



The Burning Bush

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THE BURNING BUSH

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EDITORIAL: THE PERISHING PREACHER

Last year, I was invited to write an article titled “*Rescue the Perishing*,” based on John 3:16, for a missions journal. I wrote the article with that title in mind, intending it to be gospel-centred and directly evangelistic. After submitting the article, however, I was informed that it was not acceptable because it had allegedly been written out of context.

I was instructed to rewrite it “based on its context in Nicodemus’s meeting with the Lord at night.” I was told that the “perishing” referred to “professing believers, including pastors or Bible teachers like Nicodemus.” I was further instructed to show that “salvation by grace through faith was a new concept to Nicodemus, and that he could not understand what it meant to be born again because he believed salvation came through good works.” I was also advised not to cite biblical verses outside the Gospel of John, and to use verses 13 and 14 to explain the importance of faith.

Since the editorial committee desired an article written strictly within the immediate context of John 3 to address “professing believers, including pastors or Bible teachers,” I revised it according to their instructions and retitled it “Rescue the Perishing—But Is the Rescuer Himself Perishing?”

My revised submission was again rejected. This time, the advisor to the editorial committee judged that the article was not sufficiently expository and contained too much application. According to him, this rendered the paper spiritually ineffective and therefore unsuitable for publication. I respect their decision not to publish my paper.

However, I disagree that my paper was insufficiently expository. When assessed objectively, the exposition and application are, as shown below, well balanced—indeed, slightly more expositional than applicatory (58% vs. 42%).

In any case, I do not think the two articles should go to waste, as both are scripturally grounded and doctrinally sound. The first article

has since been reframed as a Christmas message titled “*Christ’s Birth and Our Rebirth*,” published in *True Life Weekly* on 14 December 2025. I now present the second article for your perusal, with the hope that it will prove enlightening and edifying.

For the benefit of homiletics students at Far Eastern Bible College, I have highlighted the expository sections (focused on biblical text, context, and theological explanation) in bold, and the applicatory sections (practical, moral, or pastoral exhortation) in italics, so as to visually distinguish them for instructional purposes.

THE PERISHING PREACHER

(Exposition in **Bold**, Application in *Italics*)

Our Lord declares in John 3:3, 16, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God ... For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

We often sing this familiar hymn to urge preachers to “rescue the perishing, care for the dying, snatch them in pity from sin and the grave, weep o’er the erring one, lift up the fallen, tell them of Jesus, the mighty to save.” But have we ever considered that preachers themselves may be perishing and in need of rescue as well?

Nicodemus was a Pharisee, and as such he was not an atheist, a sceptic, or an irreligious man, but a believer in Jehovah, a teacher of the Hebrew Scriptures, and a spiritual leader of the Jewish people. As “a ruler of the Jews,” he was highly respected in his community. Outwardly, if anyone appeared qualified for the kingdom of God, it was Nicodemus. Yet it was to this very man that Jesus said, “Ye must be born again.”

Nicodemus represents every proud and self-righteous religious person—every learned professor, pastor, or preacher—who thinks that his seminary degrees, years of service, church size, or popularity guarantee him a place in God’s kingdom. Nicodemus came by night, but the greater darkness was within his own heart. He was credentialed but not converted. Jesus saw right through his unregenerate condition: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3).

Think You Are Saved but Actually Not

When Jesus spoke of those who “perish” in John 3:16, He was not referring only to the worldly and openly sinful, but also to professing

believers, who may think themselves saved, yet are not. Nicodemus, though “a master of Israel,” was a master only of his mistaken spirituality—wrongly believing that his zeal for law-keeping and his good works could save him. He was utterly blind to his own corruption and desperate need for God’s grace.

Many a Christian, even pastors and preachers, stand in the same peril. They speak strongly against sin, even against false faith, yet fail to see the sin of pride within themselves and their very own lack of faith. They measure others harshly but are blind to their own. They can preach good sermons and lead others to the truth, and yet have never been humbled by that truth or practised it in their own lives.

The tragedy of religious pride is that it can thrive behind the pulpit and beneath the clerical collar or religious robe. Outwardly they profess the gospel of Christ, but inwardly they possess the spirit of the devil (cf. Matt 23:15, 33).

Saved by Grace, Not by Works

Nicodemus’ religion was built upon the false notion that righteousness could be obtained through the works of the Law. He believed he could earn his way to heaven. Yet Jesus declared that eternal life is given, not earned—it is received by faith, not achieved by works.

God’s love is not conditioned on human merit but springs from divine grace: “For God so loved the world”—a world of publicans and sinners, whom the Pharisees despised. In their self-righteous hypocrisy, they condemned Jesus for being “a friend of publicans and sinners.” Yet Jesus came to save sinners and lead them to repentance. In so doing, He revealed the love of His Father, who gave His only begotten Son to redeem sinners through His perfect work—to fulfil all righteousness, to sacrifice Himself on the cross for our sins, to shed His precious blood for our forgiveness, and to rise again on the third day so that all who believe in Him might live forever.

The Son of God is the only one who can truly rescue the perishing. This is why Jesus said, “For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved” (John 3:17).

The self-righteous preacher, however, often reverses this. He condemns to prove his superiority rather than to point to the Saviour. He uses the Word as a dagger against others without using it as a mirror for himself.

When the love of God touches a sinner’s heart, it melts pride and

transforms haughty, destructive spirits into humble, compassionate ones. The true preacher does not stand above sinners but walks alongside them, leading them to the Cross.

Faith in Christ Alone Saves

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:14–15).

To reveal the wonderful grace of God and the gospel of salvation by faith, Jesus reminded Nicodemus of the bronze serpent that Moses lifted in the wilderness. The proud and rebellious had been bitten by serpents and were dying—hopeless, helpless, and hell-bound. There was nothing they could do to save themselves. There was only one way out: to look at the uplifted serpent. By looking at it, they lived.

So must the Son of Man be lifted up and made a curse for us. The parallel is clear: Salvation comes not by doing, but by looking. The dying Israelite was healed by faith, not by effort. Likewise, the sinner—yes, even the preacher—is saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, according to Scripture alone, and to the glory of God alone.

“He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already” (John 3:18). This is a truthful and loving warning. The unbeliever’s condemnation is not future—it is present. Nicodemus, despite all his religiosity, was already under judgement until he believed. It is not religion that saves, but regeneration—**“Ye must be born again.”**

This truth should sober every preacher who trusts more in his ministry than in his Master. One may preach grace, yet never taste it; one may teach the new birth, yet not be born again; one may condemn the sins of others while still being condemned himself.

The only cure is to cast oneself upon the mercy of God in Christ—for He alone is the way from darkness to light, from death to life.

Pride Casts Down, Humility Lifts Up

Nicodemus’ journey gives hope to every proud and conceited heart. The man who came by night would later defend Jesus before his peers and finally step into the light to prepare His body for burial (John 7:50, 19:39). Grace conquered pride, and love overcame self-deception.

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So it must be with those who preach today. Let every preacher examine himself: Do I just know about Christ—or do I truly know Him in a real and personal way? How can I claim to know Him if I am so loveless and unloving? The Apostle John writes, “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God” (1 John 4:7–8).

John 3:16–18 calls all who profess faith, even pastors and teachers, to repent—not of ignorance, but of arrogance. The proud perish, but the humble believe. The judgemental condemn with a self-righteous spirit, but the forgiven proclaim the truth of grace from a heart of charity and humility. Let every heart come out of the deadly night of self-righteousness into the glorious light of the Saviour’s love. Salvation comes not by performance at the pulpit, but by prostration before the Saviour; not by prowess in preaching, but by power in believing the gospel.

To God be all glory and honour. Amen. JK

WHY WE BELIEVE GOD HAS PRESERVED HIS WORD

Jeffrey Khoo

Many Christians today hear that the Bible's text is uncertain—that scholars are still trying to reconstruct what the original Scriptures said. This raises an important question: Do we really possess the Word of God today in all its fulness? The doctrine of Verbal Plenary Preservation (VPP) answers with a confident yes.

This article argues that the doctrine of VPP provides a coherent theological framework for identifying the authentic and authoritative biblical text. By distinguishing the rationalistic presuppositions of mainstream textual criticism from the biblical-theological axioms grounded in divine revelation, it demonstrates how the epangelical, linguistic, temporal, historical, ecclesiastical, evangelistic, and doxological axioms of VPP will lead to the recognition of the Hebrew Masoretic Text and the Greek Textus Receptus as the providentially preserved Scriptures. The debate ultimately concerns epistemology—the study of knowing and knowledge. The central question is whether certainty about Scripture rests upon scholarly reconstruction or upon God's promises fulfilled in history.

Modern-day liberal scholarship, and evangelical scholarship that follows the same methodological naturalism regarding preservation often presents textual criticism as a neutral scientific enterprise whose conclusions are compelled solely by manuscript evidence and naturalistic presuppositions. The problem with this kind of a scholarship is that it yields no fixed and final standard text, but only an ever-changing and evolving one. A text that remains in continual flux cannot adequately sustain the Reformation principle of *Sola Scriptura*, for Scripture cannot function as the absolute and supreme authority if its precise form remains perpetually subject to revision.¹

For this reason, the doctrine of VPP challenges this assumption at its root. VPP contends that the preservation of Scripture is not merely a historical possibility but a historical reality and more importantly a

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theological necessity grounded in the promises and providence of God, whereby the Church possesses the Word of God not only in its perfect inspiration but also in its faithful preservation.²

Thus, the central question is not merely, *Which reading is earliest?* but rather, *Where has God preserved His Word for His Church?*

Textual Criticism versus Verbal Plenary Preservation

Classical textual criticism is based upon several assumptions: that the older reading is better, the harder reading is better, and the shorter reading is better. These assumptions arose through the work of scholars such as Johann Albrecht Bengel, Johann Jakob Griesbach, and later Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort. Crucially, these are not biblical axioms but empirically-devised guidelines—probabilities derived from observed scribal tendencies. As such, modern textual criticism produces not certainty but continually revised critical editions. Its method is fundamentally reconstructive and at times speculative: the original text is agreed to be no longer existing and fully retrievable. Thus, the best scholarship can do is to get as close as possible to the lost original through scholarly analysis, but absolute certainty concerning its text is impossible.

On the other hand, VPP begins from Scripture's own doctrine of itself. If Scripture is verbally inspired, preservation logically follows from God's character and promises (Ps 12:6–7; Matt 5:18; Isa 40:8). The Westminster Confession of Faith 1.8 summarises the historic Protestant position: "The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which at the time of the writing of it was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and by His singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentical; so as in all controversies of religion the church is finally to appeal unto them."³ Preservation, therefore, is not inferred from manuscripts; it is confessed because God has spoken in the canonical Scriptures.

Where textual criticism begins with evidence and seeks conclusions, VPP begins with revelation and interprets history accordingly.

The Axioms of Verbal Plenary Preservation

The doctrine of preservation unfolds through seven theological axioms that collectively function as principles of recognition.⁴

(1) The Epangelical Axiom—Divine Promise

God has promised to preserve His Word. Therefore, the authentic text must exist in identifiable form and be available to believers in every age. Perpetual textual uncertainty contradicts divine intention.

(2) The Linguistic Axiom—Preservation of Words

Preservation applies to words, not merely ideas or concepts. The authentic text must therefore be the Hebrew and Greek text and not any translation, although a faithful translation shares in its authenticity in a derivative sense.

(3) The Temporal Axiom—Continuous Availability

The Church was never without Scripture. The preserved text cannot be the one lost for centuries and only later recovered through modern discoveries and reconstruction.

(4) The Historical Axiom—Providential Transmission

The Word of God is preserved through the ordinary historical processes of transmission—copying and printing—yet under the special superintendence of divine providence, which may at times involve extraordinary intervention.

(5) The Ecclesiastical Axiom—Custodianship of God's Chosen

Scripture was entrusted to the covenant community. The preserved text must therefore be that which is received, used, and confessed by Israel for the Old Testament and by His Church for the New Testament, rather than the modern critical texts that are continually edited and revised by academia under the influence of human rationalism.

(6) The Evangelistic Axiom—Missionary Utility

The Great Commission presupposes a trustworthy Bible suitable for proclamation. The preserved text will be demonstrably connected to the global spread of the gospel and to episodes of great revivals throughout history.

(7) The Doxological Axiom—Glory to God

The preserved text is that which magnifies God's sovereignty and faithfulness, and Christ's perfect deity and humanity, thereby giving believers confidence in their Saviour and in His Scripture.

From Axioms to Textual Identification

When applied cumulatively, these axioms yield identifiable historical characteristics. The preserved text must be continuously available, verbally intact, historically transmitted, ecclesiastically received, evangelistically fruitful, doctrinally certain, and supremely glorifying to its Author and Keeper.

These criteria converge historically upon two textual traditions:

(1) The Hebrew Masoretic Text

The Masoretic Text exhibits remarkable scribal precision and uninterrupted transmission within the covenant people of God. It represents the stable Hebrew text received throughout Jewish and Christian history and used by the Reformers. It satisfies the linguistic inspiredness, temporal continuity, historical transmission, and ecclesiastical reception of the text.

(2) The Greek Textus Receptus

The Greek text of the Protestant Reformation reflects the Byzantine ecclesiastical text preserved through widespread manuscript transmission and long usage within the Church, culminating in its final printed form. This text formed the basis of the 16th-century Reformation and subsequent vernacular Bibles, including the King James Version (KJV), which served as the principal missionary Bible of Protestant Christianity for centuries. It fulfils, in a unique way, all seven of the above axioms.

The difference between VPP and modern textual criticism is fundamentally epistemological—*How do we know what we know?*

Textual Criticism	Verbal Plenary Preservation
Begins with human assumptions	Begins with divine promise
Reconstructs text	Recognises preserved text
Produces probability	Confesses certainty
Authority located in academy	Authority grounded in Scripture

Textual criticism treats the Church as awaiting scholarly recovery of Scripture. VPP affirms that God has always preserved His inspired words for His people.

Adopting VPP safeguards several classical Reformed and Protestant convictions concerning the inerrancy, authority, sufficiency, canonicity,

and perspicuity of Scripture. Certainty regarding the text is thus grounded not in the judgements of specialists, but in the spiritual consensus of the Church's witness to Scripture under the providential guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The debate therefore concerns not merely textual data but the doctrine of God and His faithfulness. Critics argue that VPP imposes theology upon textual evidence. Yet all textual methodologies operate from presuppositions. While modern criticism assumes that textual corruption and uncertainty are historically inevitable, VPP affirms the divine preservation of Scripture. The question is not whether presuppositions exist, but which presupposition accords with Scripture's own testimony. Since Christians are called to study God's Word, and since this Word is indeed God's Word, it is vital that God is not excluded from the process of identifying and interpreting His Word.

Verbal Plenary Preservation Applied through Legal Evidence

The doctrine of VPP affirms that the God who inspired every word of Holy Scripture has also faithfully preserved every word throughout history, so that His people today possess an authentic and authoritative Bible. While this perspective is fundamentally theological, its truth may also be illustrated by principles long recognised in the field of law.⁵ In the reasoning used by courts of justice in determining the authenticity of ancient documents, we find a striking analogy for understanding the preservation of Scripture, namely the legal principles of proper repository and opposing witnesses.

The Legal Principle of the Proper Repository

In courts of law, an ancient document does not require direct proof of authorship to be accepted as genuine. Courts recognise a principle known as custody in the proper repository.

An ancient writing is presumed authentic when it is found in the place where such a document would naturally be kept, has been preserved by persons responsible for maintaining such records, and bears no evident marks of fraud or forgery. Under these conditions, the law does not demand that authenticity first be proven. Rather, authenticity is presumed. The burden of proof lies upon the party who alleges corruption or falsification.

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This legal presumption reflects what jurists sometimes call the “judgement of charity”: just as a person is presumed innocent until proven guilty, so an ancient document preserved in its proper custody is presumed genuine until disproved.

When this principle is applied to the Holy Scriptures, the parallel becomes clear. The Bible has never appeared as a hidden or privately discovered text. It was not produced secretly or from unknown sources. Instead, from the very beginning, the Scriptures have existed in the open life of the covenant community. They were publicly issued, read in congregational worship, copied for ecclesiastical use, translated for missionary expansion, and universally recognised as the rule of faith. Thus, the Church constitutes the proper repository of Scripture. The Bible is found precisely where one would expect God’s Word to be found—among God’s people. This observation harmonises directly with the VPP principle that Scripture was entrusted to the covenant community for preservation.

A frequent objection raised against certainty of the biblical text concerns the loss of the original manuscripts. Yet the law again provides illumination. Courts routinely accept copies of ancient documents when the originals have perished, provided that the documents concern matters of public interest, numerous copies were produced, and the community had a vested interest in their accurate transmission. In such cases, copyists function effectively as agents of the people at large. Their work carries authority precisely because the documents were continually used, examined, and relied upon.

The history of Scripture fits this pattern perfectly. The multiplication of biblical manuscripts was not a private or accidental process but a public and ecclesiastical one. Believers across generations copied the text for worship, doctrine, and instruction, thereby participating in the divine means of biblical preservation for their edification. VPP therefore recognises that preservation resides not in lost autographs but in faithfully transmitted apographs—the copies received and used by the Church.

The Legal Principle of Opposing Witnesses

There is another legal principle that strengthens the argument for authenticity. When documents are preserved under the scrutiny of parties with differing interests, the likelihood of corruption is greatly reduced. Throughout church history, numerous Christian communities disagreed

sharply in doctrine and practice, yet all appealed to the same Scriptures as their supreme authority. These opposing groups thus functioned as checks and balances; any deliberate alteration by one party would have been exposed and corrected by others so that controversy itself became a means of preserving the purity of the biblical text.

An illustrative example may be seen even within the history of modern critical editions. The 1881 Greek New Testament edited by Westcott and Hort removed the *Pericope Adulterae* (John 7:53–8:11) from the main continuous text on the grounds of manuscript evidence. This decision generated significant concern among many Christians, pastors, and scholars, since the passage had long been received and read within the Church. Subsequent critical editions, including those underlying the United Bible Societies Greek New Testament, restored the passage to its traditional location, though enclosed within brackets or accompanied by critical notes expressing scholarly doubt regarding its originality. From the standpoint of VPP, the tenacity of the traditional text is never in doubt.

This episode demonstrates an important evidential principle: texts that have been continuously received and used by the Church possess a remarkable resilience under God's singular care and providence. Even where scholarly attempts are made to displace them, the weight of historical reception and ecclesiastical usage exerts a corrective influence. The enduring presence of the passage illustrates how the widely received text resists permanent exclusion, confirming that the biblical text has been preserved not merely by scholarly decision but through the living witness of the Church under divine oversight and guidance.

This historical reality provides what may rightly be called an "extraordinary evidential safeguard." The integrity of the biblical text was preserved not through indifference, but through vigilant opposition to any attempt at corruption. Such historical oversight accords with the VPP understanding of providential preservation: God superintended historical circumstances—including theological controversy itself—to guard His Word from corruption.

A crucial implication follows. If an ancient charter universally received and acted upon for centuries were produced in a court of law, no judge would demand that its authenticity be proven anew. The presumption would favour genuineness. The challenger would bear the responsibility of proving fraud. Likewise, the Scriptures have been continuously received, universally appealed to, authoritatively obeyed, and

historically preserved within the Church.

Therefore, according to sound evidential reasoning, Christians are not obliged to demonstrate afresh that Scripture is authentic. Rather, those who allege corruption must establish their claim. This reasoning aligns closely with VPP's methodological stance. The doctrine begins not with scepticism requiring reconstruction, but with divine preservation recognised through historical reception.

The same principle applies to manuscripts long lost or unknown to the Church and only recently discovered. Early witnesses such as Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus should not be granted automatic authority merely on account of their antiquity, but must be carefully evaluated. Their early date alone does not overturn the presumption established by the text continuously received and used throughout Church history. Dean Burgon of Oxford has argued convincingly that these manuscripts are among "the most scandalously corrupt copies extant".⁶ Hence, antiquity by itself does not confer authenticity; agreement with the historically received Scriptures remains an important evidential consideration.

Nevertheless, it must be emphasised that VPP ultimately rests upon theology rather than jurisprudence. The doctrine arises from God's promises concerning His Word—His faithfulness, sovereignty, and covenantal commitment to preserve Scripture throughout the ages for His people. The legal analogy does not create the doctrine but illustrates its reasonableness. Law shows *how* preserved documents are recognised in history. Theology explains why Scripture must be preserved—because God has willed it so. Thus, legal evidence and theological conviction converge.

The principles governing ancient documentary evidence in courts of justice therefore provide a compelling analogy for the doctrine of VPP. The Holy Scriptures stand before humanity as ancient documents preserved in their proper repository, publicly transmitted, vigilantly guarded, and universally received by the Church throughout the centuries. Accordingly, the Bible is not an uncertain reconstruction awaiting archaeological discovery or critical scholarly recovery. It is the Word of God that has been extraordinarily preserved by the singular care and providence of God and presently possessed by the covenant community who receives His Word by faith. In this sense, legal reasoning serves to confirm what faith already confesses: The God who inspired His Word

has also preserved it, so that His Church may confidently hear, preach, and obey the Scriptures as the infallible and inerrant revelation of God.

Case Study: Verbal Plenary Preservation and the Authenticity of Acts 15:34

The question is sometimes raised concerning certain verses in the Textus Receptus that are thought to challenge the doctrine of VPP. Recently, attention has been drawn to Acts 15:34: “*Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still.*” Since this verse is not found in the majority of extant manuscripts—as many readings of the Textus Receptus are—why is it nevertheless regarded as authentic and part of the original text?

The VPP acceptance of this verse rests principally upon faith grounded in biblical truth and principles: “*Through faith we understand...*” (Heb 11:3). Such faith is not irrational but rests upon God’s infallible Word, by which He guides human understanding in matters of text, history, and doctrine.

In light of God’s special providential care over history, we believe that during the 16th-century Reformation—when the printed text came to prominence—God in His providence guided His Church to receive the traditional text as the authentic and authoritative form of Scripture (cf. Westminster Confession of Faith 1.8).

Scripture itself teaches the doctrine of VPP (Matt 5:18, Ps 12:6–7), and the Holy Spirit continues to guide God’s people into truth (John 16:13). Therefore, certainty does not rest on fallible human reconstruction but on the certainty of God’s omniscience and extraordinary providential preservation of His Word.

It should also be noted that the omission of Acts 15:34 would leave a narrative gap: after Judas and Silas return to Jerusalem (vv. 32–33), Silas reappears in Acts 15:40 as Paul’s companion for the missionary journey. Acts 15:34 provides a natural explanation for his presence in Antioch, preserving the continuity of the account. The internal evidence therefore supports its inclusion.

Our recognition of the authenticity of Acts 15:34 is thus grounded in divine providence and preservation, affirmed by Scripture, confessed in the historic faith of the Church, and supported by the internal coherence of the biblical narrative, rather than by textual criticism as the final authority.

Verbal Plenary Preservation Is Not KJV-Onlyism

Besides textual criticism, there is also the issue of KJV-Onlyism. In contemporary discussions concerning the doctrine of Scripture, VPP is frequently confused with KJV-Onlyism. Although the two positions may appear similar at first glance due to their shared appreciation for the KJV, they represent fundamentally different theological claims regarding authority, preservation, and translation.

VPP affirms that the same God who inspired the Scriptures has also preserved them in all their original language words, rather than in any single translation. Preservation, therefore, concerns the inspired words themselves, not a later linguistic rendering.

According to VPP, the providentially preserved text of the Old Testament is found in the Hebrew Masoretic Text, while the preserved New Testament text is represented by the Greek Textus Receptus. These texts are understood to be identifiable within the history of the covenant community through continuous use, transmission, and reception by the Church.

Within this framework, translations possess derived authority. A translation is authoritative insofar as it faithfully conveys the preserved original-language text. The authority of Scripture thus remains rooted in the Hebrew and Greek words that God inspired and preserved, while faithful translations serve as reliable witnesses to those words for believers who do not read the original languages.

Proponents of VPP therefore affirm the excellence and reliability of the KJV without attributing inspiration to it. The KJV is regarded as an exceptionally faithful translation of the preserved text, but not as an inspired document in itself.⁷

KJV-Onlyism, by contrast, encompasses a range of positions that elevate them beyond the role assigned to translations within classical Protestant theology. Some forms of KJV-Onlyism assert that the KJV itself is uniquely inspired or perfectly preserved in English. Others claim that the KJV may correct the Hebrew and Greek texts, or that it alone should be used by the Church.

Such claims relocate ultimate authority from the original-language Scriptures to a particular English translation. In certain expressions of the view, inspiration is effectively extended beyond the autographs to include the KJV itself. This represents a significant theological departure from

the historic Protestant doctrine of inspiration, which confines inspiration strictly to the original writings given by the prophets and apostles.

The essential difference between the two positions lies in the locus of biblical authority. VPP maintains the classical Reformation principle that authority resides in the inspired Hebrew and Greek Scriptures preserved by God. Translations derive their authority from faithfulness to that preserved text.

KJV-Onlyism, however, often places ultimate authority in a translation rather than in the original languages. For this reason, advocates of VPP generally reject KJV-Onlyism while simultaneously affirming the enduring value of the KJV as a faithful witness to the preserved Word of God.

In summary, VPP seeks to uphold both divine preservation and historic Protestant bibliology: inspiration belongs to the autographs, preservation belongs to God's providential care of the inspired words in the original languages, and translations serve the Church by transmitting those preserved words to every generation and language.

Conclusion

So why do we believe in the Verbal Plenary Preservation (VPP) of Holy Writ? It is because VPP offers a coherent theological account of how God has preserved His inspired Word throughout history. The seven axioms of preservation function not as arbitrary assertions but as doctrinal necessities arising from divine revelation itself. Rooted in God's promises, grounded in the nature of language, confirmed through historical transmission, and manifested in the life of the covenant community, these axioms provide a principled framework for recognising the preserved text of Holy Scripture.

When applied together, they lead naturally to the recognition of the Hebrew Masoretic Text and the Greek Textus Receptus as the providentially preserved Scriptures received, recognised, and transmitted by the Church, particularly during the great era of the Protestant Reformation and the worldwide proclamation of the gospel that followed.

At this point, an important theological distinction must be maintained. The doctrine of VPP must not be confused with KJV-Onlyism. VPP does not teach that the KJV is inspired, perfect, or superior to the original languages. Rather, it affirms that God preserved the inspired Hebrew and Greek words themselves, and that translations

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possess authority only insofar as they faithfully represent those preserved texts. The KJV is therefore highly esteemed as an exceptionally faithful and accurate translation of the Masoretic Text and Textus Receptus, but it does not replace the authority of the original-language Scriptures.

Thus, VPP stands within the historic Reformed and Protestant doctrine of Scripture: inspiration belongs uniquely to the autographs, preservation belongs to God's special providential care of the inspired words, and faithful translations serve the Church by conveying those preserved words to all nations. Properly understood, VPP neither produces scepticism regarding the text of Scripture nor elevates a translation beyond its proper role. Instead, it safeguards the Church's confidence that the God who inspired His Word has also preserved it so that His people today possess an authentic, authoritative, and fully trustworthy Bible.

Notes

1 For examples, see Bart D Erhman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2005), and Daniel B Wallace, "Inspiration, Preservation, and New Testament Textual Criticism", *Grace Theological Journal* 12 (1992): 21–50. For a critique, see W Gary Crampton, "Bart D. Ehrman & Daniel B. Wallace in Dialogue: The Reliability of The New Testament", ed. Robert B Stewart, *The Trinity Review* (July–August 2012): 1–7.

2 Jeffrey Khoo, ed., *Forever Infallible and Inerrant: Remembering God's Extraordinary Providence in Preserving His Inspired Words through the Traditional and Reformation Texts Underlying the King James Bible* (Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College Press, 2011).

3 Garnet Howard Milne, *Has the Bible Been Kept Pure? The Westminster Confession of Faith and the Providential Preservation of Scripture* (San Bernardino: [n.p.], 2017).

4 Jeffrey Khoo, "Seven Biblical Axioms in Ascertaining the Authentic and Authoritative Texts of the Holy Scriptures", *The Burning Bush* (2011): 74–95.

5 See Simon Greenleaf, *An Examination of the Testimony of the Four Evangelists by the Rules of Evidence Administered in Courts of Justice*, 2nd ed. (London: A Maxwell and Son, 1847), 70–73. Simon Greenleaf (1783–1853) was a lawyer, jurist, and legal scholar renowned for his foundational contributions to the law of evidence and his professorship at Harvard University. His *Treatise on the Law of Evidence* (3 volumes) is considered a classic of American jurisprudence.

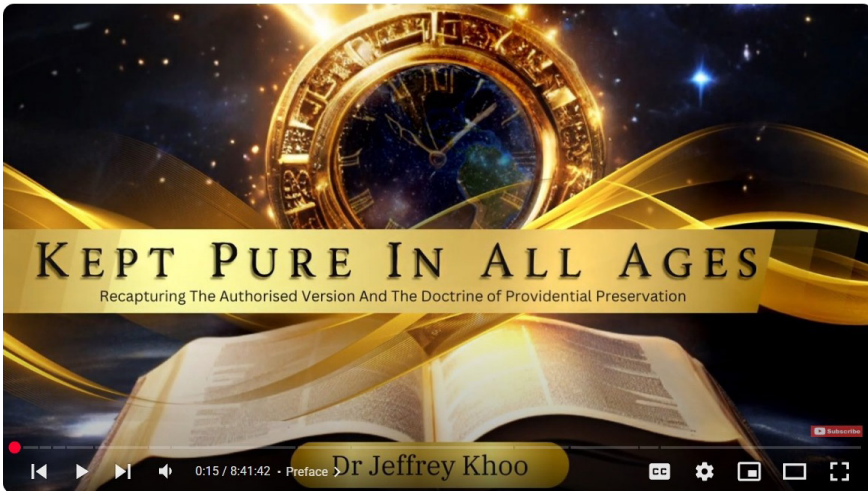
6 John William Burgon, *The Revision Revised* (Collingswood: Dean Burgon Society Press, repr 2000), 16.

7 See Jeffrey Khoo, *Kept Pure in All Ages: Recapturing the Authorised Version and the*

The Burning Bush 32/2 (July 2026)

Doctrine of Providential Preservation (Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College Press, 2001) and *KJV Questions & Answers* (Singapore: Bible Witness Literature Ministry, 2003).

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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 WORD THAT STANDS: A PASTORAL CONVERSATION ON THE PRESENT PERFECTION OF SCRIPTURE AND THE TEXTS UNDERLYING THE KING JAMES BIBLE

Zhu Xinkai

This paper is meant to be a pastoral persuasion—an extended conversation with a fellow believer who sincerely confesses the inspiration of Scripture but has not yet followed that conviction through to its implications for the Bible he holds in his hands today. The question I want him to face is not theoretical. It is the question a Chinese Christian must face when his people ask why two translations say different things about the same verse: What exactly is the Word of God, and where is it now?

What strikes me is that this question—so basic, so urgent—is rarely faced with full seriousness in evangelical circles. We have learned to affirm inspiration while living with uncertainty about the text, as though these were compatible convictions rather than tensions that must be resolved. I want to suggest that this capacity to hold both together is not a mark of depth but a sign that we have not yet thought our doctrine of Scripture through to the end.

The argument that follows moves in three rounds, each probing a deeper layer of the issue. Throughout I draw on *Forever Infallible and Inerrant*¹, not to reproduce its contents, but to press some of its most searching insights further and to apply them with pastoral directness to a believer who has never had reason to examine these matters carefully.

Round One: Why “Today” Is the Only Question That Matters

Most evangelical believers, if asked whether the Bible is infallible and inerrant, will say yes without hesitation. But press a little further—“Is the Bible you are holding right now infallible and inerrant?”—and the hesitation begins. Some will say: “Well, the original manuscripts were.” Others: “We believe what we have is essentially reliable.” These answers, however well-intentioned, conceal a profound theological instability.

I want to say to my friend: the word “essentially” is doing enormous work in your theology, and it is work that God never asked it to do. Scripture does not promise us an “essentially” preserved Word. Christ did not say, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall mostly survive.” The qualifying language we have learned to accept as epistemic humility is, when examined honestly, a quiet surrender of the ground on which all Christian confidence stands. Once we admit that the Bible we hold is only approximately God’s Word, we have already lost the argument—not with the sceptic, but with ourselves.

Here is the argument I would lay before him as clearly as I know how to state it. Inspiration means that God is the ultimate author of every word of Scripture. The question of preservation is not a separate question—it is the same question asked one step later. Does God care what happens to His words after He speaks them? Is He the kind of author who dictates a perfect letter and then abandons it to the hazards of transmission? The God revealed in Scripture is not. He is the God who numbers the hairs of our heads, who notes the fall of every sparrow, who holds the waters of the sea in the hollow of His hand. It is not possible to believe in that God and simultaneously believe He was indifferent to whether His own words survived intact.

Dr Timothy Tow’s formulation, cited in *Forever Infallible and Inerrant*, puts the logical point with admirable economy: to hold inspiration without preservation is as incoherent as Deism—the belief in a Creator who creates and then disengages. A God who inspires but does not preserve is, functionally, a deist God in the realm of revelation. He has spoken, and then He left the room. And Dr Carl McIntire pressed the pastoral implication even further, asking how it is possible to speak of a mighty, all-powerful God and then confess that this God was unable to give His people a record that is true. The two affirmations cannot stand together. Either God is able to preserve His Word or He is not; and if He is not, the entire evangelical apparatus of biblical authority rests on a foundation that has already been conceded to the enemy.

At this point in the conversation I would open the Bible itself, because Verbal Plenary Preservation (VPP) is not merely a logical inference from the doctrine of God—it is an explicit biblical promise. Psalm 12:6–7 is foundational. The psalmist moves in a single breath from the character of God’s words—“*pure words, as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times*”—to God’s personal commitment to those words: “*Thou shalt*

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keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever." The refining image is precise: silver does not become purer by accident; it is purified by deliberate, intense process. And what emerges is kept. The same God who subjects His words to the furnace of inspiration also guards what comes out of it.

Matthew 5:18 narrows the promise to its most demanding particularity: not one jot—the smallest Hebrew letter—and not one tittle—the smallest distinguishing stroke—shall pass from the law. Christ is promising the survival of Scripture at the sub-lexical level. Matthew 24:35 then frames it cosmically: "*Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away*"—a statement so foundational that all three Synoptic Gospels record it identically. John 10:35 adds the complementary truth: "*the scripture cannot be broken*"—*luthēnai*, to be dissolved, destroyed, undone. These are not mild expressions of general confidence. They are absolute, unqualified divine commitments. If they are true, they must be true of some text we can actually hold. A promise of preservation that refers only to manuscripts no longer extant is not a promise at all—it is a theological abstraction that cannot sustain a believer in a prison cell or comfort a dying man.

The autographs-only position—the view that inerrancy applies only to original manuscripts we no longer possess—creates an epistemic situation with no exit. If the autographs were perfect but all copies are uncertain, we have placed actual authority over Scripture not in God but in the discipline of textual criticism. Scholars become the mediating class through whom ordinary believers must pass to know what God actually said. The Reformation's great cry was that every believer stands directly before the Word of God without a priestly mediator. The autographs-only position re-erects that mediating class—not priests this time, but professors.

Theodore Letis's historical work, drawn upon in *Forever Infallible and Inerrant*, showed that this position is not the ancient Reformed faith but a 19th-century innovation. Under pressure from the rising discipline of textual criticism, Princeton Seminary theologians quietly shifted inerrancy from the texts believers actually held to hypothetical originals no critic could examine. It was a strategic retreat presented as a principled stand—and it has cost the church dearly. Generations of believers have been taught to believe in a perfect Bible they can never read, and to hold with only qualified confidence the imperfect Bible they actually have. The spiritual consequences of this are not difficult to see: a congregation whose pastor

regularly notes that “this passage is disputed” or that “some manuscripts read differently” is a congregation being slowly taught to read Scripture with a built-in hesitation, a hermeneutic of suspicion masquerading as scholarly honesty.

I have seen what this does in practice. When I served among Chinese-speaking believers who could not read Greek or Hebrew, who had no access to commentaries or critical apparatuses, they nonetheless held their Bibles with a confidence that shamed many seminary-trained men I know. They believed that what they held was God’s Word. Not approximately. Not essentially. They were right to believe this. And the theology that would undermine that confidence—however sophisticated its apparatus—is doing the devil’s work, regardless of the intentions behind it.

Round Two: Where the Preserved Word Is Found

Once my friend has grasped that inspiration demands preservation, his next question will be the right one: Where? The answer is found by asking a prior question: How has God typically chosen to preserve what He entrusts to human care?

The answer Scripture gives is consistent. God preserves His Word through His covenant people. He gave the Old Testament oracles to Israel—not to Egypt, not to Rome. Paul says this plainly in Romans 3:2: “*unto them were committed the oracles of God.*” The Masoretes understood themselves as custodians of a sacred deposit. Their methods—counting every letter, word, and verse, destroying pages with as few as three errors—were acts of theological reverence. The Ben Chayyim Masoretic text, underlying the Old Testament of the KJV, is the fruit of that centuries-long custodianship. The same principle applies to the New Testament. The Greek text that emerged from orthodox, apostolic transmission—attested across thousands of manuscripts, used in liturgy, preached from pulpits—is what we call the Textus Receptus, the Received Text. It is received not because a committee decreed it so but because the faithful church, across centuries, handled it, wore it out, and copied it again.

There is an important distinction to press here. The ecclesiological criterion for identifying the preserved text is not simply that the majority of Christians used a particular text. It is that the orthodox, apostolic communities—those maintaining the faith once delivered to the saints—received and transmitted it. The Alexandrian tradition, which shaped the manuscripts modern critics prefer, emerged in a context where Gnostic

speculation and allegorical interpretation flourished alongside orthodox faith. The texts that were received, copied, and transmitted by the churches most committed to apostolic doctrine are a different witness from those that survived in monasteries at the edges of the orthodox world. This is not a prejudice against Alexandria; it is a principled application of the same test we apply elsewhere in theology: not every tradition claiming the name of Christ is equally trustworthy.

The liturgical and doxological significance of the Traditional Text also deserves mention. The words that believers have prayed, chanted, and memorised across the centuries—the doxology of the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:13, the fuller Trinitarian benediction in passages like 1 John 5:7—are present in the Received Text and absent or bracketed in the critical text. To excise them is not merely a textual decision; it is a decision about the devotional and liturgical memory of the whole church. A text that removes what the church has been saying to God for centuries is doing something more than correcting scribal errors—it is rewriting the church's prayer.

The critical text underlying most modern versions privileges two manuscripts—Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus—on the grounds of their age. But antiquity is not the same as authenticity. A corrupt copy from the second century is still corrupt. And there is good reason to think these manuscripts were not simply old but unused—they survived precisely because the church set them aside. The manuscript truly received by the faithful was the one copied until it fell apart; that is why the majority tradition is preserved in thousands of manuscripts rather than two.

Dean Burgon's observations, reflected throughout *Forever Infallible and Inerrant*, deserve to be taken with full seriousness. He noted that Vaticanus and Sinaiticus not only differ dramatically from the Traditional Text but contradict each other with remarkable frequency. This is a fact of first importance. If these two codices represent a purer, common original, we would expect them to converge. Instead, they diverge from each other as sharply as they diverge from the majority—suggesting not that they preserve an earlier text but that they represent distinct local traditions marked by their own corruptions. The Westcott-Hort theory of a "Syrian recension" was posited to explain this divergence; subsequent papyrological discoveries have not vindicated it, yet its ghost still haunts the apparatus of modern critical editions.

More disturbing still is what the critical text removes. Mark

16:9–20—the resurrection appearances and the missionary mandate—is bracketed. John 7:53–8:11—the woman taken in adultery, a scene every pastor has preached beside the broken—is marked doubtful. And 1 John 5:7, the Johannine Comma, the only verse in the New Testament that directly names the three Persons as one, is absent entirely. I would ask my friend a simple question: Can a God who promised to preserve His Word allow the fullest statement of Trinitarian unity and the resurrection narratives grounding our gospel to be absent from what His church possessed and used for a millennium? The answer to that question is the answer to the text-critical question.

I would then bring my friend to Westminster Confession of Faith 1.8—not as a trump card but as a witness to what the church, at its theological best, has always understood. The Confession speaks of the Scriptures as “by His singular care and providence kept pure in all ages.” Singular care—not ordinary providence but God’s extraordinary, particular oversight. Kept pure—not approximately preserved, not essentially intact, but pure. In all ages—not only in the age of the apostles but in every age, including ours.

This is the Reformed faith. And it is important that my friend understand that the autographs-only position is not a recovery of this faith but a departure from it. John Owen, Francis Turretin, the Westminster divines—they were not defending autographs. They were defending the apographs in their hands, because those apographs were what God had preserved. Owen stated it directly: when he spoke of the “original texts,” he did not mean the lost autographs but the apographs actually in use—“because they set forth to us the Word of God in the very words of those who wrote under the immediate inspiration of the Holy Spirit.” The clarity of that statement ought to settle the matter for anyone who wishes to stand in the Reformed tradition.

Round Three: Why the Reformation Bible Is the Standard

Here is where I expect the most resistance. My friend may accept VPP in principle and the Traditional Text in theory, but he will ask: Does this really mean I must use the KJV? Is this not cultural conservatism dressed in theological language? I want to answer honestly.

The authority does not reside in the English translation. It resides in the Hebrew and Greek texts—the Masoretic Text and the Textus Receptus—from which faithful translations derive. To say the KJV is the

standard is shorthand for saying: it is the most faithful, most tested, most theologically rigorous English translation of the texts God has preserved. It is derivative authority—the authority of a faithful ambassador who perfectly represents his sovereign. But it is real authority nonetheless. And the question of which English translation best represents those preserved texts is not a trivial one; it is the question that determines what English-speaking believers will actually read, memorise, preach, and stake their lives on.

What makes a translation faithful? Translation philosophy is not a technical detail. It is a theological commitment. The KJV translators worked with a principle since largely abandoned: that the form of God's Word—not merely its sense—matters. Verbal inspiration implies verbal translation. If God chose specific words, not merely specific ideas, then a translation that substitutes the translator's interpretive paraphrase for those words has already made a decision that belongs to God, not to man. The KJV's commitment to formal equivalence is not wooden literalism; it is theological fidelity. It says: these words are God's words, and I will render them as closely as the genius of English allows.

Modern dynamic-equivalence translations make a different bet. They trust the translator's judgement about what the original means and render that meaning in accessible idiom. This produces readable English—and a Bible in which the translator's interpretation is baked into the text before the reader encounters it. Consider *hilasmos* in 1 John 2:2. The KJV renders it "propitiation"—a precise theological term carrying the freight of divine wrath, substitution, and satisfaction. Several modern versions render it simply "atoning sacrifice" or describe Christ as "the one who speaks to the Father in our defense." These are interpretations, not translations. They have already decided for the reader what atonement means and how it works. A church formed by the word "propitiation" will understand the cross differently from a church formed by the word "advocate." Over a generation, and across a culture shaped by such a translation, those differences accumulate into something large—a church that has quietly lost the doctrine of penal substitution without ever having voted to abandon it.

The KJV translators themselves understood their work in terms that went beyond linguistic competence. Their preface—"The Translators to the Reader"—reflects a profound theological seriousness about the stakes of translation. They saw themselves not as producing a convenient version for their age but as rendering for English-speaking Christendom the oracles

of God in their full weight and precision. Fifty-four scholars, working in six committees over seven years, checking each other's work, consulting all available editions of the received texts—the process was an embodiment of the principle that God's Word demands the church's most careful, most reverent, most corporate attention.

I would also point my friend to history—not as proof but as confirmation. The KJV was the Bible of the English-speaking world for over three centuries: the Bible of the Puritans and Covenanters, of the revivals under Whitefield and Wesley, of the missionary movements that carried the gospel to Asia, Africa, and the Americas. It formed the moral and theological imagination of entire civilisations, producing believers who could quote Scripture from memory, who built their lives and cultures on its cadences. None of this proves it is God's preserved Word. But it suggests God was pleased to bless it—and that blessing is not incidental.

I have stood in churches in China where believers had memorised great portions of their Chinese Union Version—itsself translated within the Hebrew and Greek tradition underlying the KJV—and faced imprisonment for those memorised words. They did not have time to debate textual variants. They needed a Word they could stand on. And they found it. A tree is known by its fruit, and the tree of the Reformation Bible has borne fruit in every language and on every continent where the gospel has gone.

Round Four: A Pastoral Word to Those Who Differ

Before closing, I want to speak gently to brothers and sisters who do not yet share this conviction. Some may fear that affirming VPP in the Traditional Text and using the AV/KJV as the English standard will require them to deny all the spiritual benefit they have received through other versions. Others may worry that such a position will isolate them from wider evangelical circles, or that it will make them appear reactionary or anti-intellectual.

To the first concern, I would say this: God is far more gracious than our theology. He has converted and sanctified His people even when their understanding of Scripture's text or translation was immature or inconsistent. I do not believe that God refuses to use His Word simply because it is printed in a less faithful edition. When I look back on my own pilgrimage, I can see ways in which the Lord fed me through texts and versions I would not now commend as standards. That does not prove those texts were equally pure; it proves that God is patient and kind. It is possible

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to be grateful for past mercies without freezing our convictions at the level of our earliest experiences.

To the second concern, about isolation and reputation, I would say this: obedience often narrows our company before it widens it. The Reformers did not begin their stand on Scripture with a plan to be admired by the academy; they began with a conscience bound to the Word of God. If careful study of Scripture's promises, the church's confessions, and the history of the text leads us to conclude that God has in fact preserved His words in the Traditional Text, then we must follow that light wherever it leads, even if some misunderstand our motives. There is a way to hold these convictions without bitterness, without caricature, and without boasting. We are not called to win every debate; we are called to be faithful stewards of what we have seen.

My appeal, therefore, is not that every believer arrive at the same pace or through the same path at the conclusions I have outlined. It is that we refuse to rest in a position we know to be internally unstable—that we refuse to say, with our lips, that Scripture is our only infallible authority while quietly treating its actual text as negotiable. If, after honest study and prayer, a brother still cannot embrace VPP and the Traditional Text, I do not count him my enemy. But I do plead with him to recognise the pastoral and theological cost of the autographs-only position, and to ask whether that cost is really demanded by Scripture, or only by a modern critical consensus that may not deserve our trust.

I want to close by telling my friend what I think is the deepest issue underneath all of these questions. It is not really about manuscripts or translation philosophy or the Westminster Confession. It is about whether God keeps His promises.

If God promised to preserve His Word—and I have argued He did, explicitly and repeatedly—then where that preserved Word is found becomes an empirical question, answered by examining where the church's faithful transmission has left its deposit with biblical principles as our authoritative guide. That examination leads us to the Masoretic Text, to the Textus Receptus, to the Reformation Bible, to the Authorised Version. We hold these texts not out of cultural nostalgia or confessional tribalism but out of theological conviction: this is where the promised preservation is.

The confidence this gives is not arrogance. It is the confidence of a child who trusts his father's word. When I stand to preach, I do not begin

with a disclaimer: “According to the best available manuscripts...” I begin with: “The Word of God says.” Not because I am naive about textual history but because I have examined the evidence and I believe God told the truth when He said His words would not pass away. That belief is the foundation of everything else I do in ministry—every sermon, every hospital visit, every conversation with a man whose world is falling apart. I need a Word that does not qualify itself. And God, in His faithfulness, has given us one.

There is something else I want to name before I close. Reformed theology has always insisted that authority must be not only theoretically sufficient but actually accessible. Calvin called Scripture *autopiston*—self-authenticating. It carries its own authority; it does not need to borrow it from scholars or critics. But a Bible whose text is perpetually under scholarly revision, whose footnotes perpetually suggest that what you are reading may not be what God actually said, cannot function as *autopiston*. It has been made dependent on a process external to itself. VPP is therefore not a peripheral doctrinal controversy—it is the theological precondition of a genuinely Reformed doctrine of Scripture which undergirds *Sola Scriptura*.

To my friend, I say finally: the question of which Bible is God’s preserved Word is not one you can afford to leave unresolved. It will shape your prayer life, your preaching, your parenting, your ability to comfort the dying and correct the wayward. Settle it—not because the academy demands a position but because the pulpit does, and the sickroom does, and the child asking you a question at the kitchen table does. The Word of God stands. It has always stood. And it stands today, in the Hebrew and Greek texts received by the church through the ages, best represented in English by the Authorised Version of 1611.

Notes

- 1 Jeffrey Khoo, ed., *Forever Infallible and Inerrant: Remembering God’s Extraordinary Providence in Preserving His Inspired Words through the Traditional and Reformation Texts Underlying the King James Bible* (Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College Press, 2011).

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MUSIC IN THE REFORMATION: HISTORY AND THEOLOGY OF CONGREGATIONAL SINGING

Joycelyn Chng

Congregational singing is an element of corporate worship that many of us are familiar with. In fact, it has become such an entrenched part of public worship that some even participate in it without giving much thought to the act or the words that come out of their mouths. Not a few church-goers are guilty of merely going through the motions when it comes to congregational singing. However, this had not always been the case. There was a time in the history of the Church when the members of the congregation were denied their part in the worship of God through singing.

The turnaround came with the 16th-century Protestant Reformation. This article surveys the history of congregational music in light of the Reformation, and also touches on some of the theological issues related to it.

State of Congregational Music Prior to the Reformation

Under the rule of the Roman Empire, persecution of Christians increased, which led them to meet in secret for worship and fellowship. This lasted for the first three centuries. During this time, they had still engaged in singing praises to God—Pliny the Younger, the governor of Bithynia, reported to Emperor Trajan in A.D. 112 that “the Christians in his province held their worship assemblies on Sunday mornings before dawn and sang antiphonal hymns¹ of praise to Christ as God.”² When persecution of Christians ended in A.D. 313 with the Edict of Milan establishing religious toleration for Christianity, Christian singing developed into an “organized and regulated part of worship.”³

Greek hymnody was the hymnody of the early churches as Greek was then the dominant language in the Roman Empire. Following the division of the Roman Empire which resulted from Emperor

Constantine's move of the capital to Byzantium in A.D. 330, hymn traditions developed separately along two fronts—the Eastern (Greek / Byzantine) and Western (Latin) Churches. Latin gradually replaced Greek as the language of the Western Church, and it was not until late in the 4th century that Latin hymnody flourished. This was aided by the writing of hymns in Latin as a means to counter the Arian heresy.⁴ Ambrose of Milan was a key figure in this respect. In addition, Ambrose also introduced the practice of antiphonal singing in the Western Church to uplift the spirits of his followers who were experiencing persecution by the Arian heretics.⁵

Latin hymnody eventually came to be mainly associated with the monastic system. The increasing complexity of poetic and musical forms from the 4th to 9th century, coupled with the decreasing use of the Latin language among the common folk, as well as the start and standardisation of the Roman Mass through the centuries, resulted in the Latin hymn being sung almost exclusively by monastic communities and cathedral churches.⁶ The monophonic and unaccompanied Gregorian chant, and Roman liturgy, also became firmly established and predominant in the West.⁷

Over time, the Roman Church grew in its power and influence, even claiming the authority to “destine a soul to hell or heaven at the signing of a decree.”⁸ Music wise, congregational singing was virtually non-existent as the clergy and choir assumed responsibility for this part of the liturgy. The Church's accumulation of and preoccupation with power led to great dissatisfaction against the Roman Church. The situation came to a head with the sale of indulgences by the Roman Church, and this culminated ultimately in the 16th-century Protestant Reformation.

Significance of the Reformation to Congregational Music

The Protestant Reformation is an important event in the historical development of congregational music. Its significance can be seen in three areas: (1) renewal of congregational songs, (2) use of congregational songs in spreading doctrine, and (3) emergence of two main streams in congregational songs.

Renewal of Congregational Songs

With the Protestant Reformation came a renewal of congregational songs in many parts of Western Europe. Martin Luther (1483–1546)

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has often been identified as the one who had brought about this renewal, and rightly so. Notwithstanding this, the initial efforts in restoring congregational singing actually had its beginnings about a century earlier, in the ministry of John Hus (1369–1415) of Bohemia (present-day Czech Republic).

John Hus was a professor at the University of Prague and opposed the doctrines of the Roman Church. He was strongly influenced by John Wycliffe, the Oxford professor and publisher of the first English Bible. Hus not only preached that the Bible was the sole and ultimate authority for man regarding faith and practice, but also taught the right of the common people to share in the songs of the church. In this way, he and his followers became instrumental in restoring congregational singing back into the church. They wrote many hymns for use in worship. Hus also used hymns as sermons, and in his hands, music became a tool for evangelism. His witness inspired the Moravian Movement. The Moravians, also known as the Bohemian Brethren, became widely known for their evangelistic fervour and missionary spirit, as well as for their exuberant congregational singing.

Declared a heretic by the Roman Church at the Council of Constance, Hus was burned at the stake on July 6, 1415. As much as Hus is recognised today as a forerunner of the Protestant Reformation, he can also be said to be the forerunner of Luther in the restoration of congregational singing.

A little over a century later on October 31, 1517, Luther, an Augustinian monk from Eisleben, Germany and an ordained priest of the Roman Church, nailed his Ninety-Five Theses to the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church. This one act would come to be marked as the start of the 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Luther's Ninety-Five Theses disputed against the Church's sale and teachings of indulgences.

In addition to being a theologian, Luther was also a musician who "believed music to be of utmost importance in worship."⁹ One of the biblical truths emphasised by Luther was the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:9), and it prompted him to translate the Bible into German. This same conviction undoubtedly "also produced the desire for congregational involvement in the liturgy through singing."¹⁰ Some have noted that Luther had probably also been influenced by the Bohemian Brethren's use of congregational singing.¹¹

Luther thus introduced reforms to the musical aspect of the church service, particularly in the area of congregational singing:

German hymns (called chorales) were used in parts of the service, and in addition Luther translated into German parts of the litany, which the choir had traditionally sung in Latin, and set them to chorale tunes for the congregation to sing.¹²

Widely considered as the “first significant evangelical hymn writer”, Luther not only wrote and adapted hymn texts but also composed hymn tunes.¹³ His most famous hymn is his paraphrase of Psalm 46, *Ein’ feste Burg ist unser Gott* (“A mighty fortress is our God”). He also supervised the publication of several hymnal collections.

Use of Congregational Songs in Spreading Doctrine

Congregational singing was not just renewed through the Reformation, it was also greatly utilised in the spread and teaching of doctrine. Church historian Philip Schaff had this to say concerning the impact in this regard of Luther’s introduction of the hymn:

The hymn became, next to the German Bible and the German sermon, the most powerful missionary of the evangelical doctrines of sin and redemption, and accompanied the Reformation in its triumphal march. Printed as tracts, the hymns were scattered wide and far, and sung in the house, the school, the church and on the street.¹⁴

The Lutheran movement eventually spread to the Scandinavian region in northern Europe, and became the state church in Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland.¹⁵

With a revival in congregational singing, an estimated 20,000 chorales were composed in Germany by the end of the 16th century. Emphases on doctrine as well as the themes of comfort, death, eternal life and Christ’s second coming characterised the hymns written in the latter half of the 16th century. This was a response to the Counter-Reformation that arose and a reflection of the challenges it had posed.¹⁶

Emergence of Two Main Streams in Congregational Songs

Besides the chorale tradition that took root in Germany and Scandinavia during the 16th-century Protestant Reformation, psalm-singing also developed as “an important part of worship in most of the Protestant Reformed churches of the sixteenth century.”¹⁷ While the

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psalms were sung in prose form in the early Christian church, those sung in the Reformed churches were metrical in nature i.e. psalm texts arranged into strophic form (stanzas) with rhyme and poetic meter.¹⁸ In the days of the Reformation, psalm-singing became used—in addition to Bible translations and sermons preached in the language of the people—as a method to give the people the Word of God.

Luther was one such reformer who “had his congregations sing the biblical psalms where practicable” and encouraged both “metrical settings of psalms as well as original hymn texts.”¹⁹ On the other hand, John Calvin (1509–1564), the French-Swiss Reformation theologian who wrote the monumental *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536), was known for advocating the metrical psalm for congregational singing.

For his part in establishing the congregational singing of psalms, Calvin has been described as “the guiding hand behind the metrical psalm.”²⁰ Nevertheless, it was Martin Bucer, a German minister and Protestant reformer in Strasbourg, who had advocated the metrical psalm in the vernacular as early as 1524. Calvin was exposed to Bucer’s ideas during his stay in Strasbourg from 1538 to 1541, when the dissenting voices of the Libertines, who resented the radical reform put in place by Calvin, forced him out of Geneva, the city where he had been ministering for some time.

Calvin eventually returned to Geneva in September 1541 after the Libertines fell from power, and preached at St. Peter’s Cathedral. It is noted that “through the influence of Bucer, the practice of metrical psalmody assumed an especially important role in the form of worship developed by John Calvin in Geneva.”²¹

While Luther tried to alter only what was necessary in order to properly reflect the biblical faith, Calvin differed in his philosophy of church song:

A more radical reformer than Luther, Calvin rejected the musical heritage of the Roman Catholic Church, including organs, choirs, and humanly composed hymns. He advocated singing only Scripture in worship, primarily the Psalms versified like hymns so that each could be sung to a particular tune. Furthermore, in Calvin’s view the metrical psalms were to be sung only in unison and without instrumental accompaniment.²²

Standard for Congregational Music Established

Two issues ought to be addressed in light of the differing viewpoints and practices concerning congregational music that arose from the Reformation: (1) whether congregational songs should be limited to the psalms, and (2) whether congregational singing should be accompanied by musical instruments.

Should Congregational Songs Be Limited to the Psalms?

It must be noted that Calvin's Genevan Psalter included materials other than the psalms, such as the Commandments and *Nunc dimittis*.²³ Furthermore, he has been attributed as the writer of the hymn, *Je te salue, mon certain Redempteur* ("I greet thee, who my sure Redeemer art"). While his authorship of this hymn has been disputed, it is notable that this hymn of human composure is said to have been included in the Genevan Psalter. Taking these into consideration, it is reasonable to conclude that Calvin's view concerning psalm-singing was more a matter of preference, rather than principle.²⁴

Of greater importance is the fact that the Book of Revelation actually records songs with words that are not the words of the psalms. Some examples of these songs are found in Revelation 5:9–10; 11:17–18; 19:1–3. Tellingly, hymnologists have coined them "doxological (praise) hymns", and these passages describe worship that shall be in heaven as God had revealed to the Apostle John.

Peter Masters rightly observed in his defence of hymn-singing, "At the very least we must ask—if it is right to sing such songs in Heaven, how can it be wrong to sing them on earth? ... We are the Church of Jesus Christ, and He must be extolled by name in our songs."²⁵

Should Congregational Singing Be Accompanied by Musical Instruments?

Music and musical instruments in particular, had their place in Old Testament worship. King David first organised musicians for worship when he instructed for the Levites to be appointed as singers with instruments of music (1 Chronicles 15:16–22). Their duty was to minister before the ark of the LORD (1 Chronicles 16:4–6).

The use of instruments of music together with the singing of praises to God continued in the Temple worship during the time of King Solomon (2 Chronicles 5:11–14), as well as King Hezekiah (2 Chronicles

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29:25–28). In post-exilic days, musical instruments were also mentioned at the laying of the foundation for the rebuilding of the Temple (Ezra 3:8–13), and the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 12:27).

In light of these examples in the Old Testament, there is biblical basis for the use of musical instruments in the accompaniment of singing in the worship of God.

However, it must be emphasised that in the Old Testament, only four kinds of instruments were allowed to be used in the house of God for worship. The four instruments permitted by God were the harp, the psaltery, the cymbals and the trumpet.²⁶ Furthermore, the trumpet was employed only for special purposes, and was not used for the normal accompaniment of singing (see 1 Chronicles 25:1–7). Evidently, the use of musical instruments was strictly regulated in the worship of God.

This does not mean that the church today should use the harp, the psaltery, the cymbals and the trumpet to accompany congregational singing. One must be mindful that this stipulation was given to the nation of Israel, and the church is not a nation but a spiritual body of Christ. It does mean however, that the same general principle of restraint must apply when it comes to the use of musical instruments in worship today. Peter Masters noted that “the standard of God remains in this Gospel age—that musical instruments should be modest in character, limited in number, and never allowed to rival or overwhelm the attractiveness of intelligent worship.”²⁷

In addition to having biblical basis, musical accompaniment serves a practical purpose as well. Many fundamental churches today employ the organ and/or piano in their worship services. When played modestly and reverently, these instruments do aid the congregation in singing praises unto God. It pays to take heed to what had happened to the state of psalm-singing in Colonial America by the latter part of the 17th-century:

Since instrumental music in church was anathema to the Puritans, and because many people could not read or were too poor to own psalters, a deacon was appointed to “line out” the psalm, reading aloud a line or two, after which the congregation would join in singing the text that had just been read. In many churches, a precentor ... would lead the singing through the strength of his own voice. The tunes were also subjected to increasingly slow tempos and to ornamentation by individual singers.²⁸

This resulted in “a free-for-all in which the notes and rhythms of the original tune were often buried in a cacophony of sound”, and at times, even changed into another tune mid-song.²⁹

Notwithstanding their usefulness, musical instruments can turn into tools of distraction as well as detracting from the glory of God if not played in an appropriate manner. Firstly, the music must give off a sound that is decent and orderly. God’s Word says, “*For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints. ... Let all things be done decently and in order.*” (1 Corinthians 14:33, 40). Secondly, the musician must not draw attention to himself through his playing. God alone must be the focus of worship, and all glory is to be given to Him alone. God declares in Isaiah 42:8, “*I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images.*”

It is therefore of utmost importance that the instrumental accompaniment for congregational singing in the worship of God be modest and reverential in its presentation and arrangement. Only then will it be befitting the worship of the thrice holy God.

Conclusion

The wonderful privilege given to Christians to participate in the worship of the Almighty God through congregational singing—snuffed out by the Roman Church—was providentially restored during the days of the Reformation. May the Lord impress upon all who love Him, to praise Him in song with renewed zeal and fervour.

Notes

- 1 An antiphonal hymn is one whereby the singing of the hymn is done in alternation between two groups.
- 2 Harry Eskew and Hugh T. McElrath, *Sing with Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Hymnology* (Nashville: Church Street Press, 1995), 80.
- 3 William J Reynolds and Milburn Price, *A Survey of Christian Hymnody* (Carol Stream: Hope Publishing Company, 1999), 5.
- 4 Eskew and McElrath, 85.
- 5 Reynolds and Price, 9.
- 6 Robin A Leaver and Joyce Ann Zimmerman, *Liturgy and Music: Lifetime Learning* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998), 326.
- 7 William Loyd Hooper, *Church Music in Transition* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1963), 30.

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- 8 Hooper, 35.
- 9 Eskew and McElrath, 98.
- 10 Reynolds and Price, 18.
- 11 Hooper, 37.
- 12 Ibid., 38.
- 13 Reynolds and Price, 18.
- 14 Quoted from the article “The Reviving Power of Hymn-singing” in *Life B-P Weekly*, Vol. 24, No. 11.
- 15 Eskew and McElrath, 100.
- 16 Reynolds and Price, 21.
- 17 Ibid., 35.
- 18 Ibid., 35.
- 19 Hooper, 41.
- 20 Eskew and McElrath, 115.
- 21 Reynolds and Price, 35–36.
- 22 Eskew and McElrath, 115.
- 23 Louis F Benson, *The English Hymn: Its Development and Use In Worship* (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1915), 55. *Nunc dimittis* is the song of Simeon recorded in Luke 2:29–32.
- 24 Iain H Murray, *The Psalter—The Only Hymnal?* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 12.
- 25 Peter Masters, *Worship in the Melting Pot* (London: The Wakeman Trust, 2002), 101.
- 26 Jeffrey Khoo, *Charismatism Q&A* (Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College Press, 1998), 81.
- 27 Masters, 66.
- 28 Reynolds and Price, 97.
- 29 Ibid.

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BLESSED IS THE ONE WHO TRUSTS IN THE LORD

William Goh

Introduction

Good evening to all of you. It is a joy and a privilege to be here as we gather for this thanksgiving service, coming together to thank and praise God for bringing us through this semester at Far Eastern Bible College (FEBC). To those who have completed their studies and to those who are continuing, each of you has gone through many weeks of learning, assignments, classes, and projects. There were moments of joy and also moments of struggle. There were times when you understood clearly, and times when you faced difficulties.

I rejoice that some of you have completed your course of study, while others continue this journey. Whether you have finished your studies or are still in the process, as we look back we give thanks to God for all He has done. We give thanks for granting you strength and wisdom, and for sustaining you throughout your studies. Yet as we come to the end of the semester, we must also ask: What comes next?

The world says: “Blessed are those who succeed.” “Blessed are those who achieve.” But God teaches us otherwise in Jeremiah 17:7, “*Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is.*” This short verse teaches a simple truth: true blessing is found when a person fully trusts and places his hope in the Lord alone.

This evening, I would like to share three simple truths from this verse: (1) Trust in the Lord is your foundation. (2) Depend on the Lord as your source of strength. (3) Rest your hope fully in the Lord.

Trust in the Lord Is Your Foundation

During your time in FEBC, you studied Scripture to understand the Word of God. You attended lectures and completed assignments and projects, undergoing the discipline of study, reflection, and preparation

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for service. As this semester comes to an end, you have gained much knowledge. But the most important question is not, “*What have you learned?*” The real question is: “What is the foundation of your life?”

Knowledge alone is not enough to be the foundation of life and ministry. What are you most deeply depending on? What truly supports your life? Who gives you stability, direction, and strength? It must be God.

What you trust in will shape your life. It will influence your decisions, your character, and your priorities. If your foundation is weak or uncertain, your life will not remain stable. What you trust in will also shape your ministry. How you serve God flows from what is in your heart. If you are rooted in God’s Word and in Christ, your ministry will be steady and faithful. But if your ministry rests only on knowledge, ability, or emotion, it will not endure.

So the question remains: What is the true foundation of your faith and life? This foundation carries you through both good times and difficult times. When life is easy, it keeps you humble and thankful. When life is hard, it keeps you strong and steady so that you do not fall. Jesus said in Matthew 7 that there are two kinds of builders. The wise man builds his house upon the rock, while the foolish man builds his house upon the sand. The difference is not that one heard and the other did not—both heard. The real difference is this: one trusted and obeyed; the other merely listened.

Some may be trusting in training, relying on ability, or depending on connections. Others may place their confidence in future plans, rushing ahead of God’s timing. But God reminds us today that the blessed life is not built on these things. The blessed life is built on trusting Him—listening to His Word and obeying it.

Depend on the Lord as Your Source of Strength

Jeremiah describes the blessed person as one “*whose hope the LORD is.*” This means the Lord is not merely one part of our trust, nor a backup plan when everything else fails. Rather, God Himself is our only true source of life, strength, and hope.

As we come to the end of this semester—whether graduating or continuing—remember this: ministry is not easy. Life will not always be predictable, and people may disappoint us along the way. If we depend on our own strength, we will grow weary. If we depend only on knowledge,

we will soon discover our limitations. If we depend on circumstances, we will be shaken when they change.

But when the Lord is our source, we remain steady even in uncertain times. Jeremiah 17:8 gives a beautiful picture of this life. The one who trusts in the Lord is like a tree planted by the waters, whose roots grow deep. When drought comes, the tree does not fear, for it continues to draw nourishment from its source.

To those who are graduating, do not rely only on your training; continue to depend on the Lord. To those who are continuing your studies, do not depend on routine or familiarity, but learn daily dependence upon Him. Whether graduating or continuing, we must trust the Lord to sustain us in both ministry and life—especially in times of pressure, disappointment, challenge, and waiting. When rooted in God, we will not be shaken, we will not wither, and we will bear fruit in due season.

As we give thanks today, we acknowledge that it is not we ourselves who have sustained our journey, but the Lord who has been our faithful source throughout this semester.

Rest Your Hope Fully in the Lord

Jeremiah 17:7 describes a blessed person as one “*whose hope the LORD is.*” This means that the person who truly trusts God bases his life not only on what God has done in the past or is doing in the present, but also on what God will do in the future. His confidence rests fully in the Lord.

This hope looks forward. It trusts God for what is yet to come. As we gather for this end-of-semester thanksgiving service, many are thinking about the future. Some are excited about the next season of life. Others feel uncertain. Some may even feel anxious, asking, “What comes next?”, “Where will I be sent?”, or “Am I ready for what lies ahead?”

These are honest questions. Yet this verse gently redirects our hearts: our hope is not in future events, but in the Lord Himself. If our hope rests in success, disappointment will come. If our hope rests in people, they may fail us. But if our hope rests in the Lord, we will not be shaken, for He is faithful, unchanging, and sovereign over all things. Therefore, Scripture calls us to rest our hope fully in Him—not partially, not temporarily, but completely.

For those who are graduating, remember: your future is not

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determined by your posting, position, or place of service. Your future rests safely in God's hands. Consider this simple testimony. A Bible college graduate eagerly expected immediate ministry after graduation. He anticipated preaching and visible service. Yet nothing happened. Weeks turned into months, and months into years. Discouraged, he wondered whether he had missed God's calling. Still, he continued praying, serving faithfully in small tasks, and helping in his local church. Then unexpectedly, a door opened when a church urgently needed a worker. By then he was not merely trained, but refined—having learned patience, humility, and faith. Looking back, he realised that God had not delayed him but prepared him. Later he said, "That waiting season was when I truly learned to trust the Lord."

Dear students, some of you may enter ministry quickly, while others may wait. Yet the waiting season is never empty. God is not forgetting you; He is forming you. To those continuing your studies, your future is not determined merely by academic results or achievements. Your future also rests in the Lord who guides your steps day by day. Thus, in this thanksgiving season, we thank God not only for what He has done but also for what lies ahead. Our future is safe in His hands.

Conclusion

As we come to the end of this semester, this is not only a time to look back but also a time to respond to God. Jeremiah 17:7 reminds us again: "*Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is.*" True blessing is found not in what we achieve, but in whom we trust.

Let us remember three truths: First, trust in the Lord is our foundation. Knowledge alone will not sustain us, but a life built upon God's Word will stand firm in every season. Second, the Lord is our daily source. We need Him continually for strength, wisdom, and endurance. Third, our hope must rest fully in the Lord—not partly in ourselves, nor in plans, people, or success, but wholly in Him who never changes.

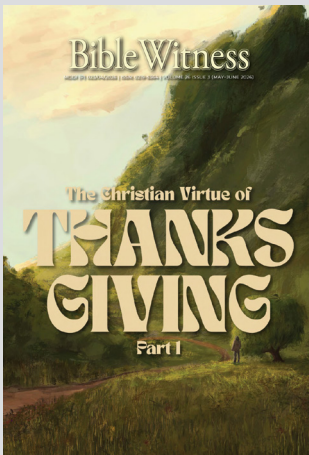
Many of you are thinking about the future. Some are excited. Some uncertain. Some may ask, "What will happen next?" God's Word gently reminds us that our future is not governed by circumstances but safely held in the Lord's hands. Therefore, we do not end this semester with fear, but with thanksgiving and trust.

We thank God not only for what He has done, as John 3:16

declares: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” We also thank Him for what He will continue to do. He gave His Son, Jesus Christ, to die for the forgiveness of our sins. He will surely keep all His promises. No one who belongs to Him shall ever be taken from His hand, and He gives us eternal life.

Our God is faithful. He is the same yesterday, today, and for ever. So, we conclude this semester with thankful hearts and confident hope, knowing that our future is secure in Him. Let us therefore continue to trust the Lord in every circumstance. Those who trust in the Lord shall never be put to shame. Amen.

The Rev William Goh is the pastor of the Chinese congregation of Berean Bible-Presbyterian Church. He graduated from Far Eastern Bible College with a Bachelor of Theology (BTh) in 2011. The above sermon was delivered at FEBC's end-of-semester thanksgiving service on 1 May 2026.



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MINISTERING WITH FAITH, NOT FEAR

Joshua Yong

I greet one and all in the blessed name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Please open your Bible to 2 Timothy chapter 1. The verse for our meditation this evening is found in verse 7: *“For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.”* Amen.

We thank the Lord for His holy and precious Word.

Introduction: Characterising Our Ministry

How would you want to characterise your ministry? Is it one that would be characterised by faith, where you trust in the Lord from the very beginning of your ministry, every step of the way, until the time that the Lord determines that your ministry ends?

There will be many challenges to your commitment and to your resolve. Even as you begin, we know that this graduation is not just the completion of your studies. By the grace and mercies of God, He has seen you through many examinations, duties, challenges, and trials. But this is only the beginning of a new phase of your life. How would you want to characterise your ministry?

When the Apostle Paul wrote this epistle to Timothy, he was coming towards the end of his ministry. At this time, he was in prison, experiencing much suffering. Anyone else might have been fearful. Yet, as he encouraged young Timothy, who was just beginning his ministry in his youth, the Apostle Paul exhorted him not to embark upon this ministry with fear.

The Enemy of Faith—The Spirit of Fear

We must recognise that there will be an enemy to faith even as we seek to minister. This is the first thought we want to consider this evening—the enemy of faith.

Even as we desire to serve and minister in faith, the Bible tells us that God hath not given us the spirit of fear. The Bible does not merely say that this is fear, or that God has not given us fear; rather, it says that God has not given us the spirit of fear.

There may be moments of fear. There may be times when we are afraid. But the Bible is not merely speaking about the emotion of fear; it speaks of someone who is completely taken over, overwhelmed, and possessed by fear—hence, the spirit of fear. It describes a disposition of fear, where a person is characterised by fear and is constantly afraid.

There are many reasons to be afraid as we begin to serve. We may fear our own inadequacies, insufficiencies, and inexperience. There are still many things we do not know as we begin this ministry and the calling that the Lord has entrusted to us. We do not know what to expect. We do not know where the Lord will send us. These may become causes of fear.

You may also fear lack. Will I have enough resources—resources for the ministry or even for my own personal life? Will I have sufficient provision to care for my family? Will I have enough for the needs of the church? You may have many desires as you embark upon the work of God, yet fear whether you will have the resources to do these things for the Lord.

You may also fear loneliness. What if the Lord sends me to a place where there are no like-minded brethren nearby, no one with whom I may regularly fellowship? Even with modern technology, time differences may make fellowship difficult, and loneliness may become a real concern.

You may fear: What if the Lord sends me to a small church? What if the Lord sends me to a large church? There are many uncertainties concerning the future, and we may become overwhelmed with fear.

If you embark upon your ministry with fear, how would it look? Every day you would be worrying and troubled. Those whom you serve would also sense your fear—the anxiety, the uncertainty, the doubts. Is this the kind of ministry you wish to begin?

Paul says, “*God hath not given us the spirit of fear.*” There may be moments when we are afraid—when we receive difficult news or face persecution. Fear may initially grip our hearts. But how shall we respond? We must respond by exercising faith.

Exercising Faith Through the Spirit of Power

This brings us to the second thought. The enemy of faith is fear—the many kinds of fear we may face in ministry. Yet the Bible tells us that we may exercise faith, and in this verse we are given three particular ways to do so.

First, the Bible tells us that God hath given us the spirit of power. This power must be understood in light of the first part of the verse. It is a spirit of power—a disposition characterised by power—and it comes from the working of the Holy Spirit within us.

In Scripture, power may describe both destructive and constructive power. It is the power of God, whereby He enables us to overcome fear through faith—a powerful faith.

When we preach, we may not know how people will respond, but we must preach fearlessly, trusting God, because salvation is of the Lord. He alone is powerful to save and to convict sinners. He works even in the hardest hearts.

Are there not times in ministry when we think certain people are too stubborn, too difficult, or impossible to persuade? Yet through the simple preaching of the gospel, souls are saved. God is powerful, and He has given us this spirit of power to serve.

You may fear whether you have enough strength. As ministry continues, the Lord entrusts more responsibilities—the care of the flock and many burdens to bear. As you minister, you hear of many troubles and carry heavy concerns. There may be days when you feel exhausted. Yet the Lord gives His power and enabling.

How are we sustained through preaching engagements, visitations, counselling, and mission trips—times when humanly speaking we might collapse? The Lord strengthens us with His power.

But do you trust in the Lord's enabling? Do you rely upon His empowering? Or will you attempt to overcome fear through your own reasoning, resources, or self-confidence? If so, you will fail. But if you trust in the Lord's empowering, He is able to convict, help, strengthen, and sustain.

Exercising Faith Through the Spirit of Love

Secondly, exercise faith in love, for God hath given us the spirit of love. This must be our motivation and source of energy.

When you fear how people may respond, or whether there will be visible fruit in your ministry, let the spirit of love—shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost—be your motivation. This unconditional love moves us to minister sacrificially.

Whether people come or not, whether the church grows or not, we continue to preach faithfully out of love. Whether we are remembered, recognised, or appreciated does not matter. We continue to give ourselves sacrificially.

Even if people take advantage of us, abuse us, forsake us, or betray us—and these may indeed be fears—we continue in the unconditional love of Christ.

When the Lord Jesus Christ ministered on earth, was He not betrayed by one of His own disciples, Judas Iscariot? The Lord knew from the beginning that Judas would betray Him, yet He still called him, taught him, and guided him as He did the other disciples.

This must be the love we show to the flock entrusted to us. You may have been hurt or betrayed before, yet let love be your motivation—the energy that sustains your service to the Lord. Not only love for the flock, but above all, love for your Saviour.

He first loved us with a self-sacrificing, unconditional, all-giving love. Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ gave His life for us, and now He grants us the privilege of being His servants, instruments, and mouthpieces. Love Him with all your heart as you serve Him.

Exercising Faith Through the Spirit of a Sound Mind

Thirdly, the Bible tells us that God hath given us the spirit of a sound mind—a mind characterised by discipline and self-control. This is a mind under the control of the Holy Spirit. It does not wander in fear or wallow in self-pity. Rather, it continually returns to the promises of God.

It is a mind that dwells upon Christ and His promises—a mind full of hope, sobriety, and discernment. The Lord grants us this ability to discern and to rest upon His promises, giving us confidence in service.

Scripture teaches us not to think too highly of ourselves. Some overestimate their abilities and believe themselves stronger or more capable than they truly are. Those entering ministry may sometimes feel this way, and the Lord must humble and teach them. We must trust the Lord's timing and not be overly eager. If it is not yet His time for a

particular ministry, we must patiently wait.

Yet there are also those who think too lowly of themselves, overwhelmed by feelings of inadequacy, becoming ineffective in service. We must not think so lowly of ourselves that we become useless for the Lord. Instead, we must be sober-minded in Christ.

It is not because of experience nor merely because we have received theological training. Rather, true training teaches us to depend even more upon Christ. If the Lord has given spiritual gifts, He will also give grace, enabling, and strength to fulfil His calling. That is sobermindedness.

Without such sobriety, we may shrink from responsibility or flee from God's calling. But sober-minded faith recognises that as we decrease and Christ increases, the Lord grants grace, strength, and enabling to accomplish His will.

Conclusion: A Ministry Characterised by Faith

The Lord hath given us all that we need to do His work. Exercise that faith—faith in the Lord's power, motivated by love, and guided by sober-mindedness—as you embark upon the ministry entrusted to you.

Today is a great privilege. You are not merely receiving graduation certificates. This is also a confirmation of the calling that the Lord has given you, as He sends you forth into His harvest field.

Do not allow your life or ministry to be characterised by fear. Rather, let your life and ministry be characterised by faith—faith in the all-powerful, sovereign Lord who is always with you.

Let us pray.

The Rev Joshua Yong holds the Bachelor of Religious Education (BRE), Master of Divinity (MDiv), and Master of Theology (ThM) degrees from Far Eastern Bible College. He serves as Assistant Pastor at Calvary Pandan Bible-Presbyterian Church and Lecturer in Greek Reading and Contemporary Theology at Far Eastern Bible College. The above sermon was delivered at the 51st Graduation Service of the Far Eastern Bible College on 10 May 2026.

SHAPED BY GOD’S GRACE: TESTIMONIES FROM THE CLASS OF 2026

Praise the Lord for the six students who have just graduated from Far Eastern Bible College (FEBC) with their respective degrees. Below are their testimonies of how the Lord has taught and trained them during their time at FEBC.

Hyeon Ji Cho, BRE

I am truly grateful for this opportunity to share a portion of my testimony—particularly my time here at FEBC. Like every FEBC student, I shared my testimony on my very first day during the Day of Prayer. At that time, I was just beginning this journey. Now, as I come to the end of my studies, I realise that this chapter of my life here at FEBC is also coming to a close.

It was a deep conviction that brought me here: that faith is the one thing I must treasure above all. That belief led me to study God’s Word at FEBC. Yet being here was not only about learning in the classroom—it was a life that required discipline, endurance, and dependence on the Lord. Living with different roommates, cleaning the college premises, and constantly watching the clock to be on time for morning devotions, lectures, and prayer meetings became part of daily life. Every day needed structure. Every responsibility needed attention. And honestly, managing it all was possible only through prayer. There were many moments when I realised that without the Lord’s help, I simply could not keep going.

Through this journey, the Lord has taught me several important lessons—lessons that I believe will stay with me beyond FEBC: First of all, humility—learning that I am not sufficient in myself. Whether in studies, responsibilities, or relationships, I was constantly reminded of my need to depend on God. Second, gratitude—recognising that every opportunity to learn, to serve, and even to struggle is a gift from the Lord. Third, care—being mindful of others, serving not out of obligation, but out of love, just as Christ has shown us.

SHAPED BY GOD'S GRACE

One particularly meaningful recent moment was visiting Rev Koa Keng Woo, who is now 97 years old. He had once taught my father—and by God's providence, I too had the privilege of sitting under his teaching at FEBC. To have been his student, even for a season, is something I now treasure even more deeply. Today, he is no longer able to teach as he once did, as his body has grown weaker. Yet seeing him again, though physically frail, we saw that his faith remains steadfast. And to this day, his life continues to testify of God's sustaining grace. It was a powerful reminder that the Christian life is not measured by moments of strength alone, but by a lifetime of faithful endurance.

This also brought back memories of my first year—especially the simple moments of sitting for meals with Mrs Ivy Tow. Mrs Tow gave us practical life advice and shared some of her FEBC stories from the old days. Her life quietly demonstrated what it means to serve the Lord faithfully, not just in public ministry, but in her daily walk with the Lord, even to the very end.

The lives of Rev Koa and Mrs Tow exemplify lessons that are not merely taught in a classroom, but lived out before us—becoming a visible testimony of perseverance in Christ. All the books we have read and lectures we have been taught are valuable, but it was also our lecturers, tutors, and staff, who serve the Lord, that have taught me through their lives to look ahead with purpose: to live not just for the present, but to pursue a faith that endures, by God's grace, all the way to the end.

As I reflect on my time here, I can say that FEBC has not only taught me doctrine, but has shaped my walk with God. It has shown me that faith is not merely something we speak of, but something we live out daily, often in quiet, unseen ways. To conclude, I would like to leave this verse: *“But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”* (Heb 11:6).

May all our graduating students walk forward in faith, trusting the Lord in every step, and become living testimonies of Christ in all that they do. As we continue to walk with the Lord, may our lives reflect His grace and truth.

Car Vincent Cuesta Magkidong, BTh

Praise the Lord for seeing me through my studies here at FEBC. I thank God for His unfailing grace and mercy upon my life. Without

Him, I would not be who I am today. His grace saved me, His love comforts me, His correction teaches me, and His abundant mercy has enabled me to persevere throughout my training in FEBC. All these blessings have been made possible through my preeminent Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

My calling into full-time study was not simple. Along the way, I experienced many trials and temptations, and there were times when I failed to overcome them. Because of this, I had to bear the consequences of my actions. Nevertheless, the Lord remained gracious and faithful to me throughout that difficult period of my life. In His mercy, He granted me a second chance which I deeply cherished throughout my years in FEBC. By His grace, I sought to use this second chance to become more faithful in serving and following Him. Yet, despite His goodness, the journey was still not easy.

Coming to FEBC was truly a great blessing from the Lord. He did not bring me here without purpose. I believe it was according to His sovereign decree that I was led to this place. God did not bring me here merely to study or to earn a degree. Rather, He brought me here so that I might know Him more deeply, be trained in His Word, grow in faithfulness, and be transformed for His own purpose and glory. Through my years here, I have come to understand that theological training is not only about gaining knowledge, but also about being moulded spiritually and prepared for service in His kingdom.

I am also deeply thankful to God for all the lecturers, teachers, and tutors in this college who faithfully labour in the ministry of training students for the work of the Lord. Their dedication, sacrifice, and commitment to the truth are greatly appreciated. Despite their own ministries and responsibilities, they faithfully prepare lessons, teach diligently, and invest their time in shaping the next generation of servants for Christ. May the Lord richly bless and strengthen each one of them for their labour of love.

Furthermore, I thank God for all the privileges and opportunities He allowed me to experience in FEBC. I am grateful for the opportunity to serve as part of the student leadership for two and a half years, as well as to serve as a cook for three years and to undertake many other responsibilities in the college. Through these duties, the Lord taught me many practical lessons in life and ministry. He taught me how to control my emotions, to become more disciplined, to serve others sacrificially,

and to grow in humility. I also thank God for the Matron, who entrusted these responsibilities to me. These experiences gave me a clearer glimpse of the realities, challenges, and demands of Christian ministry, and they became valuable instruments for my personal and spiritual growth.

Moreover, I thank God for the many wonderful and truthful lessons I have learned in this school. During my time here, I learned, unlearned, and relearned many things that helped me grow in my understanding of God and behold more of His greatness and sovereignty. One significant change that took place in my theological understanding was my shift from Progressive Dispensationalism to Covenant Theology. This transition did not happen because of emotions, personal relationships, or outward persuasion, but through careful study of Scripture, prayer, conviction by the Holy Spirit, and submission to the truth of God's Word. As the Apostle Paul declares in 2 Corinthians 13:8, "*For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.*" By God's grace, I have become more convinced that His redemptive plan is beautifully unified in Christ and faithfully revealed throughout the whole counsel of Scripture.

Indeed, my years in FEBC have not only increased my theological knowledge but have also shaped my spiritual life, convictions, and understanding of the ministry. The Lord used both joyful experiences and painful trials to sanctify me and to remind me "*that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose*" (Rom 8:28). Looking back, I can truly say that every hardship, correction, privilege, and lesson was ordained by God for my growth and for His glory.

As I move forward into the next stage of life and ministry, my prayer is that I will remain faithful to the Lord who has called me. May I never forget the lessons He has taught me during my years in FEBC. May He continue to humble me, sanctify me, and use me for the furtherance of His kingdom. To God alone be all the glory, honour, and praise forever.

Erniati Tabita Karma, BTh

FEBC was a place where God not only shaped my academic knowledge but also my spiritual life. I came to realise that the more I study, the more I see how much I still need to learn. I learned that academic achievement is not ultimately about being the best student, but about remaining faithful to God until the end. As 2 Timothy 2:15 teaches, I am called to be a worker approved by God, rightly dividing the

Word of truth. This encourages me to continue learning with seriousness, humility, and dedication.

Another lesson I learned during my studies here was humility and dependence on God. I had previously studied the same course in Jakarta. There were times when I felt that I did not want to take the same subjects again. Some of my friends said that I was wasting my time, and I even had the same thoughts. As the days went by, I came to understand that being a servant of God requires humility, as our Principal often reminded my classmates and me of John Calvin's three rules for studying God's Word: humility, humility, and humility. I thank God for this truth, which keeps my heart right in learning His Word.

I still remember that my first, second, and third semesters at FEBC were full of tears. I cried because I did not understand what the lecturers were teaching. Because of that, after class, instead of resting, I had to watch the lessons again and again, which took a great deal of time. This even caused me to complain to God. I told God how many hours I had to spend watching lessons repeatedly just to understand, even though I still did not fully understand everything. But I thank God for helping me understand that the God who called me would carry me through all the struggles I faced during my studies at FEBC. As the founder of this school, Rev Timothy Tow, said, "Self-help with God's help is the best help." I understand that God sent many people to help me. I can say that they became like angels, always ready to help me during my studies. Their help brought great comfort and encouraged me not to give up but to keep going, taking each step of faith and remaining faithful to my calling.

Last year, when I was about to enter my final semester, my mother was called home to be with the Lord, bringing overwhelming sorrow that was difficult to describe. In the midst of my grief, I began to question my calling. Even so, through this experience, I learned to trust God more deeply, knowing that His ways are higher than ours and His plans are always good, even when they are not understood. Romans 8:28 says, "*And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*" A hymn that has encouraged me is "The King's Business." Although it has not been easy to take steps of faith, I give thanks for the lessons learned through this journey, which have brought comfort to my heart. It reminds me that God is always with me, even in difficult times. This assurance gives me peace and hope, knowing that one day I will see my mother again in heaven.

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I truly cannot imagine how God has His own way of helping me study His Word in English and even in Greek—two languages with which I struggled greatly. I often cried and wanted to give up. Sometimes I even prayed, “Lord, I have an exam next week; can You please come back soon so that I do not need to take the exam?” Sometimes I shared this with my friends, and we laughed, but deep down I felt sure that I would not do well in my exams. I thank God, who continually reminded me through morning devotions and chapel services to seek His help while also doing my part by studying diligently. I learned that the real test is not only on paper but in real life. A hymn I often sang was “I Must Tell Jesus,” which reminded me that I truly must bring everything to Jesus, for without Him I can do nothing.

Dormitory life was not my first experience, as I had lived in dormitories before, but life at FEBC felt completely different. Here, I lived with friends from various countries and cultural backgrounds. This diversity required me to learn to adapt in order to live harmoniously together. The adjustment process was not always easy. Differences in habits, ways of thinking, and cultures often presented challenges. However, I am grateful to God for helping us learn to understand one another, admonish one another in love, and support one another with the shared goal of growing together in faith as Bible students. Through dormitory life, I learned not only tolerance and togetherness but also experienced real spiritual growth. Relationships became a means through which God shaped my character, helping me mature personally and spiritually.

My involvement in the cooking team was a truly memorable experience at FEBC. Cooking for 30 to 40 people was something I had never done before. This made me very nervous. When cooking, I tried to make things easier, but my heart was not at peace. I was reminded of a hymn asking, “Have I done my best for Jesus?” That question made me realise that even cooking must be done for God’s glory. Cooking is also a form of service, using the gifts God has entrusted to me. From then on, whenever I had the opportunity to serve on the cooking team, I responded with gratitude. During my four years at FEBC, if I am not mistaken, I had about five opportunities to cook over five semesters. I often joked with my friends that perhaps I would graduate with a “degree” in both cooking and theology.

At FEBC, besides studying and cooking, I also had other duties to

perform, such as cleaning toilets, washing windows, sweeping the yard, and other tasks. I even prayed that whatever duty FEBC assigned to me, God would help me perform it faithfully. Of all the duties, I enjoyed cleaning the flower garden the most. I love gardening because I come from a farming family. Through this, I could observe the process of plant growth and marvel at how God nurtures every plant.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to True Life Bible-Presbyterian Church for their prayers, encouragement, and financial support throughout my studies. I am also deeply thankful to all the lecturers, tutors, staff, and the Board of FEBC for their faithful guidance, teaching, and support during my time here. All glory belongs to God. Amen.

Ricardo Mejedo, BTh

First, I give grateful thanksgiving to God the Father, who ordains all things according to His will, in the name of God the Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, through the powerful work of God the Holy Spirit. I also want to thank True Life BPC, whom God used to embrace me and sustain my studies even though I came from nowhere. I am thankful to our Pastor and the Principal of FEBC, Rev Dr Jeffrey Khoo, and his family, for their spiritual lessons and comfort. I also want to thank Rev Dr Jose Lagapa and his family, whom God used to open the door for me at FEBC and for supporting me and my family financially and spiritually. I also thank the Family Bible Fellowship (FBF) of True Life BPC for supporting my family's needs through their love gifts. I thank God also for the faithful lecturers of FEBC and for all the spiritual lessons I learned. All these provisions and experiences are part of my journey as a follower of Christ.

When people hear the word "graduation", they usually think of a ceremony, certificate, diploma, or degree. But for someone called by God, "graduation" is not just the completion or end of studies and examinations. Life on earth is not just a classroom. The most important lessons happen in the heart, and the real "examinations" are the hard times we face every day, because a follower of Christ is at war with sin. Studying at Bible college has been a time of difficult testing for me. The hardest parts were not only the books and languages, but also the preparations and tests of the soul. Being far from family and facing discouragements and accusations from people were part of these preparations and tests.

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There were times when I felt very alone, shed quiet tears in my bed, and wanted to quit. These experiences and struggles are the real lessons. The Lord allowed discouragements to encourage me. He allowed weaknesses to strengthen me. I realised that to know if a knife is sharp, we must sometimes be cut. God allows these things so that I may know Him more and become stronger for Christ.

The Lord established me through the four years of study at FEBC that I should not let the feelings or opinions of other people control me. Instead, I must always be governed by His holy, inspired, preserved, and perfect Word which is the supreme authority of faith and practice. I must live the remaining time of my life on earth by faith in Christ, because without faith no one can please God. The hard times, the quiet tears, and the choice to stay faithful, even when others are unkind, are all preparing us for that final day. God does not choose us to fulfil our own desires, but He chooses us to fulfil His desires and purposes. Though we are surrounded by uncertainty, it is our privilege to declare His certainty. Through these experiences, I truly understand that God does not call the qualified; He truly qualifies those whom He calls. Daily spiritual tests are part of this calling. In these things, I realised that the true “graduation” for believers does not happen on this earth. We are all still on our journey. The real “graduation” will happen in heaven.

An earthly “graduation” marks the end of a school programme, but the spiritual journey continues until the Lord says, “Well done.” We must keep our eyes on the goal in heaven. God’s grace will keep us going until the very end. My time at FEBC has shown me that “graduation” is about growth, not completion. I thank God for those faithful men whom He used to teach and encourage me spiritually, and whom He used as His instruments to remind me that I have not yet arrived. As I look at my life today, I must be honest about where I stand. As I borrow a word from John Newton, “I am not what I ought to be, I am not what I want to be, I am not what I hope to be in another world; but still I am not what I once used to be, and by the grace of God I am what I am.”

Lord willing, I will return to the Philippines with the lessons and doctrine that I fully learned and embraced at FEBC, with the strong conviction from God to obey and declare His inspired, preserved, and perfect Word, and to focus on missions work in Luzon under True Life BPC. I humbly ask that you continue to pray for me, that I may remain faithful and steadfast in the ministry, not growing weary, but

pressing on in the strength of the Lord. Pray also for my family, that we may all serve the Lord faithfully. *“Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing”* (2 Tim 4:8). *“Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life”* (Rev 2:10).

Willem Putra Kasih Zamasi, BTh

Praise the Lord for His grace and mercy upon my life, as He has continued to sustain me until today. During my four years of study at FEBC, I have witnessed God’s goodness and His hand upon my life. Looking back to when I decided to study at FEBC, I can see how God guided me every step of the way.

I came to FEBC with almost no knowledge of English. I did not know how to speak English, write in English, or even understand people speaking English. My first semester was very difficult and frightening for me. In almost every class, I could hardly understand what was being taught. Not only that, I also did not really understand how to live as a student at FEBC, such as doing duties and participating in activities. Many times, I embarrassed myself and did things that I was not supposed to do. Seeing all these things, I often thought to myself that I would only stay for one semester and then the principal would send me back. Fear, anxiety, and confusion frightened me throughout my studies here. But by God’s grace and mercy, He helped me to continue studying semester after semester.

While studying at FEBC, I learned many things that truly changed my mindset about how to live as a Christian and what it means to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ. The following are some of the things that helped me grow in Christ and the lessons that I learned. First, I learned to be humble before God. *“Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time”* (1 Pet 5:5–6). I think that those who study at FEBC are familiar with the rule that John Calvin gave concerning the study of theology. The rule is simply the three ‘H’s: humility, humility, humility. The lecturers at FEBC often reminded the students to be humble. This command comes from the Word of God itself, which is the supreme authority of faith.

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Second, I learned to be ready to suffer. *"For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake"* (Phil 1:29). To be a Christian is a privilege, and it is only by God's grace. Christians are special people to God because they are His children. God will take care of His people and preserve them until the end. This was what the principal told me when I first met him at FEBC. When he said to me, "You must be ready to suffer," I did not understand what he meant at that time. Then the principal wrote the words on a piece of paper, and later I searched for the meaning of the words. Only then did I understand what he meant. Yes, it is true that a disciple of Jesus Christ must be ready to suffer, bear the cross, and endure hardship for Christ's sake. Many times, I thought of giving up my studies because of the many pressures and problems, both internal and external. I often questioned my situation and even murmured about why things were so difficult. But because of this reminder, I prayed to God that I would always be ready to suffer, especially when entering full-time ministry. I thank the Lord for the training at FEBC, which helped me gain a clearer picture of what ministry is like and how every Christian will face suffering.

Third, I learned biblical separation. *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God"* (Rom 12:1–2). It is very important for me to remember that I must be holy, as God is holy. It is not easy to obey and follow what the Scriptures say because the world continually tempts believers to do things that are not pleasing to the Lord. Nevertheless, it is God's command that we be holy before Him. I am thankful that God brought me to FEBC to study sound doctrine and also to learn how to apply it rightly. It is a privilege for me, especially knowing that there are many false teachings and temptations that can destroy my life and my relationship with God. I know that being a separatist is very difficult, especially in my country, but I pray that I will remain faithful to the Word of God. I also pray that God will give me wisdom, strength, and humility to apply His Word in my life, so that I may be a blessing to those around me.

Fourth, I learned to focus on the preaching of the gospel. It is sad that many churches and Christians today are more focused on social, cultural, and political issues rather than proclaiming the gospel

and bringing people to repentance. There are only a few churches that faithfully carry out the work of the gospel. At FEBC, I observed that all the lecturers focused on the work of the gospel. This does not mean that we ignore other matters, but it is important for Bible students to be equipped and prepared to preach the Word faithfully and correctly. I hope and pray that I will remain faithful to Him by focusing on the work of the gospel and leading people to true repentance from sin.

There is so much for me to thank God for regarding how He helped me during my studies at FEBC. I am especially thankful for how the Lord used many Christians to help me grow in Christ, encourage me, and support me, so that by God's grace I was able to graduate from FEBC. I am thankful for Tabernacle BPC, which supported me financially and prayed for me. It is by God's grace that through Tabernacle BPC, God sustained me during my studies at FEBC. I also thank the session of Tabernacle BPC for continuing to pray for and support me throughout my years of study.

Graduation is not the end, but the beginning of true ministry. I am thankful for the message delivered at my graduation, which caused me to reflect on how I should be serving the Lord—whether by faith or by fear. The sermon was taken from 2 Timothy 1:7, "*For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind,*" with the title "Ministering with Faith, Not Fear," preached by Rev Joshua Yong. The sermon began by explaining that there are many fears Christians face in ministry. These may include fear of financial difficulties, health problems, people, and many other concerns. Such fears cannot be completely avoided. However, the sermon reminded me that God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, love, and a sound mind. The power that comes from God strengthens Christians to serve the Lord and overcome fear and anxiety in ministry. Our motivation must also come from love for sinners and love for the Lord, because God first loved us. This reminder also helped me understand that I must serve the Lord with the right motive. I must not serve Him with murmuring or complaining. Also, God has given us a sound mind to serve Him, a mind that can understand and receive the truth, so that by His mercy I may also be able to teach others and pray that I can make right decisions in ministry for His glory.

Indeed, the sermon was a great blessing to me because before and even during graduation, I was afraid of what ministry would be like. Everything I heard in the sermon reflected what I had been thinking

and feeling. There was great anxiety in my heart, and I was also confused about where I should go to serve. Many of my classmates and friends who graduated with me already knew where they would serve, but for me it was still unclear. However, the sermon encouraged me to depend on the Lord and trust in Him. The Lord will direct my path and ministry. God comforted me through the sermon and reminded me that I must have faith in Him.

Will I be faithful to Him? Only God knows. But I pray that I will remain faithful to Him until the end of my life, serving Him with the right motive, with humility, diligence, and in the proper way. I pray that I may apply all that I have learned from FEBC and faithfully teach the whole counsel of God. I know that ministry is not easy and that there are many temptations. This is especially true because this is my first time entering ministry after eight years in Bible college—four years in my country and four years in Singapore. Nevertheless, I believe that God will never forsake His own people and those who seek to live in holiness. Psalm 55:22 says, “*Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.*”

Kelvin Lim Cheng Kwang, MDiv

“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven... A time to break down, and a time to build up...” (Eccl 3:1, 3b).

I praise and thank the LORD for another opportunity to return to FEBC to learn of His unchanging truths from His perfect Word. As I recollect how the LORD had opened the door for me to study in FEBC again, I can only echo the lyrics of the song, “In His time, in His time, He makes all things beautiful in His time” (cf. Eccl 3:11). It is difficult for a preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ who is serving full-time with a church to study full-time in a Bible college. But the LORD hath made it possible for me! He moved the heart of my pastor, Rev Prabhudas Koshy to allow me this blessed privilege and with the approval of Dr Jeffrey Khoo, I was accepted as a full-time student in July, 2022. Truly, this is the LORD’s doing!

Secondly, I want to thank the LORD for His goodness. Throughout the duration of my course of study, many precious lessons were learned. The biblical lessons learned reaffirmed my doctrinal convictions regarding the fundamentals of the faith, the preservation of Scripture, the active and passive obedience of Christ, and the communion of saints. Next, it

is a privilege to study the biblical languages of Greek and Hebrew again. These studies have helped me to rightly divide the Word of truth for the glory of God and the edifications of saints. I am so grateful to the LORD for seeing me through those lessons on the languages.

Apart from these, I also relearned John Calvin's principle of studying theology, "Humility, humility, humility." This taught me to be submissive to authority especially those who have the rule over me (cf. Heb 13:17). Moreover, my faith has been strengthened by the scriptures and the counsels of men who faithfully teach the truth of God!

Thirdly, I want to thank the LORD for His grace. I am a wretched sinner and do not deserve salvation. "... *and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent...*" (Rom 10:14c, 15a). But thanks be unto God, He not only saved me from the penalty of my sins, He also called me into the ministry of the Word. Throughout the duration of my studies in FEBC, the LORD has reiterated my calling to minister His words among prisoners. This can be confirmed from the instruction for me to write my thesis on "Prison Ministry". Besides, the LORD has delivered me from being a prisoner and appointed me to be a preacher of the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ.

Fourthly, I want to thank the LORD for His mercy. I was not only given another opportunity to enrol in the master's programme but also to redo Hebrew Reading during this programme. The LORD knew my infirmities and gave me an additional year to complete the requirements of the Hebrew language. Indeed, the LORD has allowed me to fail so that I would learn to rely on Him! He not only gave me the spiritual and physical strength needed to cope with the requirements of the languages but also that of other courses in my studies. Otherwise, I would not be able to make it through and to graduate. Truly, this is the mercy of God!

Finally, I want to express my gratitude to the LORD for the lecturers, tutors, staff and students who have been part of my learning journey in the last four years. May the LORD be pleased to sustain FEBC and use us for the extension of His kingdom here on earth! *Soli Deo Gloria.*

COLLEGE NEWS

Day of Prayer

The College began the new year with a day of prayer on 2 January 2026. The preacher was Samuel Goh, who graduated from FEBC with a BTh in 2017 and is currently an MDiv student at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, USA. He spoke from Exodus 25:8–9, encouraging all to serve the Lord with His presence and purity.

The Principal also read Rev Dr Hien Nguyen's letter to the College family. In the letter, he encouraged all to be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, to live out God's Word, and to be God's witnesses in the College and in churches. Rev Dr Hien Nguyen is an FEBC alumnus and the pastor of Brisbane Bible-Presbyterian Church and the Vietnamese Bible-Presbyterian Church in Brisbane, Australia.

Each of the lecturers also gave a word of encouragement, including the new English tutor, Mrs Julie Aw, who took the Dean Burgon Oath before all. It is mandatory for every Board and faculty member of FEBC to believe in the Verbal Plenary Inspiration and Verbal Plenary Preservation of Holy Scripture, its consequent infallibility and inerrancy, and hence its sole, supreme, and final authority in faith and practice.

Corrigendum: The announcement of a new English tutor in the January 2026 issue of *The Burning Bush* should read, in the relevant part, as follows: "Mrs Julie Aw has taught a range of language and professional communication courses at NUS, NTU, SP and SMU. She also has



conducted English language and teaching methodology classes for international students and teachers. She holds a Master of Education (English Language) from Nanyang Technological University, as well as a Bachelor of Arts and a Diploma in Education from the National University of Singapore.”

Enrolment

This semester, FEBC matriculated five new students: from China—*Diao Zimo, Zhang Entong*; from England—*Shawn Samuel Joseph*; from the Philippines—*Mar Kevin Pili De Guzman*; and from Sri Lanka—*Sivapalan Palasingam*.

The total enrolment was 589, consisting of 48 full-time residential students and 541 part-time/online students. They came from 17 countries: Australia, Cambodia, China, Congo, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Sierra Leone, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand, USA.

Lecturers and Courses

The lecturers/tutors (and courses) during the January-May 2026 semester were: Rev Dr Jeffrey Khoo—*Bible-Presbyterianism, Calvin's Institutes II, Heresies and Orthodoxy*; Rev Dr Quek Suan Yew—*Hebrew Reading II, Homiletics, Old Testament History I*; Rev Dr Prabhudas Koshy—*Pastoral Theology*; Rev Stephen Khoo—*Ezra*; Rev Tan Kian Sing—*1 Timothy*; Rev Clement Chew—*Elementary Hebrew II, Theology of Worship*; Rev Dr Jose Lagapa—*Biblical Missions*; Rev Zhu Jianwei—*Old Testament Survey II (Chinese)*; Rev Samuel Joseph—*Biblical Apologetics, Greek Exegesis II*; Miss Carol Lee—*Adult Christian Education, Theological Research and Writing*; Mr Joshua Yong—*Greek Reading II, Contemporary Theology IV*; Mr Cornelius Koshy—*Elementary Greek II*; Miss Joycelyn Chng—*Christian School Administration*; Mrs Cheng May Lynn—*Beginner Pianoforte*; Mrs Patricia Joseph—*Elementary English II*; Mrs Ng May Shyen—*Intermediate English II*; Mrs Julie Aw—*Advanced English II*.

Basic Theology for Everyone

Fourteen Basic Theology for Everyone (BTFE) courses were offered to the public on campus and online in the January-May 2026 semester: (1) Bible-Presbyterianism, (2) Calvin's Institutes II, (3) Heresies and Orthodoxy, (4) Old Testament History I, (5) Pastoral Theology, (6) Ezra, (7) 1 Timothy, (8) Theology of Worship, (9) Biblical Missions, (10) Old

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Testament Survey II (Chinese), (11) Biblical Apologetics, (12) Adult Christian Education, (13) Contemporary Theology IV, (14) Christian School Administration.

Daily Vacation Bible College



The Daily Vacation Bible College (DVBC) course on “Separation and Communion” was taught by the Principal from 4 to 10 May 2026. The course description is as follows: “The course examines the biblical doctrines of ecclesiastical separation and the communion of saints. It seeks to explain how the church maintains biblical purity while expressing spiritual unity. Special attention is given to the doctrinal and practical harmony between separation from error and fellowship in the truth.” A total of 89 students signed up for the course.

51st Graduation Service

FEBC’s 51st Graduation Service was held on the Lord’s Day, 10 May 2026, at Calvary Pandan Bible-Presbyterian Church. Over 500 attended the service to rejoice with the 23 who were conferred their respective degrees and certificates: **Certificate of Religious Knowledge (CertRK)**: Benjamin Boi Yen Ming, Gideon Yeow Hsien Yee, Raynor Fong Ruibin, Alice Tan Suay Choo, Taneti Anand; **Certificate of Biblical Studies (CertBS)**: Chatchanok Sumangkhaset, Deneb Josel Villanueva Ganancial, Stephen Kiew Jon Chye, Lucas Lek Jan Jin, Sarah Tang Hui Qin, Isaac Tham Yijie, Eunice Ting Jia Wei; **Diploma in Theology (DipTh)**: Winston Chew Yoon Chong, Pang Yee Hong, Wee Bo Hao, Wee Hong Hao, Linda Wong Siew Ping; **Bachelor of Religious Education (BRE)**: Cho Hyeon Ji; **Bachelor of Theology (BTh)**: Car Vincent Cuesta Magkidong, Erniati Tabita Karma, Ricardo Mejedo, Willem Putra Kasih Zamasi; **Master of Divinity (MDiv)**: Kelvin Lim Cheng Kwang.

The Rev Joshua Yong was the Lord's messenger, and he spoke on "Ministering with Faith, Not Fear" (2 Tim 1:7).

End-of-Term Retreat



A total of 74 students, alumni, faculty, and friends attended the end-of-term thanksgiving retreat at Xi An Presbyterian Church's campsite in Tangkak, Malaysia, from 12 to 14 May 2026.

The theme for this retreat was "*The Disciplined Student*". A total of five messages were preached by Rev Dr Jeffrey Khoo (*Discipline of the Mind*), Rev Zhu Jianwei (*Discipline of the Body*), Rev Clement Chew (*Discipline of the Emotions*), Rev Zhu Xinkai (*Discipline of the Tongue*), and Pr Cornelius Koshy (*Discipline of Time*).

The graduates also presented their respective theses: Kelvin Lim on "*Ministry among Prisoners*"; Willem Zamasi on "*An Examination of Christian Festivals and Their Compromising Practices in the Light of the Doctrine of Biblical Separation*"; Car Vincent on "*The Significance of Christ's Bodily Resurrection in the Christian Realm*"; Cho Hyeon Ji on "*Fertility and Faith: An Analysis of Declining Birth Rates in Relation to Faith*"; and Erniati Karma on "*Reconciliation in Philemon: A Biblical Pattern for Christian Counselling*".

Students presented praise items, skits based on the messages, and thanksgiving testimonies throughout the meetings. There was also a Bible quiz and badminton for recreation. A film on the renowned blind Korean pastor, An Yohan, was screened, and another film on the persecution of Christians around the world was also shown.

**End of Term Retreat at Tangkak, Malaysia
(12–14 May 2026)**



Far Eastern Bible College 51st Graduation Service

