the Sabbath Day, to Keep It Holy

Isaiah 58:13 declares, *“If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words.”* Here we see two ways one might profane the sabbath with the tongue. The first is speaking thine own words, which means indulging in the kind of conversations that one might usually spend the other six days of the week having. The second is not calling the sabbath a delight, which means complaining about what the Christian should instead delight to do on the sabbath, aptly described in Psalm 92:1: *“A Psalm or Song for the sabbath day. It is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High”*.

Thou Shalt Not Take the Name of the LORD Thy God in Vain

One of the sins of the tongue under this commandment is profanity: *“But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.”* (Jas 5:12). While this verse applies to more than profanity, Leviticus 19:12 also states, *“And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD.”* Ephesians 4:29 thus exhorts Christians, *“Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth.”*

Another sin of the tongue is blasphemy: *“Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?”* (Jas 2:7). One example is Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom Paul said he *“delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme”* (1 Tim 1:20). The most severe example is the beast in Revelation: *“And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven”* (Rev 13:6).

Yet another sin of the tongue is hypocrisy, where seemingly good words are not matched with actions: *“Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God”* (Jas 3:9). James also points out, *“If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain.”* (Jas 1:26).

Finally, idle words are unbecoming of those who bear the name of Christ: *“But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.”* (Matt 12:36). Proverbs 10:19 describes those who say much: *“In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise.”* James thus exhorts, *“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath”* (Jas 1:19).

Thou Shalt Not Make unto Thee Any Graven Image

While idolatry seems more an action, the fact is that when one verbally asks another to create an idol or proclaims something created as god, that is idolatry: *“And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us... and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.”* (Exod 32:1-4). Similarly, Jeroboam proclaimed to the ten tribes about the two golden calves, *“... behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt”* (1 Kgs 12:28).

Thou Shalt Have No Other Gods before Me

God must be first and foremost in every believer’s life, that the chief end be to glorify God. The tongue is certainly capable of not giving God the glory. James 4:15 declares, *“For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.”* Psalm 12:4 similarly describes those who say, *“With our tongue will we prevail; our lips are our own: who is lord over us?”* Isaiah similarly spoke, *“For Jerusalem is ruined, and Judah is fallen: because their tongue and their doings are against the LORD, to provoke the eyes of his glory.”* (Isa 3:8).

In conclusion, James 3:2 rightly says, *“For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.”* The tongue is capable of grievous sins, but we must control it so that it may be a blessing instead (Prov 18:21).

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PLAYING FOUL ON FOWLER: A CLARIFICATION ON QUOTING O S FOWLER ON COURTSHIP AND UPHOLDING BIBLICAL MORALITY

JEFFREY KHOO

Prove All Things

“Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.” (1 Thess 5:21).

In a course I taught on the Theology of Marriage¹, I referenced a chapter on courtship and marriage from *Creative and Sexual Science* by Prof O S Fowler². In his book, Fowler strongly advocates sexual abstinence until marriage and clearly speaks against premarital sex. However, due to its complex phraseology and Victorian-era backdrop, some who read the book may misinterpret or misconstrue his words to mean quite the opposite.

Let me state unequivocally that I have never advocated and do not advocate premarital sex in any form. Fowler himself—who studied theology under Congregational ministers at Amherst College—explicitly promoted abstinence. He wrote, “Sexual freedoms belong only to marriage,” and “Abstinence till after marriage is the only policy, and best for both, the female especially.”³ Why “the female especially”? Because women in the 19th century suffered more than men from sexual double standards and from the legal and social disadvantages of “free unions” (i.e., cohabiting as husband and wife without a formal legal or religious marriage).⁴

Since Fowler was addressing broader societal issues and moral concerns, I quoted him selectively and with editorial care, using only those portions of his material that dealt specifically with traditional values regarding courtship and chastity.

It is important to clarify that quoting an author does not imply

wholesale endorsement of all their beliefs or writings. For example, when the apostle Paul quoted Athenian philosophers in Acts 17:28, he was not endorsing paganism or pantheism. Likewise, our founding pastor, the late Rev Dr Timothy Tow, often cited Confucius to illustrate moral truths, but that did not mean he accepted ancestral worship. Similarly, quoting Dr John Sung does not require us to adopt his Arminian theology. My point is this: I cited Fowler solely for the aspects of his writing that affirm biblical principles on courtship and abstinence.

Mate First, Then Love?

Some may have misread his phrase “*Mate* first, then love”⁵ to mean that a couple should have sex before love or marriage. That is not what he meant. According to Chambers Dictionary (1901 edition), the verb “mate” means “to be equal to; to become a companion to; to marry.”⁶ Thus, “*Mate* first, then love” simply means “*Marry* first, then love”—which is fully consistent with Fowler’s overall emphasis on abstinence before marriage. It does NOT mean “*Sex* first, then love.”

In the chapter I referenced, Fowler insists that courtship should be entered into honourably, with a serious intent to marry, and not used as a means of flirtation or physical indulgence. I quoted him for his “good old-fashioned” views on courtship grounded in commitment, as well as his strong opposition to flirtatious or seductive behaviour. Consider these direct excerpts from his writings:

All sexual familiarities breed contempt. The observation and experience of most women have taught them this fact... “I TRIED TWO years IN VAIN, while courting my wife, to get her to kiss me; but she would not, and I married her because she wouldn’t. I would not marry any girl who would. The more she wouldn’t, the more I wanted to marry her.”⁷

Courted females, make “Hands off” your motto... “Seal our love by engagement and marriage, and all I have and am is yours to possess and enjoy; but till then, touch not, taste not, handle not...” Sexual freedoms belong only to marriage—are marriage.⁸

Abstinence till sometime after marriage is the only policy, and best for both, the female especially... You MIGHT NOT MARRY, after all. Then what? “Many slips happen between cup and lips.” Hundreds of heart-rending cases of desertion after engagement have been told, are known to all; and usually caused by that disgust or dissatisfaction be gotten by these very intimacies being unsatisfactory.⁹

One heart-wrenching example Fowler recounts involves a woman who yielded physically to her fiancé the night before their wedding, only to be abandoned and slandered the next day. Fowler's tone in telling this story is one of moral outrage, not permissiveness. He writes:

A MOST excellent Canadian girl of twenty, betrothed, was to be married Monday at 10 a.m. All her preparations were completed; her affianced visited her Sunday evening, and by dint of persuasion and entreaty, under solemn assurance that they were to be married within ten hours, induced her to yield her person; hurt her terribly, without giving any pleasure; and left her that night for good. Monday morning, she, friends, minister, all but her betrayer, were on hand for their marriage. He not only stayed back, but *scandalized* her as not virtuous, alleging her dereliction with him as proof. But, a church-member, she stood so high that he was not believed. Yet O WHAT HEART-BROKEN AGONY she suffers! It has completely unstrung her nerves. Yet she loves him still! All the details of her case are most heart-rending. Fool she. Devil he. And both have many kindred.¹⁰

Sow the Wind and Reap the Whirlwind

There are other quotes—not cited by me, but by others—that can easily be misunderstood or misinterpreted. One such example is the following:

Love alone begins, consummates, and perpetuates marriage... Whether their marriage is or is not mentioned, matters nothing. Loving actions and expressions are *marriage* actions and expressions. He who makes Love to any woman thereby makes marriage to her; and she, by allowing it, consents to marriage, and by reciprocating it marries herself to him... And he who, after having made Love to a woman, discards her, has divorced himself; as she divorces herself who rejects a lover she has allowed to make Love to her.¹¹

However, these words should be read in their proper context. Immediately after saying this, Fowler admonishes: “How monstrous is this sin... Those who perpetrate it ‘sow the wind,’ and must ‘reap the whirlwind’.”¹² This makes Fowler's meaning clear—he is not advocating casual relationships but denouncing the sin of emotional and physical exploitation. This echoes 1 Corinthians 6:16, which teaches that sexual union establishes a one-flesh relationship, even if not within the bonds of marriage. Fowler rightly warns against cohabitation and casual intimacy.

Here is another quote that could be misunderstood:

HE WHO ELICITS A VIRGIN'S LOVE THEREBY SEDUCES HER

HEART... Her Love for him is desire to have intercourse with him...
MALE LOVE CONSISTS IN DESIRE TO IMPREGNATE... THE SIN
AND PUNISHMENT OF SEDUCERS rest on all you who call out only
to blight... and then discard her.¹³

Again, when read carefully in context, it is clear that Fowler was describing—not condoning—the moral corruption of society. He explicitly denounced those who manipulate and discard women after arousing their affections. His moral condemnation is evident in his own words: “You deserve to be horsewhipped by her father, cowed by her brothers, branded villain by her mother, cursed by herself.”¹⁴ Fowler strongly denounced lust, seduction, and unchaste behaviour—his views are consistent throughout.

How Dare You!

Here is another passage:

LOVE-MAKING GIRLS... by the very act and fact of making Love... you virtually offer to marry... Not that this is wrong... if you can and want to... COQUETTES... You are thereby... preparing and inciting each other to physical [intercourse]... Young folks... how *dare* you reciprocate Love till you have acquired this right by betrothal?¹⁵

Someone interpreted this to mean, “Simply put, Fowler advocated that the amorous couple, especially the female, should take care not to submit herself to the temptation of indulging in premarital sex unless her lover has promised to marry her.”

However, this is a misreading of Fowler’s main thrust and warning. Here is the context of what he said,

This “flirting with a fellow” will bear to be called by some other name [i.e., it could rightly be called something more serious, such as immodesty or worse], and you with it. This is not said to spoil your “fun” [i.e., what may seem like harmless fun is, in fact, morally serious], but to show you just what that “fun” is and *means*. So flagrant a violation of her laws Nature must punish [i.e., such behavior violates a natural standard of virtue and purity and inevitably brings consequences]. Young folks, as you set by moral purity and virtue, how *dare* you reciprocate Love till you have acquired this right by betrothal?¹⁶

When read in context, it is clear that Fowler was not suggesting that premarital sex becomes acceptable once a promise of marriage is made. Rather, his concern was with the moral and emotional consequences of romantic expressions that stir up physical desire

without the proper covenantal commitment of betrothal or marriage. His rebuke of “love-making girls” and “coquettes” was not a sanction for conditional premarital sex but a warning against irresponsible emotional entanglements that lead to temptation and potential ruin.

Liberties Kill Love

Fowler consistently upholds chastity, self-control, and the sanctity of marriage. For instance, when he writes, “how *dare* you reciprocate Love till you have acquired this right by betrothal,” it is clear he is placing emotional and physical expressions of love within the bounds of formal commitment. His strong language underscores the dangers of prematurely arousing affection and desire. To interpret Fowler as permitting premarital sex on the basis of a mere promise of marriage is to misrepresent his intent. His overarching message is one of restraint and moral responsibility—particularly in safeguarding the well-being of women, who in his time bore the brunt of the consequences of unchaste behaviour and broken promises.

To prove this point, Fowler, on the very same page, writes:

LIBERTIES DURING COURTSHIP. THEY KILL LOVE... [P]urity always enamors, while sensuality disgusts... This shows *why* liberties kill Love...

LET THE EXPERIENCE of every courted woman attest whether all kinds and degrees of sexual freedoms she ever permitted any man to take with her, did not obviously deaden his Love for her. What though she yielded reluctantly, just to oblige him... yet they killed his respect and affection for her, however great both. And he despised her more the more she tolerated, even if they did not extend to intercourse; and if they did, they killed it, because of necessity mutually unsatisfactory. All sexual familiarities breed contempt.¹⁷

These remarks make it unmistakably clear that Fowler viewed physical intimacy before marriage as morally harmful and spiritually dangerous.

Make Love Hay, While the Love Sun Shines

Finally, some readers have misconstrued Fowler’s use of the old proverb, “Make hay while the sun shines,” which he applied to courtship with the advice: “GIRLS, KEEP SUITORS WAITING NO LONGER than is absolutely necessary for a judicious decision. YOUNG FOLKS, ALL, MAKE LOVE HAY WHILE THE LOVE SUN SHINES.”¹⁸

Here too, context is key. In the preceding section titled “WASTE NO MATING [MARRYING] TIME,” Fowler counsels young people not to delay marriage unnecessarily:

“DO WITH YOUR MIGHT” what you undertake, is both a scriptural and sensible injunction. “Whatever is worth doing at all, is worth doing *well*,” is a good life motto. And applies to courtship more than to everything else...

NATURE’S [MARRYING] PERIOD IS SHORT... so make the most of it. Waste no more of your own time, or that of the other sex, than is absolutely necessary to a right [choice of a spouse] and [marriage].¹⁹

Thus, the phrase “Make love hay while the love sun shines” is not a call to promiscuity, but an encouragement to marry while one is still young. Fowler advocates early marriage and childbearing—ideally between the ages of 19 and 23 (cf. Prov 5:18-19). This aligns with the apostle Paul’s instruction in 1 Corinthians 7:9: “*But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.*”

One reader concluded with the assertion that “Fowler believed man’s chief end is to glorify sex and enjoy it forever.” I must firmly disagree. I have found no evidence that Fowler ever made such a claim. On the contrary, his writings affirm principles that are consistent with Scripture: the honour of marriage, the virtue of chastity, the sinfulness of fornication, and the importance of sincere courtship with the intent to marry.

Hold Fast That Which Is Good

As 1 Thessalonians 5:21 instructs, “*Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.*” Though Fowler had his flaws (as we all do), it cannot be denied that he expressed truths worth holding onto—especially his call to sexual purity, honourable intentions in courtship, and abstinence until marriage. These principles remain timeless and urgently needed in our generation.

Notes

¹ Jeffrey Khoo, *Theology of Marriage* (unpublished lecture notes, Far Eastern Bible College, 2022).

² Orson Squire Fowler, *Creative and Sexual Science: On Manhood, Womanhood, and Their Mutual Interrelations* (Cincinnati: Subscription Book Publishers, 1875), 417-519.

³ *Ibid.*, 490, 518.

⁴ See Ginger S Frost, *Living in Sin: Cohabiting as Husband and Wife in Nineteenth-Century England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008).

⁵ Fowler, Creative and Sexual Science, 484.

⁶ Rev Thomas Davidson, comp., Chambers's Twentieth Century Dictionary (London: W & R Chambers, Ltd, 1901).

⁷ Fowler, Creative and Sexual Science, 488.

⁸ Ibid., 489-90.

⁹ Ibid., 518.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 485.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 485-6.

¹⁴ Ibid., 486

¹⁵ Ibid., 486-7

¹⁶ Ibid., 487

¹⁷ Ibid., 487-8

¹⁸ Ibid., 492

¹⁹ Ibid., 491

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THE LORD WILL NOT HEAR YOU!

JOSE TRINIPIL LAGAPA II BA-A

Proverbs 28:9 says, *“He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination.”*

There was a boy who was born into a Christian family. He believed in Christ as his personal Lord and Saviour in his early teenage years, but he had already been going to church practically since birth. So, he knew much of the fundamental doctrines and teachings of Christianity.

He continued in life going through school and church, with the zeal and fervour in his heart dwindling slowly but surely. Soon enough, sin and carnality had clouded his mind. The things of the world replaced God and spiritual things in priority. He became addicted to mobile and computer games, which most definitely affected his studies. His relationship with his family and friends were also affected. Naturally because of that, he stopped reading his Bible and keeping his quiet time.

On the outside, everything seemed to be fine – more like he pretended that everything was fine. He still went to church. He “worshipped” during service. He “served” in many areas in the church. In all these things, he convinced and deceived himself into thinking that everything was fine. He thought he could continue in life while straying far away from God.

It was only when he was reaching the end of his high school that he was forced to face reality. It was time for him to decide what path he would take next. Many were asking him, “What are you going to do next?”, or “Where is the Lord leading you?”

He always had an easy and automatic answer to give them: “I’m still waiting on the Lord and how or where He will lead” with a string of sentences after about his own desires.

However, he was asking himself the same question. “What am I going to do next?” He was lost. He didn’t know what to do.

Then an idea came to his head, “Aha, I know, I just have to pray about it!” And so, he did. He prayed, “Lord, please show me the path you want me to take!” He kept doing this for days. Those days turned into weeks. It was not long before he realised what was happening. He had heard this many times in Sunday School and Sunday sermons. “The Lord isn’t hearing my prayers.”

Have we ever felt like the Lord isn’t hearing our prayers at all? But why would the Lord not hear us? Didn’t He promise that He would always hear us whenever we call upon Him? In what case will the Lord not hear our prayers? This morning, we shall take a look at the cause and effect of God not hearing our prayers.

First, let us look at the cause: The Lord will not hear you if you turn from Him.

If You Turn from the Lord

This point is taken from the first half of this proverb which says, “*He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law.*” The phrase “He that turneth away” is what we want to emphasise in this first part. Taking a closer look at the key words of this section, the verb “turneth” here is not in the passive voice where the person is being caused to turn away, but it is, instead, in the active voice. This means that the person himself is the one making his ears to turn away from hearing.

We can see a good illustration of this sort of wilful turning from none other than ourselves. I believe that all of us have experienced disobeying our parents. They tell us to do certain things but what do we do instead? We walk away and hide in our rooms and do something else.

In the same way, this “turneth away” is done in a wilful manner because the idea of the turning away is not just to simply turn one’s ears away to another direction, but to also stop his ears from hearing. This person knows exactly what he is doing and is purposely doing it. This person is not ignorant of what God’s commandments are. If he disobeys, he is committing a conscious decision in his heart to turn his ears away from God’s commandments. He turns away because he doesn’t want to obey it. Why? It could be due to his pride and rebellion. He is unwilling to let go of his sin.

The word “law” here does not just refer to the Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament), it includes all of God’s words and commandments. This is because the word “law” here has the idea of

“instruction”, like a father’s instruction. It is similar to how we see our earthly parents’ words and instructions as “law”. So, instead of the “law” here being limited to the Torah, it is extended to all the instructions from our Covenantal Father. In this context, it is the entire Word of God that we have in our hands today.

In any relationship, communication is key. This is a simple fact between husbands and wives, parents and children, siblings, and friends; there must be communication. God is communicating with His children through His law. When we turn away from His law, it is the same as turning away from the Lord Himself. What happens when one suddenly stops communicating? It doesn’t matter how close you might be physically to the other person; if there is no communication, the relationship is strained or broken. That is the consequence when we “turn away from hearing the law.” This consequence is the “effect” part of the cause and effect that we discussed earlier. Now, we will see that the Lord will not hear you because He will turn from you. This is our second point:

The Lord Will Turn from You

In our first point, we were discussing a person’s reaction to God communicating with us, which is through His Word. In our second point, we are now viewing the relationship from our point of view because of the word “prayer”. Prayer is the means God has provided for us to communicate with Him.

But here we see the contradiction. In this section, we see the phrase “His prayer”. This means that this person who has turned away from hearing the law still “prays” to the Lord. Thus, such a person turns away from God’s law within his heart where no one would be able to see. Outside, he would offer sacrifices to the Lord, bring his tithes and offerings, keep all the holy days, fasts, and feasts, and would still pray to the Lord, but his heart would be far, far away from Him.

He might even be delusional to think that the Lord would still bless him because he did all of these things. He might think he has kept his “end of the deal” and so the Lord has to “keep His Word.” But what do we see in this passage? Such prayers are an abomination to the Lord.

Now, we might notice that in the second section, there is no explicit mention of God turning away from us, unlike in the first where it clearly says, “He that turneth away”. However, this is a case where even though it is not written down for us to read, it is obviously implied. This is

because of the word “abomination”. This word is used very strongly in the Bible to refer to something that God hates and abhors. It might seem strange that such a word is used in this proverb to refer to prayer – something that we hold to be holy. But this is the result of turning away from the law of the Lord. Our lives are unclean – unable to stand before God’s holy presence and our lips are unable to pray prayers that are in accordance with God’s Word.

An abominable prayer! That is an oxymoron. It seems unimaginable for prayer which is a thing holy and sacred to be regarded by God as filthy and abominable; yet we know that such prayers exist. Some may ask, “Can a Christian actually pray a prayer that God would find abominable? Can a man who has been cleansed by God utter a prayer that God hates?” If we are honest with ourselves, we know that some of the prayers that we have prayed could have been abominable. Let us not be so proud to claim that every prayer that we have uttered has been heard by the Lord.

And how does God view abomination? He hates it. He abhors it. He despises it. He turns from it. In every mention of this word throughout the Bible, it is always used in the negative sense and is usually referring to something that the Lord absolutely hates.

To further emphasise how God sees and hates abomination, I think it would be best to hear it from God Himself. I shall just read a short passage for all of us from Isaiah 1:10-15. Interestingly, even though Proverbs 28:9 is poetry, not prophecy, it is in a sense “fulfilled” here in the time of Isaiah, where the children of Israel, the very same people who were addressed in the book of Proverbs, have turned their ears away from hearing the law.

I just want you all to listen and hear from God’s own mouth. Here the Lord speaks to the children of Israel through the prophet Isaiah: *“Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. [Here, the Lord even calls the children of Israel Sodom and Gomorrah because of how far they had turned away from His law.] To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and*

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sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.”

Application

Do you hear God’s anger? Can you feel it – the great wrath and utter distaste even for the worship and sacrifices that the people were offering to Him? These things that they were doing were not sinful in themselves. In fact, these were commanded by the Lord and yet He found them to be completely abominable.

Let us not be so quick to point a finger at the Israelites and judge them for their sins, because God may very well say the same thing to us. If He were to say those words today it might sound like: “Who told you to come into the sanctuary to worship? To what purpose do you bring your tithes and offerings? They are an abomination to me. Your fellowship groups, Bible studies, church camps, and prayer meetings – do away with them. Your special services, Good Fridays, Easter Sundays, Church Anniversaries, Reformation Services, Christmas Services, and Watchnight Services my soul hates. When you fold your hands to pray and make long and profound prayers, I will not hear you.”

Can this be said of us? Have we turned from God’s laws? Has the Lord turned from us? Does He no longer hear our prayers?

Are we guilty of what is written in this proverb? I must examine myself too. Even during the months spent preparing and meditating on this proverb, there were times when the Bible felt like a closed book. I just was not able to dig any deeper into the text and I knew why: I had turned away from the Lord. I had turned from obeying His law. Thus, He was not hearing my prayers. Through this experience, I began to see for myself this proverb in a real way. It was not a pleasant thing to go through at all if we are truly a child of God.

Do we esteem our relationship with our Heavenly Father lightly? Sometimes we do, when His Words are no longer our first and final authority. He no longer takes first place in our lives. We go through life conveniently forgetting that He is the one who has saved us. Our love for Him has grown dull and cold.

We take prayer for granted. We pray simply for the sake of it; as if it is a sort of routine we just have to do or some kind of secret formula for things in our life to go well. Even if we pray sincerely, we think that we convince ourselves that we are immediately doing something right because it's "prayer". Yet, that prayer in itself is a sin.

Have we turned aside from hearing God's Word to such a point? We have already learned this morning: If we turn from hearing God's Word, He will also turn from us. The Lord will not hear you. The Lord will not hear us.

This proverb that we have meditated on this morning is a warning call to all of us. If we are truly God's children, we shouldn't be found wallowing in such a state. If there is not even a single drop of guilt and desire to repent, I pray that we will check our own salvation. Such an attitude towards the Lord might be an indication that we are not His children, but imposters.

But do not despair. The Lord has promised in Isaiah 55:6-7, "*Seek ye the LORD while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will absolutely pardon.*"

The opposite of this verse is also true. "*He that turneth his ear to hear the law, even his prayer shall be heard by the LORD.*" Our Heavenly Father is always ready to turn again to us if we repent and return to Him. His arms are ever ready to receive us back in His arms. He will forgive us of our sins.

The first step we need to take is to repent, because that is the only prayer He will hear from us. Then let us turn to Him, hear His law, and obey it. Then the Lord will hear you. The Lord will hear us.

Jose Trinipil Lagapa II Ba-a is a graduate of the Diploma in Theology programme at Far Eastern Bible College. The above sermon was delivered during the Homiletics Chapel on 2 April 2025. He is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Religious Education degree.

COLLEGE NEWS

Day of Prayer

As usual, the College began the new year with a Day of Prayer on Thursday, 2 January 2025. About 70 board members, faculty, staff, students, alumni, and friends gathered for a time of worship, fellowship, and prayer to commit the new semester to the Lord.

Missionary James Tan, an FEBC alumnus who lectures at the Bible College of East Africa in Kenya, delivered a message from Acts 4:13–22 titled “*Keep on Declaring the Truth.*” This was followed by brief exhortations from the lecturers, testimonies from new students, and a time of prayer led by Rev Tan Kian Sing.

Enrolment

The **total enrolment** in the January-May 2025 semester was 608, consisting of 39 full-time residential students and 569 part-time/online students. They come from 16 countries: Australia, Cambodia, China, Congo, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Sierra Leone, Singapore, South Korea, Tanzania, Thailand, and the United Kingdom.



There were four **new full-time students**: Samuel Goo Junseo (Brazil/South Korea), Joshua Nah (Australia), Salwen Dave Sinonlay Alejan (Philippines), and Thang Sian Khual (Myanmar).

Lecturers and Courses

The lecturers/tutors (and courses) during the January-May 2025 semester were: **Rev Dr Jeffrey Khoo**—Epistle of James II, Introduction to Calvinism; **Rev Dr Quek Suan Yew**—Hermeneutics, Homiletics, Hebrew Reading II; **Rev Dr Prabhudas Koshy**—Isaiah I; **Rev Dr Koa Keng Woo**—Bible Geography IV, Cults II; **Rev Stephen Khoo**—Church Administration II; **Rev Tan Kian Sing**—1 Thessalonians; **Rev Clement Chew**—Elementary Hebrew II, Minor Prophets I; **Rev Dr Jose Lagapa**—Church History II; **Rev Samuel Joseph**—Greek Exegesis II; **Rev Zhu Jianwei**—New Testament Introduction II [Chinese]; **Miss Carol Lee**—Sunday School Curriculum Development, Women in the Bible II; **Pr Cornelius Koshy**—Elementary Greek II; **Pr Joshua Yong**—Contemporary Theology II, Greek Reading II; **Miss Joycelyn Chng**—Childhood Christian Education; **Mrs Patricia Joseph**—Elementary English II; **Mrs Ng May Shyen**—Intermediate English II; **Mr Aw Beng Teck**—Advanced English II; **Mrs Cheng May Lynn**—Beginner Pianoforte.

Board of Directors and Administrative Staff

The Board of Directors of the Far Eastern Bible College (FEBC) consists of Rev Dr Jeffrey Khoo (President), Elder John Leong (Secretary), Mr Wee Hian Kok (Treasurer), Rev Dr Koa Keng Woo, Rev Stephen Khoo, and Rev Dr Prabhudas Koshy. Rev Clement Chew and Rev Samuel Joseph joined the Board on 2 January 2025.

The administrative staff of FEBC includes Mrs Eileen Khoo (Matron), Miss Crayson Wong (Clerk), Mrs Yap Ling Ling (Librarian), Mrs Tan Chew Ying (Bookkeeper), Mrs Manuela Heng (Bookroom Assistant), and Mr Murray Ong (IT Manager).

Mrs Cheng May Lynn has resigned as Staff Assistant to devote herself to full-time motherhood to her baby daughter. She continues to serve as a piano teacher.

Basic Theology for Everyone

Fourteen Basic Theology for Everyone (BTFE) courses were offered to the public on campus and online last semester: (1) Systematic Theology IV: Eschatology, (2) 1 Thessalonians, (3) Epistle of James II, (4) Cults II, (5) Childhood Christian Education, (6) Isaiah I, (7) Contemporary Theology II, (8) Church History II, (9) Sunday School Curriculum Development, (10) Minor Prophets I, (11) Women in the Bible II, (12) Hermeneutics, (13) New Testament Introduction II (Chinese), (14) Introduction to Calvinism.

End-of-Term Thanksgiving



FEBC held its end-of-term thanksgiving service on 2 May 2025 at the FEBC Hall. A thanksgiving dinner preceded the service, featuring three food stations: Chinese prawn noodles, Indonesian satay, and Filipino lechon. About a hundred people attended the dinner and service. Rev Stephen Khoo was the Lord's messenger that night, preaching on "*Faith, Hope, and Love*" (1 Cor 13:13).

Daily Vacation Bible College



The Daily Vacation Bible College (DVBC) was held from 5 to 10 May 2025 and featured a course on Biblical Counselling taught by Rev Tan Kian Sing. A total of 89 students signed up for the course. The photo above shows credit students taking the exam.

50th Graduation Service

FEBC's 50th Graduation Service was held on the Lord's Day, 11 May 2025, at Calvary Pandan Bible-Presbyterian Church. A total of 28 students graduated with their certificates and degrees: 6 with **Certificate of Religious Knowledge (CertRK)**: Chew Song En, Caleb, Chua Ban Long, Karunakar Rao Madhura, Ko Lingwei, Koh Ying Ling Felicia, Yip Chi Ching Joyce; 9 with **Certificate of Biblical Studies (CertBS)**: Celina F Frianela, Cheong Sock Wah Jodie, Lim Kwee Wah Jeanette, Ng Lay Hoon Carine, Tan Jyh Cheau, Thng Yi Lian Liz, Toh Ching Hua Eric, Yeo Heng Hock Benjamin, Zhang Yongqiang; 3 with **Diploma in Theology (DipTh)**: Lagapa Jose Trinipil II Ba-a, Nathanael Zechariah George, Tan Chung Huat Josiah; 1 with **Bachelor of Ministry (BMin)**: John Mbuya Njuguna; 3 with **Bachelor of Religious Education (BRE)**: Cho Hyeon Seo, Gouk Taehwan, Martin Eliezer Siregar; 3 with **Bachelor of Theology (BTh)**: Hkaw Du Htin Htut, Lee Hasom, Maria Mae Balbutin Durango; 1 with **Master of Ministry (MMin)**: Tann Heng; 1 with **Master of Religious Education (MRE)**: Lagapa Maria Celeste Ba-a; 1 with **Master of Divinity (MDiv)**: Jonathan Ryan Hendricks.

COLLEGE NEWS

Rev Samuel Joseph was the graduation speaker. He preached on the topic—“*Honourable Homiletics: Preaching Excellently, Truthfully, Righteously*”—based on Proverbs 8:6–8.



Briefing Before Rehearsal



Taking the Dean Burgon Oath



Cho Hyeonseo Conferred with the Degree of Bachelor of Religious Education



Gouk Taehwan Conferred with the Degree of Bachelor of Religious Education



Martin Siregar Conferred with the Degree of Bachelor of Religious Education



Htin Htut Conferred with the Degree of Bachelor of Theology



Lee Hasom Conferred with the Degree of Bachelor of Theology



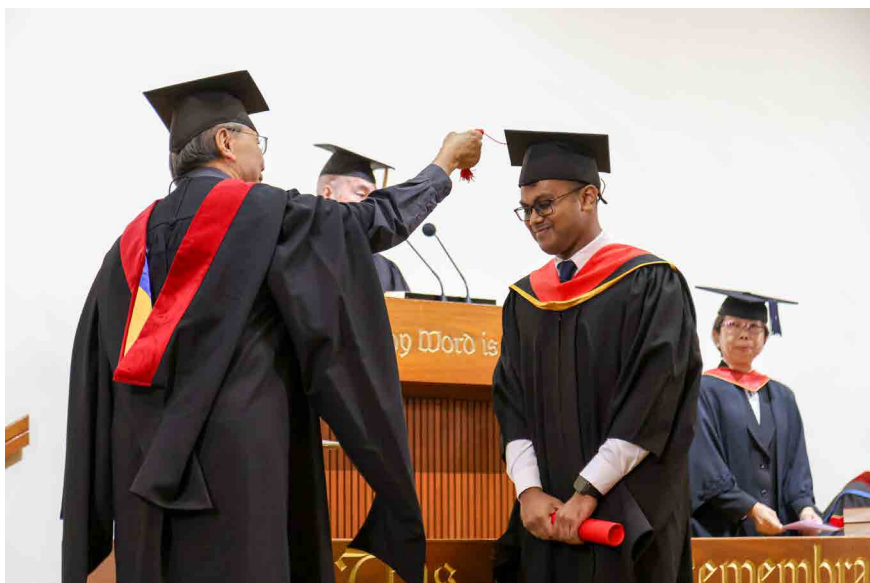
Maria Mae Durango Conferred with the Degree of Bachelor of Theology



Tann Heng Conferred with the Degree of Master of Ministry



Lagapa Maria Celeste Ba-a Conferred with the Degree of Master of Religious Education



Jonathan Hendricks Conferred with the Degree of Master of Divinity



Lee Hasom with His Missionary Parents and Brother



Rev Dr Prabhudas Koshy and Church Members



Rev Dr Jose Lagapa with Family and Friends

Annual Retreat



The annual college retreat was held at **Resort Lautan Biru (RLB)** in Mersing, Malaysia from 13 to 15 May 2025, with a total of 69 participants in attendance. Devotional messages were delivered by Rev Clement Chew, Rev Dr Haposan Siregar, Rev Zhu Jianwei, Rev Samuel Joseph, Rev Dr Koa Keng Woo, and Rev Dr Jeffrey Khoo.

During the retreat, the following graduates presented their theses: **Jonathan Ryan Hendricks**: *Church Discipline and Its Practice According to the Pauline Epistles*; **Martin Eliezer Siregar**: *A Biblical View of Entertainment*; **Cho Hyeonseo**: *The Sacredness of Life: A Biblical and Ethical Defence against Modern Justifications for Abortion*; **Maria Mae B Durango**: *Biblical Principles on Co-Labouring in the Life of Paul's Co-Labourers*; **Khaw Du Htin Htut**: *A Biblical Evaluation of the Prosperity Gospel*.

Since RLB has been put up for sale by the Board of Elders of Calvary Jaya Bible-Presbyterian Church—the trustees of RLB—this may be the last time the college holds its retreat there. We are saddened by this prospect. It is our prayer that RLB, built as a youth campsite through the vision of the late Rev Dr Timothy Tow, may continue to serve that purpose and remain a blessing to the many youth fellowship groups and small churches that have used it for Bible camps and retreats. May God's will be done.



Daily Devotional Chapel



*Matron Mrs Eileen Khoo Presenting the Story of the Building
of Resort Lautan Biru*



Celebrating Rev Dr Koa Keng Woo's 96th Birthday



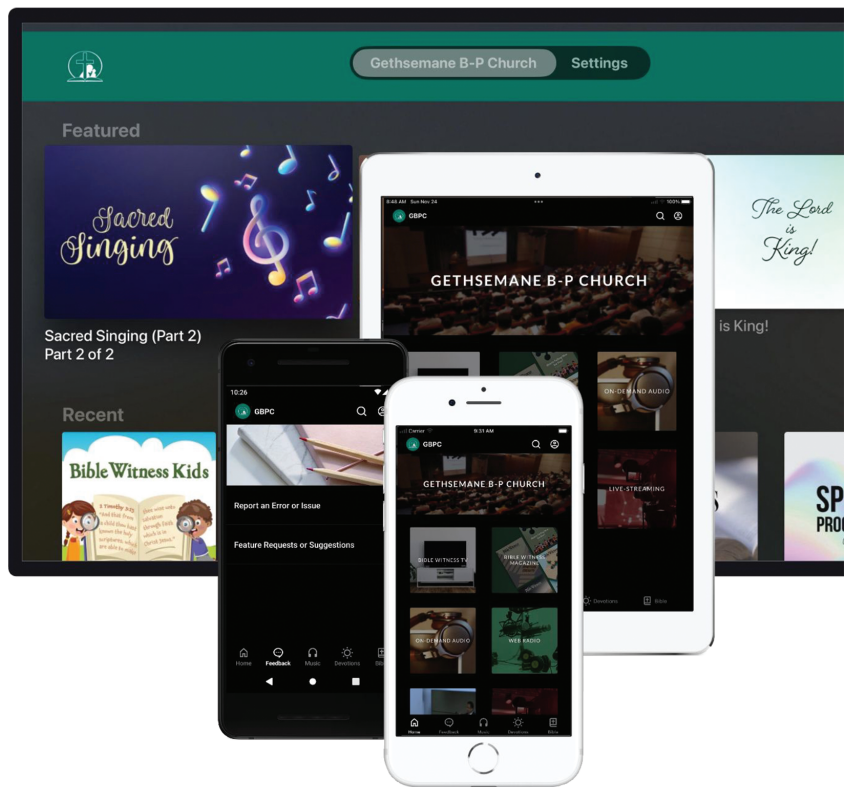
Indonesian Students Presenting a Praise Item



Lunch Time Fellowship



Playing Captain's Ball



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**Far Eastern Bible College Annual Retreat
Resort Lautan Biru, Mersing, 13-15 May 2025**



**Far Eastern Bible College
50th Graduation Service
Class of 2025**

