



# The Burning Bush

ISSN 0219-5984

January 2024

Volume 30 Number 1

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# THE BURNING BUSH

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FAR EASTERN BIBLE COLLEGE  
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Editor : Jeffrey Khoo  
Publisher : Far Eastern Bible College  
Website : [www.febc.edu.sg](http://www.febc.edu.sg)  
Permit : MCI (P) 018/03/2023

*The Burning Bush* (ISSN 0219-5984) is published bi-annually in January and July, and contains theological papers, sermons, testimonies, book reviews, College news, and alumni reports. Articles are indexed in the *Christian Periodical Index*. The journal is distributed gratis to the FEBC family and Bible-Presbyterian churches, and is available online at [www.febc.edu.sg](http://www.febc.edu.sg). Local/Foreign subscription rates in Singapore dollars: one year—\$8/\$16; two years—\$15/\$30; back issues—\$4/\$8 per copy. Make cheques payable to “Far Eastern Bible College.”

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# TRUTH, CHARITY, UNITY

Jeffrey Khoo

There are three things that are vital for church health and growth—things every church should desire for, and they are truth (2 Cor 13:8), charity (1 Cor 13:13), and unity (Ps 133:1).

## Truth

Truth is vital because truth is life. When there is no truth, there is no life. For this reason, truth must come first. Where is truth? Truth is in the Lord Jesus Christ. In John 14:6, Jesus declared, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”* Jesus is the truth and He is the only living and true way to eternal life.

Besides the Lord Jesus, what else is truth? John 17:17 says God’s Word is truth, *“Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.”* Jesus Christ is the truth and the Bible which is His Word is also the truth.

By knowing Jesus Christ personally and believing in the Bible sincerely, we will know the truth about life—where we come from, why we are here, where we will be going. Knowing the truth sets us free from the guilt of sin, from the evil of this world, and from the judgement to come. Jesus said, *“And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”* (John 8:32).

If we refuse the truth, we live in a lie. When we live in a lie, we die. To those who reject the truth, Jesus said, *“Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not.”* (John 8:44–45).

Satan wants us to believe and live in a lie so that we will end up like him, in the lake of fire. Why follow Satan? He is very evil and wicked. Follow instead the thrice holy God who created us, even the Lord Jesus who saved us from our sins. Our God is a very good God

because He is a God of love (2 Cor 13:11). *“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. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.”* (John 3:16–17). God wants us to live, not die!

### Charity

Charity (Love) follows truth. 1 Corinthians 13:6 says charity *“Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth.”* When truth is present, charity is happy. When you have Jesus and His Word in your life, you will know what love is and how to show it to others. The Apostle Peter enjoined all believers, *“Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently”* (1 Pet 1:22).

Charity is vital, for without charity *“I am nothing”* (1 Cor 13:2). That is a profound statement by the Apostle Paul. What does it mean? It means *“I am a loser, a big zero.”* It can mean, *“I am empty inside, without Christ and without life.”* Consider what John, the Apostle of love, himself said, *“In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous. Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you. We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.”* (1 John 3:10–15).

Simply put, if we do not love our fellow man, we do not know God. If we know God, have experienced His love and grace, His mercy and forgiveness, we will know how to love others and will show it. John’s brother the Apostle James himself said, *“If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well... What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are*

## TRUTH, CHARITY, UNITY

*needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone” (Jas 2:8, 14–17). If faith without works is dead, charity without works is dead also, for charity is love in deed.*

Charity is something very good. It is love in action, love in relation to others. 1 Corinthians 13:4–7 tells us: *“Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.”* As such, charity will not fail to produce good results, like unity.

### Unity

Charity begets unity. This can be seen in God’s love to us through Jesus Christ: *“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.... For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life”* (Rom 5:8, 10). This reconciling love of Christ is a love that no one can put asunder (Mark 10:9). *“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Rom 8:35–39). In Christ, we are joined to God forever by His love and by His Spirit (Eph 2:13–22).

Unity is very precious and desirable, *“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”* (Ps 133:1). As members of the body of Christ, we are not only united to Christ but also to one another. That was why the Apostle Paul exhorted, *“[W]alk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all”* (Eph 4:1–6). This unity which is already present must be

preserved by means of truth and charity. When there is truth and charity, there is unity.

### **Truth + Charity = Unity**

Truth plus charity equals unity. When we believe the truth of Christ and live out the grace of charity in our lives, we will see unity in our homes and in our churches. When God is glorified in our midst, when His truth is believed (Mark 12:31-33; 1 Cor 10:31, Phil 1:9-11) and charity practised in the following ways: by speaking the truth in love, and not in a proud, arrogant, self-righteous manner (Eph 4:15, Matt 7:1-5), being kind, tenderhearted, forgiving towards one another (Eph 4:32), doing things humbly without envy and strife (Phil 2:3), seeking always the other person's good and well-being (Phil 2:4), we will see a wonderful union and communion in all our relationships and interactions.

Such a blessed unity was experienced by the early church as seen in Acts 2:41-47, which resulted in the growth of the church and the extension of God's kingdom, *"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."*

When the church is united in truth and love, it will be a church most joyful and peaceful. It will be a real blessing to people and they will want to be part of it. *"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another"* (John 13:35). Can we be such a church? May the Lord help us.

If truth plus charity equals unity, then what is truth without charity? Truth without charity is hypocrisy.

### **Truth – Charity = Hypocrisy**

There are men who claim to speak the truth and to love their fellow men, but in reality they do not. Their lips and their hearts are not in sync; they say one thing but mean something else. Or they say one thing but do something quite different, quite the opposite. They really do not believe the truth, neither do they love it, even though they say they do. Isaiah 29:13 describes them, *“Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men.”*

The prophet reveals that their “fear of God” does not come from God at all but *“is taught by the precept of men.”* Their fear is a man-made fear that is based upon false human assumptions and self-induced prejudices. They think they fear God and love men, but actually, they fear men and love themselves. They think themselves godly and righteous, but actually, it is conceit or conceitedness, plain and simple.

The truth they claim to have is thus only an appearance or a semblance of truth. It seems true but actually it is not. People may not be able to see through the façade, but God sees all, He sees the heart, and the heart is not good, nor right. Jeremiah 17:9 says, *“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”* The Lord Jesus exposed the “God-fearing” scribes and Pharisees for who they truly were, *“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity”* (Matt 23:27–28).

Hypocrisy is a form of deceit or deception that seeks to divide, not unite. A deceitful and divisive tongue is an abomination to God. Proverbs 6:16–19 says, *“These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.”* Proverbs 11:9 says, *“An hypocrite with his mouth destroyeth his neighbour: but through knowledge shall the just be delivered.”*

What God loves is unity in the ministry of the gospel and that can only be had if there is truth and charity. *“Only let your conversation [ie loving manner of life] be as it becometh the gospel of Christ [ie the truth of God’s Word]: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel [ie in Christian unity and harmony]; And in nothing terrified by your adversaries [who hate you and seek to destroy you]: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God”* (Phil 1:27-28).

A hypocritical faith is no faith at all (Matt 23:2-3). In James 2:19-20, we are told that the demons believe the truth, but are they saved? *“Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?”* (cf Acts 6:16-17). The statement, *“O vain man”*, is another way of saying, *“I am nothing”* (1 Cor 13:2). God is not impressed with lip service. The life must match the lips or else it is not life at all but a lie. 1 John 2:4-5 says, *“He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.”* Faith without charity is empty.

### **Charity – Truth = Heresy**

Charity without truth is heresy. Charity that is not defined or governed by truth is not charity at all. It is a false charity that is deceptive. For instance, the liberals or modernists who hype love but despise truth are quick to dismiss the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. One example of this is the infamous Auburn Affirmation (1924) of the liberal Presbyterian Church of USA (PCUSA). In that declaration, they dismissed (1) the inerrancy of Scripture, (2) the virgin birth of Christ, (3) the miracles of Christ, (4) the substitutionary atonement of Christ, and (5) the resurrection of Christ as unnecessary for the Christian faith. A Christian they say does not need to believe in these five fundamentals to be saved. That is heretical for if these doctrines are denied, there is no gospel, no forgiveness, no salvation.

The liberals may be full of charity and charitable deeds, but if they deny the gospel truth by believing in a lie, then it brings death not life. As the Apostle Paul said, *“And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching*



*vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not.... And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.... If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.”* (1 Cor 15:14, 15, 17, 19). *“But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.”* (1 Cor 15:20). The resurrection of Christ is an undeniable historical fact attested by *“many infallible proofs”* (Acts 1:3); *“For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth”* (2 Cor 13:8).

Then there are those like the ecumenists who teach that unity is most important, not truth. They say, “love unites, doctrine divides”, quoting Jesus’ words in John 17:11, *“that they may be one, as we are.”* But they quote Jesus out of context, for Jesus qualified what that oneness is in John 17:17-23. When Jesus spoke of oneness, it is a oneness found in those (1) who believe in God’s sanctifying truth, ie His Word, the Holy Scriptures (John 17:17), (2) who are in true and holy communion with God the Father and God the Son (John 17:21), (3) who love and obey the Father and the Son (John 17:6, 8), (4) who have received the glory of Christ which is full of grace and truth (John 17:22 cf John 1:14). It is thus not a free-for-all, up-to-you kind of love and unity that the liberals and the ecumenists want us to have—a truthless unity that is without any boundaries or controls.

Dr John Whitcomb in his article, “When Love Divorces Doctrine and Unity Leaves Truth”, gave an excellent reason why love cannot exist without truth. He wrote, “Love rejoices in the Truth. Why? Because without Truth to define it, to interpret it, to protect it, to guide it, to channel it—love can become a total disaster! We dare not place Truth on the same level as virtues. Virtues would shrivel up and die if it were not for Truth. We cannot imagine life on this planet without water. Water is absolutely essential for life, as long as it stays within proper channels, within its canals, aqueducts and pipes. But when water gets out of control, it is the second greatest catastrophe that can happen to this planet, second only to fire. On the one hand it is an absolutely essential blessing, but on the other hand, it may become a near-total disaster. So it is also with love.”

Let us make sure we truly possess the truth for truth is life, and if we indeed possess the truth, we will surely live a life of charity and not

hypocrisy. A loveless truth and a truthless love will not bring unity, harmony, and peace, but dissension, division, and destruction.

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# THE BEST LOVE SONG OF ALL: A COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SOLOMON (II)

Jeffrey Khoo

## Wedding and Consummation (3:6-5:1)

**3:6** *“Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchant?”*

On the wedding day, the groom goes to the bride’s house to escort her to the wedding venue. It is a grand and elaborate procession with God’s presence as symbolised by the “pillars of smoke.” The “pillars” speak of God’s presence and providence just like the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night in the Exodus (Exod 13:21-22). This highlights the Lord’s providential leading and guidance of the couple from the day of courtship till the wedding day and even after the wedding (cf Neh 9:19).

“Myrrh and frankincense” are associated with worship. The wedding is not just a time of human celebration, it is also a time of worship for it is God who is the Author of the marriage (Gen 2:18-25). God must be remembered and not forgotten. Without God, the marital union would be purely carnal and not spiritual. There is no blessing without God in the picture.

The covenant home must see God taking centre stage in the life of the newlyweds. *“Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it”* (Ps 127:1). The “powders of the merchant” are a further description of the sweet smelling perfumes that must pervade the whole event—how the wedding ceremony must be full of worship, praise and thanksgiving to God, conducted according to God’s Word, and not in a worldly way.

**3:7-8** *“Behold his bed, which is Solomon’s; threescore valiant men are about it, of the valiant of Israel. They all hold swords, being expert in war: every man hath his sword upon his thigh because of fear in the night.”*

The bride is going to be married to just one particular man and she will sleep on his bed. It is a monogamous bed, and utterly exclusive. *“Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.”* (Heb 13:4). The man must be protective of his marital bed. He must guard it with all his might. This is seen in the groom’s calling of 60 brave men who will protect him and his bride from those who are out to hinder their union. *“And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”* (Mark 10:8-9).

The relationship between Christ and His Church is sacred and must be protected. The *“valiant men”* point to the Lord’s servants—kings, priests, prophets, apostles, pastors, teachers—whose ministry is to protect the Church from spiritual harm and danger (2 Kgs 17:13, Jer 44:4, Acts 20:28-29). All the ministers of the Gospel must be experts in fighting the good fight of faith (1 Tim 6:12; 2 Tim 4:7), wielding their swords (ie the Holy Scriptures) skilfully (Eph 6:17, Heb 4:12).

It goes without saying that those who wish to be ministers of the Gospel must undergo strict and strenuous training at a Bible-believing and Bible-defending College or Seminary like Far Eastern Bible College (FEBC) which is a spiritual SAFTI (Singapore Armed Forces Training Institute) to be equipped to handle the Word of God rightly (2 Tim 2:15).

**3:9-10** *“King Solomon made himself a chariot of the wood of Lebanon. He made the pillars thereof of silver, the bottom thereof of gold, the covering of it of purple, the midst thereof being paved with love, for the daughters of Jerusalem.”*

The wedding procession and the wedding service are quite impressive. Solomon prepared a sedan chair made of Lebanese wood—the trees of Lebanon produced the best wood in those days (2 Kgs 19:23). The fittings of the chair were made of gold and silver, covered with royal purple drapes, and decorated with flowers that are pleasing to womenfolk. This gives a picture of the thoughtfulness and care to the wedding event.

The wedding service should not be taken lightly. Every effort should be made to ensure that the whole ceremony is dignified and delightful. The bride’s gown should be pure white and exude feminine chastity and modesty—no low cuts and bare backs. The groom should be well groomed, clean shaven, dressed smartly in coat and tie.

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The wedding service should reflect godliness and not worldliness. The service is to be a sacred and solemn ceremony since lifelong vows will be made before God and man. *“But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”* (Mark 10:6–9). The word “cleave” (Gen 2:24, Mark 10:7) in the original is a very strong word for joining or binding. It has the idea of soldering together two metal pieces to form one whole piece. It is permanent and inseparable. Marriage is thus a lifelong union and a lifetime commitment. Hence the vow, “till death us do part.”

Solomon, the royal bridegroom, rides into town on a chariot. It points to Christ, the greater Solomon, who will ride into this world as King, at first meekly and then mightily (Matt 21:5, Rev 19:11–16).

**3:11** *“Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold king Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart.”*

The word “espousals” (*chatunnah*) here refers to the wedding which has come. This is the first time a wedding is mentioned in the Song. It is the father who gives his daughter away in marriage, and it is the mother who blesses her son as he leaves her to be joined to his bride. Bathsheba placed a wreath or a garland around Solomon to send him off with her blessing. It is important that both sets of parents give their blessings. The man should seek the blessing of her father as well as his own mother.

“In contemplating marriage”, the Rev Dr Timothy Tow advised, “one should first seek God’s blessing and second our parents’. *“Honour thy father and thy mother, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee; that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee, in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.”* (Deut 5:16). Do you get your parents’ blessing for the girl you are going to marry and vice versa?... That honouring your parents in marriage should also be properly expressed in your Invitation Card. Not you invite with your parents appended below, but rather your parents invite and your names under. Honouring your parents is a natural law with a promise—long life to filial sons and daughters.”

The daughters of Jerusalem and of Zion refer to His people who will behold their King and Saviour when He comes back for them (Acts 1:10-11, Rev 1:7). “[H]is mother crowned him”—Consider how Mary herself crowned Him as Her Lord and Saviour when she knew she was bearing the Son of God in her womb (Luke 1:46-55).

**4:1** *“Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; thou hast doves’ eyes within thy locks: thy hair is as a flock of goats, that appear from mount Gilead.”*

Again, he praises her and adores her for her beauty. He cannot get enough of her beauty. He says it again and again that he loves her very much. He does not hide his feelings, but expresses them with good words to reassure her of his love for her. He describes the beauty of her face as seen in her dovelike eyes exuding peace and comfort (cf 1:15).

Her long black hair like a veil conceals her eyes. (The goats of Gilead which are usually black in colour are used to describe the colour of her hair.) On the wedding day, the bride wears a veil to hide her beauty. Her beauty is unveiled by her husband who is the only one privileged to do so (cf Gen 24:65). *“Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth.”* (Prov 5:18).

The Bride of Christ is commended for her beauty. She is beautiful not because of herself, but because of her Groom (Eph 5:25-27); *“But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption”* (1 Cor 1:30 cf Phil 3:8-9). The Bridegroom has made her beautiful by clothing her with His righteousness and by adorning her with all the graces of His Spirit, *“but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.”* (1 Cor 6:11). The Church is described as having *“dove’s eyes”* which means she is peace-loving and peace-seeking. She preaches the Gospel of peace (Rom 10:15) and is a peacemaker (Matt 5:9). She is as *“harmless as doves”* (Matt 10:16). *“Within thy locks”* speaks of her modesty and chastity (cf 1 Tim 2:9-10), humility and meekness (Matt 5:5, 10). She does not return evil with evil, but returns evil with good (Rom 12:21).

**4:2-3** *“Thy teeth are like a flock of sheep that are even shorn, which came up from the washing; whereof every one bear twins, and none is barren*

## THE BEST LOVE SONG OF ALL (II)

*among them. Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet, and thy speech is comely: thy temples are like a piece of a pomegranate within thy locks."*

The beauty of her face is further described here. Her white teeth are clean and even. Her lips are of a nice size, shape and colour. Her speech is fitting and appropriate and not like a loud and quarrelsome woman. You do not want a loud and quarrelsome woman at home. The loud and quarrelsome woman irritates like a constantly dripping tap (Prov 19:13). *"A continual dropping in a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike."* (Prov 27:15). *"It is better to dwell in the corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman and in a wide house."* (Prov 25:24).

Virtue is beautiful. Her "temples" (of the face, ie cheeks) are rosy (pomegranate is pinkish red in colour). Beauty is not in the looks but in the heart. Her godly heart is reflected in her healthy face. A virtuous woman shows a healthy countenance. *"Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come. She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness.... Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised."* (Prov 31:25-26, 30).

*"Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands" (1 Pet 3:1-5).*

**4:4** *"Thy neck is like the tower of David builded for an armoury, whereon there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men."*

Her neck looks stately—slender yet strong. It speaks of her strong support from family and friends. She is also well received by the groom's family and friends who see her as a most suitable wife for him. She is a capable helpmeet and he is in good hands.

Such a virtuous woman is clearly described in Proverbs 31:10-25, *"Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil."*

*She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life. She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar. She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens. She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard. She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms. She perceiveth that her merchandise is good: her candle goeth not out by night. She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff. She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy. She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet. She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple. Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land. She maketh fine linen, and selleth it; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant. Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come."*

For the Church to remain pure and chaste, she must *"Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."* (Eph 6:11-13).

**4:5** *"Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins, which feed among the lilies."*

This is the wedding night. *"And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed."* (Gen 2:25).

The breasts of a woman are outstandingly beautiful. Compared to previous mention (cf 1:13; 2:17), this is by far the most vivid description of what he now sees in plain sight, on the wedding night itself. He captures her physical beauty in poetic terms, likening her breasts to two graceful young deer in the scenic backdrop of majestic mountains and rolling hills full of shapely flowers (*shoshannim*—*"lilies"*) in full bloom releasing a sweet scent into the air. (Jewish philosopher Abraham ibn Ezra described the *shoshannah* lily as a white flower with six petals and six stamens with a good fragrance.)



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Some think that this part of the Song is unbefitting of Scripture because it is sexually explicit. Those who think like this are looking at the book with too much Hollywood in mind—where sex is abusive and exploitive (cf 1 John 2:15-17). However, when the Song is seen through the lens of Holy Writ and sung in the backdrop of a sacred union between a man and his wife, it is something most beautiful and wonderful (cf Rom 12:1-2). She is for his eyes only, and he is for her eyes only. Sex is created by God, and when celebrated in the confines of a marital relationship between a man and a woman that is loving and giving and not selfish and lustful, the sexual union is not only physically satisfying, but also spiritually sanctifying. Sex is created by God to be enjoyed within marriage; there are no two ways about it.

**4:6** *“Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, I will get me to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense.”*

This is the fulfilment of what was anticipated in chapter 2:17. Courtship is over, the wedding has come. He embraces her and enjoys her sweet smell. *“Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well. Let thy fountains be dispersed abroad, and rivers of waters in the streets. Let them be only thine own, and not strangers’ with thee. Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth. Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love. And why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger?”* (Prov 5:15-20)

The day of fulfilment will finally arrive when Christ weds His Church: *“Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.”* (Rev 19:7-8).

Just like the Old Testament is full of shadows and symbols of the New Testament (Col 2:17, Heb 8:5; 10:1), so is the New Testament in relation to the Kingdom of God to come (cf 1 Cor 13:12; 2 Cor 3:18). We do not see the Lord Jesus face to face now, but one day we will, *“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”* (1 John 3:2).

**4:7** *“Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee.”*

He praises her for her beauty and chastity. She is absolutely lovely and attractive to him. “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.” Every husband should see his wife in such a superlative way.

Christ says He will come quickly to marry His Church, “*And, behold, I come quickly;... And the Spirit and the bride say, Come.*” (Rev 22:12,17). “*Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.*” (Rev 19:7-8).

The Church will be finally and entirely perfect in heaven, truly beautiful, and totally pure and clean. Once the Lord has justified His Bride, He will surely sanctify her, and ultimately glorify her (Rom 8:30). “*Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.*” (Eph 5:25-27).

**4:8-9** *“Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, with me from Lebanon: look from the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon, from the lions’ dens, from the mountains of the leopards. Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck.”*

The word “*spouse*” (*kallah*) appears for the first time here and five more times afterwards (4:8-12; 5:1). Now that the wedding is over, the time for consummation has come. He calls on her to detach herself from a distant country (Lebanon is a northern country outside of Israel), from the heights of the mountains—Amana, Shenir, Hermon, from the open spaces where predators lurk (cf 1 Pet 5:8; Jas 4:7). He uses all these metaphors to tell her that they should no longer perceive each other as “foreigners” or distant, but as the closest of companions. “*Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.*” (Gen 2:24). They are no longer in danger of sinful concupiscence but are totally free to be sexually intimate with each other. “*And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.*” (Gen 2:25).

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Sex is very good within marriage, but sinful, shameful, and scandalous outside of it. The word “*ravish*” (*lebab*) speaks of intense feelings of the heart. It is used twice here to highlight the immense intensity of his desire for her. He calls her his “*sister*” which in this context is another term for “*wife*” (also 4:10, 12; 5:1-2 cf 1 Cor 9:5). She is no longer a stranger but a next of kin—his closest relative. “*One of thine eyes*” here can mean a glance or a playful wink. The “*chain of thy neck*” can either refer to a necklace or a neck muscle. He is enraptured by how she playfully looks at him and the way she turns her graceful neck.

**4:10-12** *“How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse! how much better is thy love than wine! and the smell of thine ointments than all spices! Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb: honey and milk are under thy tongue; and the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon. A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.”*

The “*love*” (*doḏ*) here (also in 1:2), refers to physical affection, no more as an engaged couple but as a married couple. To him, her physical touch is better than the most expensive wine, and the smell of the perfume she wears is better than all the perfumes combined. In other words, he desires to be sexually intimate with no one else but her.

The lips speak of kissing in the lovemaking. This is the first time they kiss lip to lip. Her lips are like honeycomb—invitingly pleasant. The kissing is described as sweet to the taste and to the smell. The words from her lips are also pleasant to hear: “*Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones.*” (Prov 16:24). Both milk and honey are health foods—she speaks good and godly words that build up his soul (Prov 24:13-14).

The “*smell of Lebanon*” is a nice one because of the country’s famed cedar trees (1 Kgs 5:6; 6:9-10). Cedar wood gives off an aromatic odour like what is found in an heirloom camphor box. Thus, her “*garments is like the smell of Lebanon*” must mean her dressing pleases her husband very much. We see here that biblical lovemaking is both physically and spiritually therapeutic.

His newly wedded bride is described as an enclosed garden. This speaks of her virginity (symbolised by the shuttered spring and sealed fountain). She has kept her chastity for her husband.

The Church is here called the “*spouse*” or wife of Christ. The Church is a called-out body of Christ, as Israel was, “*And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the LORD am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine.*” (Lev 20:26 cf Deut 7:6; 14:2; 26:18–19). She has been called out of the world of darkness into the marvellous light of God’s kingdom: “*But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light*” (1 Pet 2:9). Herein, is the doctrine and practice of separation for the Church also spoken of as “*a garden inclosed... a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.*” (v 12 cf 2 Cor 6:14–7:1).

How then is the Church His sister if she is His wife? John Gill answered, “the church may be called Christ’s sister, because of his incarnation, in virtue of which he is not ashamed to call his people his brethren, and so his sisters, Heb2:11; and on account of their adoption; in which respect, he that is Christ’s Father is theirs; and which is evidenced in regeneration; when they, through grace, do the will of his Father, and so are his brother, and sister, and mother, Mt12:50.”

Jesus is known as our Brother since He is the Firstborn, “*And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.*” (Col 1:18), “*And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood*” (Rev 1:5).

**4:13–14** “*Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphire, with spikenard, Spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices.*”

His virgin bride has a most beautiful garden with all kinds of plants and flowers and fruits and aromatic spices. The garden refers to her whole being—body and soul. Camphire is the henna plant, the leaves of which produce a reddish-brown dye that women apply to their hands and its yellowish white flowers produce a nice scent. Spikenard is expensive aromatic oil, and the saffron is from the crocus plant and its pistils are used in certain foods or cuisine for flavour and colour. Calamus is a type of grass with medicinal properties. Cinnamon is a spice that comes from the bark of the Cinnamon tree and has health

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benefits. Aloes comes from a tree that produces a fragrant smell (cf Ps 45:8). All this speaks of how she is overwhelmingly beautiful, and altogether chaste and pure. It also speaks of how lovemaking can be beneficial to one's health.

The church should be a well-watered garden. The plants are her members (cf John 15:4-5). The plants come with all kinds of delicious fruits and sweet smelling spices. They tell us how the church must be fruitful, bearing the fruit of the Spirit, full of *"love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance"* (Gal 5:22-23), and full of the gifts of the Spirit for the edifying of the saints (Eph 4:12).

God pays attention to His garden and waters it so that it will bloom and flourish. *"For the LORD shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.... And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not."* (Isa 51:3; 58:11).

**4:15-16** *"A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon. Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits."*

Her luscious and luxuriant garden which was closed is now open. She invites him in to enjoy all that it has to offer. Note that the garden is only open to him. Only he can enter. It is *"his garden"* and only he can *"eat his pleasant fruits."* He has exclusive rights to the garden. She belongs to him and him alone (2:16 cf 1 Cor 7:3-4, Hos 3:3).

That is why there is treachery when a husband commits adultery and betrays the love his wife has for him. *"Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth."* (Mal 2:14-15).

The allusion to water sources and outlets here speaks of how the Church is alive because she is drinking from the Fountain, the Well, the River of life (cf John 4:10; 7:38; Rev 22:1). Jesus said, *“But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”* (John 4:14).

For the Church to be alive and fruitful, she must live by the Spirit and be filled with the Spirit. *“This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.”* (Gal 5:16).

**5:1** *“I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse: I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk: eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.”*

He enters into the innermost sanctum of her garden which now belongs to him, a place locked up and untouched until now. He now goes in and knows her in the most intimate way (Gen 29:21). The marriage is consummated—*“I have gathered... I have eaten... I have drunk”*—it is done; it is double happiness—*“my myrrh with my spice [it is doubly fragrant]... my honeycomb with my honey [it is doubly sweet]... my wine with my milk [it is doubly nourishing].”* He is now one flesh with her (Gen 2:23–25).

*“O friends; drink”*—a toasting to the couple. This tells us that a holy matrimony is a public event. Family and friends serve as witnesses to the wedding and hold them accountable to the vows they have taken, to be each other’s loving companions for life. *“Yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.”* His wife encourages him to enjoy all that she has to offer in her garden (cf 4:9–16). It goes without saying that what happens in the garden between the newlyweds is strictly private.

Jesus says, *“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”* (Rev 3:20). The Church that has opened the door of her garden to Jesus is seeing Him enjoying their company. He delights in the fellowship of His Bride, the Church (Pss 16:3; 37:23; 147:11), which will culminate in *“the marriage supper of the Lamb”* (Rev 19:9).

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# **THE BIBLICAL PROMISES OF THE VERBAL AND PLENARY PRESERVATION OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES**

George Skariah

The Westminster Confession of Faith of 1646 was the first Church creed that mentioned the doctrine of the verbal and plenary preservation of the Holy Scriptures, stating, “The Old Testament in Hebrew... and New Testament in Greek... being immediately inspired by God, and by His singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentical.”<sup>1</sup> The Helvetic Consensus Formula in 1675 likewise stated, “God saw to it that His Word, which is with power unto salvation to everyone who believes, was entrusted to writing not only through Moses, the prophets and apostles but also He has stood guard and watched over it with a fatherly concern to the present time that it not be destroyed by the cunning of Satan or by any other human deceit.”<sup>2</sup>

However, the question to be asked is: What is the biblical basis for the doctrine of the verbal and plenary preservation (aka the special providential preservation) of the Scriptures? Is the doctrine of preservation a doctrine that has its basis only in the Westminster Confession or in the Helvetic Consensus? The answer is no. Like any other Christian doctrine, it finds its basis in the absolute and unfailing authority of Scripture itself.

There are several scriptural passages covering both the Old and New Testaments that speak of the doctrine of the verbal and plenary preservation of the Holy Scriptures. This paper will study the key passages dealing with the promises of preservation.

## **Psalm 12:6-7**

*“The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever.”* (Ps 12:6-7). Psalm 12:6-7 is

one of the most important Scripture texts that speak about the preservation of God's words. The psalmist unequivocally declares that God's words are pure words and God will preserve them forever. This understanding of these two verses is not without question, however. For example, William Combs argues,

... it is more probable that verse 7 ("Thou shalt [sic] keep them... thou shalt preserve them") is not even referring to "the words of the LORD" in verse 6. That is, the antecedent of "them" in verse 7 is probably not the "words" of verse 6. The Hebrew term for "them" (twice in v 7) is masculine, while the term for "words" is feminine. Therefore, most interpreters and versions understand the promise of preservation in verse 7 to apply to the "poor" and "needy" of verse 5.<sup>3</sup>

He says David in this Psalm is concerned about the righteous who are being oppressed by the wicked. In such a situation he declares his assurance that God will preserve the righteous forever. "Taken in this sense," according to Combs, "this passage has no bearing on the doctrine of preservation."<sup>4</sup> The modern Bible versions echo the same sentiment. The NIV, for example, translates verses 6-7, "*And the words of the LORD are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times. O LORD, you will keep us safe and protect us from such people forever.*" This translation can only refer to the preservation of people. However, applying the Hebrew grammar in a correct way will help one to solve the problem, and to understand from these two verses that God has indeed promised to preserve His words for all generations.

Psalm 12 is a psalm of contrasts. The psalmist David contrasts the godly with the ungodly and the words of the Lord with the words of men. It is also a psalm of lament. David laments the evil words of his enemies. Thomas Strouse gives the following structural analysis of the psalm:<sup>5</sup>

- A. The Recognition of the Need for Divine Help (v 1)
  - B. The Threat of the Words of the Ungodly (vv 2-4)
    - C. God's Promises (v 5)
      - B<sup>1</sup>. The Antidote of the Words of God (vv 6-7)
        - A<sup>1</sup>. The Recognition of the Need for Divine Help (v 8)

According to Strouse, the structure of the psalm is asymmetric. The focus of the psalm is on point C, God's Promises (v 5).<sup>6</sup>

King David, faced with the evil intentions of the ungodly, goes to the LORD for help (v 1). The deceitfulness and arrogant nature of the



ungodly and God's judgment upon them for their evil acts are vividly described by the psalmist (vv 2-4). David exposes the prevailing falsehood and hypocritical words of the ungodly. They speak with flattering lips and a double heart, and they falsely accuse the godly. He asserts that the LORD will cut off the flattering lips of the wicked. Being affected by their falsehood and hypocrisy, David appeals to the promise of God for deliverance (v 5). This is the centre of the psalm. The LORD promises in verse 5, "*For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the LORD; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him.*" David hopes that the LORD will arise and set him in safety.

The promise and assurance given in verse 5 are asserted in verses 6-7. David here proclaims his confidence in God's promise, mentioned in verse 5. His confidence in God's promise rests upon the assurance that God's words are pure words and that God will preserve His words forever. The contrast is clear: man's words are falsehood; he speaks vain things; God's words, on the other hand, are pure, trustworthy, and forever preserved. Finally in verse 8, David concludes the psalm by expressing once again that the ungodly are everywhere, and therefore he needs the LORD's help.

Verse 6 records David's response to the LORD's promise in verse 5. The emphasis in verse 6 is on the purity of God's words. The psalmist, in verse 6, adds his amen to what the LORD announced in verse 5. David asserts the truthfulness of God's words, and hence, their trustworthiness. He declares the truthfulness of God's words by saying, "*The words of the LORD are pure words.*" Then he describes them by adding, "*as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.*"

The Hebrew noun for "words" here is in the feminine plural. When used in such a way, the phrase "words of the LORD" denotes the entire Word of God.<sup>7</sup> The words are described as pure and clean.<sup>8</sup> As an adjective, the word "pure" is used to mean (1) pure in a physical sense, as opposed to filthy, soiled (used of gold in Exod 25:11); (2) pure in a ceremonial sense, as opposed to that which is profane (used of animals for sacrifice in Lev 13:17; 14:4), and (3) pure in a moral sense (used of heart in Ps 51:10; Prov 22:11).<sup>9</sup> All of these ideas can be applied here. God's revelation is sacramentally and morally pure and holy.

David then uses a simile to compare the purity of God's Word, "as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times." The two verbs in the participle form describe the purification process. The verb "tried" means "to smelt," "to refine," or "to test,"<sup>10</sup> and the verb "purified" means "to refine" or "to make pure."<sup>11</sup> The term "seven times" indicates complete and absolute perfection. The number seven in the Scriptures denotes a complete or perfect number and indicates the completion of any process. Hence, the idea is that "God's word is solid silver smelted and leaving all impurity behind, and, as it were, having passed seven times through the smelting furnace, ie, the purest silver, entirely purged from dross."<sup>12</sup> The sense here is that God's words are perfectly pure. They are "pure of all error, all mistake, all equivocation, all deception, all encouragement to sin, all weakness."<sup>13</sup> There is no admixture of falsehood in His words. They are absolutely authentic and completely trustworthy.

The psalmist continues his meditation on God's pure words in verse 7. The emphasis in verse 7 is the preservation of God's words. Since God's words are so pure, David now prays with assurance, "*You shall keep them, O LORD, you shall preserve them from this generation for ever.*" There are two important verbs here that need close examination. They are "*you shall keep them*" (Hebrew: Qal imperfect, 2 ms, with 3 mp suffix) and "*you shall preserve them*" (Hebrew: Qal imperfect, 2 ms, with 3 ms suffix). The LORD is addressed as the subject of both verbs. The first verb means to "keep," "watch," or "preserve."<sup>14</sup> One of its Old Testament usages is to "keep, have charge of" garden (Gen 2:15; 3:24) and property in trust (Exod 22:6, 9), to "tend" the flock (Gen 30:31), to "keep, guard" captives (Josh 10:18), to "keep, retain," of storing up food (Gen 41:35), etc. The underlying root meaning is "to pay careful attention to."<sup>15</sup>

The object of the verbs "keep" and "preserve" has become a controversy. Many regard that the object of both verbs to be "the poor" and "the needy" of verse 5. Doug Kutilek, for example, writes,

In the Hebrew of Psalm 12, the pronouns translated *them* in verse 7 are both masculine—the first *them* being plural in number, the second being singular (*him*, literally), particularizing every individual in the group (with slightly different vowel points in Hebrew, the second pronoun could be understood

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as the first person plural common, viz, *us*). So, the antecedent noun can be expected to be masculine in gender and plural in number.

The word rendered words twice in verse 6 is a feminine plural noun in both cases; the words poor and needy in verse 5 are both masculine and plural in Hebrew. While the English translation is ambiguous and allows two different antecedents, the Hebrew is clear and plain—the antecedent of *them* is the poor and needy ones of verse 5, not the *words* of verse 6.<sup>16</sup>

However, this is a wrong understanding of the Hebrew grammar. The object of the first verb must be the closest antecedent, ie “words” of verse 6. Although there is a gender disagreement here, for “words” is in the feminine plural and “them” in the masculine plural, this is not unusual in Hebrew grammar. For example, Hebrew grammarian Gesenius writes, “Through a weakening in the distinction of gender, which is noticeable elsewhere and which probably passed from the colloquial language into that of literature, masculine suffixes (especially in the plural) are not infrequently used to refer to feminine substantives.”<sup>17</sup>

There are several examples for such a gender discordance in the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms when dealing with God’s words. This is particularly the case in Psalm 119 which is the *locus classicus* concerning the perfect and preserved words of God. Strouse cites the following examples:<sup>18</sup> (1) in Psalm 119:111, the psalmist uses the personal pronoun “they” (mp) to refer to “your testimonies” (fp), referring to the everlasting “testimonies” of the LORD; (2) in Psalm 119:129, the psalmist uses “your testimonies” (fp) to exalt the LORD’s “testimonies” and refers to them with the verb “keep them” (mp suffix); (3) in Psalm 119:152, the psalmist again uses “your testimonies” (fp) and refers to them with the verb “founded them” (mp suffix); and (4) in Psalm 119:167, the Psalmist mentions “your testimonies” (fp) and refers to them with the verb “I love them” (mp suffix).<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, the masculine nouns “poor” and “needy” of verse 5 cannot be the antecedents of the pronominal suffix of “them” in verse 7 because they are not the closest antecedents. Moreover, they violate the biblically accepted gender discordance rules. Thus, according to Hebrew grammar, it is legitimate to take the masculine plural pronominal suffix “them” (v 7a) to refer to the feminine plural “words of the LORD” in verse 6.

The second verb *natsar* means to “watch,” “guard,” or “keep.”<sup>20</sup> It has a sense of “watch over,” “protect,” “guard from dangers,” “preserve,” or “guard with fidelity.”<sup>21</sup> The verb *titzrennu* is Qal imperfect, 2<sup>nd</sup> masculine singular, with 3<sup>rd</sup> masculine singular suffix with energetic *nun*. In normal case, the pronominal suffix for the 3<sup>rd</sup> person masculine singular is the verbal suffix *hu*.<sup>22</sup> However when energetic *nun* takes place, changes happen. Gesenius explains, “A verbal form with a suffix gains additional strength, and sometimes intentional emphasis, when, instead of the mere connecting vowel, a special connecting-syllable (*an*) is inserted between the suffix and the verbal stem.”<sup>23</sup> As a result, *ehnhu*, becomes *nnu*, for 3<sup>rd</sup> person masculine singular ( $n + h > nn$ ). It is noteworthy that for the 1<sup>st</sup> person masculine plural, it is also the same form, ie, *ennu* becomes *nnu* ( $n + n > nn$ ) and there is no masculine plural pronominal suffix in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person when the energetic *nun* is applied to a verb.<sup>24</sup>

The important question is what does the suffix *ennu* refer to? Could it be referring to the “poor” and “needy” of verse 5 or “the words of the LORD” of verse 6? As noted earlier, the suffix of the first verb *tishmerem* is referring to the closest antecedent, ie *'imaroṯh* (“words”) of verse 6. If that is the case, then the suffix of the second verb also must refer to the same object. Though there is no agreement in number and gender, the immediate context warrants it. Moreover, the use of the energetic *nun* in the Hebrew grammar, which is, according to Genenius, intended for “additional strength” and “intentional emphasis,” allows connecting the suffix with *'imaroṯh*. Furthermore, the verb *natsar* is a synonym for the first verb *shamar*.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, the psalmist, for the purpose of emphasis in the Hebrew poetry, uses two synonym verbs, emphasising his assurance in the LORD that He will preserve His pure words. Strouse understands the two verbs in the following way, “The first verb refers to all the Words the Lord preserved and the second to the very individual Words He preserved. The Lord promised to preserve every one and all of His Words for every generation, because every generation will be judged by the canonical Words (ie, OT and NT) of the Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>26</sup> Shin notes that in verse 7 there is a synthetic parallelism, consisting of a pair of lines that together forming a complete unit, in which the second line completes or expands the

thought introduced in the first line.<sup>27</sup> Hence, verse 7 teaches the complete preservation of God's words.

Psalm 12:6-7 teaches the special providential preservation of God's words. In Psalm 12, the psalmist shows the contrast between the words of evil men and the words of the LORD. The LORD promises that He will protect the godly against the evil words of the ungodly. Then the psalmist declares his assurance in the LORD's promise by stating that the LORD's words are pure words and He has committed to preserve His words. Verse 6 declares the purity of God's words. The words of the LORD are without error and they are 100% perfect. Verse 7 affirms that since God's words are pure, He will preserve His words. He not only preserves all of His words, but will also preserve His every word. That is the teaching of Psalm 12:6-7.

### Isaiah 59:21

Isaiah 59:21 reads, "*As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the LORD; My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the LORD, from henceforth and for ever.*" Isaiah 59:21, according to John Owen, is "the great charter of the church's preservation of truth."<sup>28</sup> In this verse the LORD announces that He has a covenant with His people that His Spirit that is upon them and His words, which He Himself put in their mouth, shall not depart from their mouth but will remain in them from generation to generation. The LORD here emphasises three things by using three personal pronouns, *berithi* ("my covenant"), *ruachi* ("my Spirit"), and *debaray* ("my words"). This is an emphatic announcement from the LORD concerning the perfect preservation of His words and must be considered in detail.

The second part of the Prophecy of Isaiah (ch 40-66) contains great promises from the LORD. Some of the promises are: (1) the LORD promised the final restoration of Israel and the future glory of Zion (ch 41, 49, 52, 60, 62, 66); (2) the LORD also promised the arrival of the suffering Messiah, the LORD's Servant, to deliver His people from sin (ch 42, 53); (3) the LORD announced that He will pour out His Spirit upon Israel (ch 44); (4) the LORD also promised an everlasting salvation to Israel, and the salvation will come only by the LORD (ch

43, 45); and (5), the LORD announced that He is the LORD, that is His name, and His glory He will not give to another (ch 42:8). In this context comes the promise concerning the preservation of His Holy words in 59:21.

Isaiah 59 deals with Israel's national corruption and consequent suffering, and is a continuation of the judgments enumerated in chapter 58. Still God's hand is not yet beyond the reach of salvation (59:1). But their sins have separated them from His presence (v 2). In verse 4 the LORD describes their condition, "*None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth: they trust in vanity, and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity.*" To this, Israel responds, "*We roar all like bears, and mourn sore like doves... for our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us*" (vv 11-12). Verse 13 further enumerates their sins. The prophet responds in verses 15b-20; it begins with threatening and closes with promises. The righteous God has to deal with sin, and at the same time, the loving God will send redemption to His people. The LORD then seals the prophet's words with His promise for Israel, by which the LORD reassures His commitment for His covenant people (v 21).

The LORD promises those who have turned away from their transgressions that He will make an everlasting covenant with them. The construction of the words here is very emphatic and by doing so, the LORD underscores the importance of His promise to His covenant people. The introductory pronoun *wa'ani* ("and I") is absolute, which is not only emphatic, but intended to intimate a change of person. In the previous section of the chapter, the prophet has spoken. But now the LORD is introduced as speaking Himself. This is part of the covenantal formula, used elsewhere in making God's covenant with His people (see Gen 9:9; 17:4). Edward J Young notes, "The very language calls attention to the grace that God makes known in His covenantal dealings with Israel."<sup>29</sup> Therefore, the language underlines divine commitment. The covenant will not rest on human wish or need but on divine determination.

The LORD adds, "*this is my covenant with them.*" The suffix "my" in *berithi* indicates that the covenant is the LORD's. When God is the subject of the covenant, it is "a divine constitution or ordinance with signs or pledges."<sup>30</sup> Later, the addition of the clause, "*saith the LORD*",

which is mentioned twice, adds further emphasis to the divine character of the promise. The verb *'amar* is Qal perfect, denoting that what the LORD is saying is a settled matter. It is JEHOVAH, the covenant keeping God, who is establishing the covenant with His people. This assures that the covenant will never be annulled. It will be a perpetual promise from the LORD.

What does the word *berithi* here refer to? E J Young writes, "Actually this is not a new covenant, but a new administration of the covenant once made with the fathers.... It is because the Lord once made this covenant with Abraham that He will come for Zion."<sup>31</sup> All of God's dealings with His chosen people are covered by the term "covenant" as Calvin remarks, "And we ought carefully to observe the word *covenant*, by which the Prophet points out the greatness and excellence of this promise; for the promises are more extensive, and may be regarded as the stones of the building, while the foundation of it is the covenant, which upholds the whole mass."<sup>32</sup>

By these words, "God reminds His people of their glorious heritage that extends back to the Abrahamic covenant and to His promises given when they entered the Promised Land (see Gen 17:4)."<sup>33</sup> Since the Abrahamic covenant is a suzerainty covenant, both in its institution and administration unconditional (Gen 15:7-18), the LORD will faithfully keep what He has promised. Therefore, as the LORD has covenanted with Abraham that "in him all the families of the earth be blessed" (Gen 12:2), it is certain that the Redeemer shall come to Zion and He will deliver His people, first from their sin, and second from their sinful body. It is also certain that what the LORD promises here will come to pass.

The content of the promise covers the following: "*my Spirit that is upon you, and my words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth... from henceforth and forever.*" The language again is very emphatic as the LORD continues to use the personal pronouns *ruchi* ("my Spirit") and *wudebaray* ("my words"). The first thing the LORD mentions is "my Spirit." The noun *ruach* can mean "breath," "wind," or "spirit."<sup>34</sup> Here it refers to the Spirit of God, the divine gift to the believers, who transforms and sanctifies them by the indwelling (Tit 3:5). It is a promise made to the people of God, and therefore Barnes writes, "... the idea is, that the Spirit of God would be continually

imparted to his people, and to their descendants forever.”<sup>35</sup> The prepositional phrase “upon you” suggests that the Spirit has already descended from above and now rests upon the true Israel.<sup>36</sup>

Parallel to the gift of the Spirit, the LORD now mentions the second promise, “my words.” The use of personal pronoun particularly stresses the fact that the words are God’s words; the words are not of human origin but of divine origin. The phrase, “which I have put in your mouth”, conveys the idea of prophetic inspiration. Whatever the prophets recorded are God’s breathed-out words and now these words are the possession of the people of God. These words are very similar to the words the LORD spoke to Joshua in Joshua 1:8, saying, “*This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.*” The phrase, “from henceforth and forever”, suggests that this promise is permanent and eternal. God’s Holy Spirit and Holy words will be the perpetual possession of the people of God.

By the phrase, “my words”, the LORD refers to His eternal truth, the Holy Word of God,<sup>37</sup> which He revealed through His chosen servants for the guidance and instruction of His people. With the realisation of the new covenant, this promise became more vivid and the Church in the New Testament also became the beneficiary of this promise. Young comments,

The Lord is declaring that His eternal truth, revealed to man in words, is the peculiar possession of His people. In the times of the Old Testament, this consisted of revelations made unto the fathers and the prophets. Today, the treasure of the Church is the Holy Scripture, the Word that cannot be broken, inerrant and infallible, the very truth of the eternal God. This Word and the Spirit will never depart from the Church, for the Church as the body of the Head is to declare the truth to all nations that the saving health of God may be seen by all.... Despite the constant sin and apostasy of His people the Lord abides faithful; the promises will be fulfilled, and the Redeemer will come bringing rich gifts, even His Spirit and Word; and these will abide with His Church forever. To God alone be all the glory.<sup>38</sup>

Today, the Holy Spirit of God and the Holy Word of God are the permanent treasures of the Church.

There are several important points that are emphasised in Isaiah 59:21: (1) God is a covenantal God; He deals with His people according



to the covenant that He made with them; (2) God's covenant is unchangeable; since God was the one who made the covenant, He will make sure that His covenant will be fulfilled; (3) the parallel placing of God's Holy Spirit and Holy Word stresses the importance of God's Word as the possession of the Church; and (4) the faithfulness of God in keeping His covenant guarantees the Church that she will have the completely preserved perfect Words of God.

#### Matthew 4:4

What was the Bibliology of Jesus? It is important to study how Jesus regarded the Holy Scriptures. There are several passages in the Four Gospels where Jesus spoke clearly about His perception of Scripture. Some of the examples are Matthew 4:4; 5:17-18; Luke 16:17; Matthew 24:35; Mark 13:31; Luke 21:33; and John 10:35. In these verses Jesus categorically stated that the Scriptures are inspired, inerrant, infallible, and entirely preserved. Matthew 4:4 is one of the important verses, "*But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*" Thomas Strouse notes the following,

- 1) He affirmed the doctrine of the verbal, plenary inspiration of the autographa by stating the source of Scripture — "proceedeth out of the mouth of God."
- 2) He affirmed the authority of the written Scripture, and consequently its infallibility and inerrancy, by upholding it as a standard by which "man shall ... live."
- 3) He affirmed the availability of Scripture since He declared His personal access and implied mankind's general access to God's Words — "by every word."
- 4) He affirmed the doctrine of the verbal, plenary preservation of Scripture by the expression "It is written."<sup>39</sup>

The Lord's attestation to His holy words is a vital testimony for the Church to understand correctly the doctrines concerning the Bible and uphold them.

The context of Matthew 4:4 is the temptation of Jesus Christ. After telling his readers about Jesus' baptism (Matt 3), Matthew goes on to inform them how Jesus began His public ministry (Matt 4). Matthew begins by recounting how Jesus was tempted by the devil and how He

overcame the temptation (see also Mark 1:12-13; and Luke 4:1-13). Significantly, Jesus overcame all the three temptations by quoting the Scriptures (from Deut 8:3; 6:16; and 6:13). By doing so, Jesus upheld the importance of the Scriptures. The first reference was especially significant. When the devil came and tempted Jesus by saying, “*If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread*” (v 3), Jesus replied, “*It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*” This was the Living Word (Christ) validating His Written Word (Scripture). Jesus believed He had all the inspired words of the Old Testament intact in His day.<sup>40</sup>

Jesus begins His answer to the devil by declaring *gegraptai* (“it is written”). The Greek verb is the perfect passive indicative of *grapho* (“I write”). The Greek perfect tense, according to Brooks and Winbery, “expresses perfective action. Perfective action involves a present state which has resulted from a past action. The present state is a continuing state; the past action is a completed action.”<sup>41</sup> The past action has the sense of the Greek aorist, which describes an action in the past. The continuing state has the sense of the Greek present tense, which expresses a continuous state of existence. Hence, when combined, the perfect tense has the sense of a past action with continuous results. Therefore, one may translate *gegraptai* to mean “it has been written and is still being written,” “it is written,” or “it stands written.”

The verb *gegraptai* thus has the idea that “every word once written, now stands forever written.”<sup>42</sup> This is a formula that has been used in the New Testament 62 times to refer to the Old Testament Scriptures.<sup>43</sup> Jesus used the same formula for all the three references He referred to from Deuteronomy in His answer to the devil (vv 4, 7, 10). In doing so, Jesus regarded the Old Testament as the very Word of God and that its every word has been carefully preserved and handed down from generation to generation. He also regarded that the Old Testament is a permanent record of what God has said. There are at least three biblical arguments for this position:

- 1) The Lord referred to jots and tittles that make up the Hebrew language, not the Greek language (Mt 5:17-18).
- 2) The Lord referred to the three-fold division of the *Tanak*, not the LXX, which included the *Torah* (law), the *Nabiim* (prophets), and the *Kethubim* (writings), on several occasions (cf Lk 24:44).

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- 3) The Lord referred to the first and last books of the *Tanak* (Lk 11:50–51), including the brutal deaths of the prophets from Abel (Gen 4:8) to Zacharias (2 Chron 24:20–22).<sup>44</sup>

The testimony of our Lord is the greatest proof for us to believe that God's words withstand the test of time. They are unchangeable and completely reliable.

Jesus now states one of the important facts of Bible preservation, that is, the availability of every word or the entire preservation of God's Word. He says, "*man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word.*" In Deuteronomy 8:3 Moses reminded Israel of God's tender care for His people during the forty years of their wilderness journey as he told them, "*And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live.*" Moses reminded them that preservation of life does not depend upon bread alone, but upon God's unfailing words of promise. Israelites often murmured and sinned when they were hungry or thirsty. But Moses reminded them to trust in God's promises and keep His commandments, "*thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to fear him*" (Deut 8:6).

Jesus, by quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, underscores the importance of God's words to give spiritual nourishment and guidance to the people of God. In order to emphasise the insufficiency of physical food the negative *ouk* ("not") is placed first. Then the use of the strong adversative *alla* ("but") shows a sharp contrast with the preceding negative. The addition of adjective *panti* ("every") makes *rhema* ("word") comprehensive or complete. BDAG notes that when the adjective is used with a noun in the singular without the article, it emphasises "totality with focus on its individual components, *each, every, any.*"<sup>45</sup> Therefore, "every word" of Scripture is inspired by God (*theopneustos*, "God-breathed") and "*is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*" (2 Tim 3:16) and therefore man must take heed of it. Since it is "every word" that man has to live by, the Lord will preserve His every word for His people. Jesus knew in His day that He had every word of the Old Testament

Canon. Therefore, He quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 when He repelled the devil and conquered the temptation.

The third important phrase of this verse is “*proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*” The participle verb *ekporeuomeno* comes from *poreuomai* with the preposition *ek* to mean “goes out” or “proceeds out.” The preposition *dia* with genitive conveys source. The source is the “mouth of God.” Every word of God’s Word came out from His mouth (2 Pet 1:20–21; 2 Tim 3:16–17). Jesus regarded God as the Author of Scripture. This is the reason why every word is important; this is the reason why every word is to be preserved; and this is the reason why every word must be heeded carefully.

Jesus’ quotation of Deuteronomy 8:3 in Matthew 4:4 underlines the importance of the words of God. It teaches that (1) Jesus had a high regard for the Old Testament Scriptures and regarded them as the eternal words of God, (2) every Word of God is inspired and infallible and therefore must be preserved, (3) every word of God is able to give spiritual nourishment to the believers, and (4) the Church must have the complete Word of God in her possession.

### **Matthew 5:17–19**

Matthew 5:17–19 reads, “*Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*”

How absolute and authoritative are the words of God? Jesus in Matthew 5:17–19 declares unequivocally that every revealed word of God not only is truth but is truth conveyed with absolute, inviolable authority. God’s words in the canonical Scriptures are perfect, eternal, and infallible. Jesus asserts that He did not come to destroy the inscripturated words, but to establish them. This authority depends upon the fact that every jot and tittle of God’s Word is important and must be fulfilled. Jesus further adds that every commandment of the Scriptures (even the very least commandment) is significant and must not be disregarded. This affirms that every jot and tittle of God’s Word

is divinely inspired and must be preserved. This is true not only with the Old Testament Scriptures, but also with the New Testament Scriptures.

Matthew 5:17-19 is part of the Sermon on the Mount, preached by Christ after He began His public ministry. In the Sermon, Jesus emphasises the spiritual character and quality of those who inherit the kingdom of heaven. First, He begins with the Beatitudes (5:3-12) which describe the characteristics of a true Christian. Verses 13-16 emphasise the responsibility of a true child of God in the world. Then, from verses 17 onwards, Jesus stresses the need for righteousness. As He begins to preach on the righteousness of the kingdom, He explains that the righteousness which He proclaims is not a novelty, but in thorough harmony with the entire Old Testament (v 17). In this context He states that He came not to abolish the law or the prophets, but to establish.

There is also another thing to note here. Jesus, in His teachings on the righteousness of the kingdom, intended to correct the commonly mistaken understanding of the commands of the Torah by the scribes and Pharisees. This involved the presentation of the true meaning of the Torah. In Matthew 5, six times Jesus referred to the false understanding by saying, "*Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time...*" (vv 21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43). Jesus corrected the wrong understanding by stating the correct meaning of the Torah with these words, "*But I say unto you...*" (vv 22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44). However, the opponents of Jesus would charge Him by saying that He intended to disregard the teachings of the Torah and substitute His own teaching in their place. Thus in Matthew 5:17-19, having anticipated such a charge from His opponents, Jesus makes the unequivocal assertion that He came not to destroy the Old Testament, but to fulfil it.

Jesus begins with an emphatic negative command, "*do not think that I came to destroy the law or the prophets.*" This is the key statement in the pericope and the emphasis of the command is evident from the repetition of the words in the following clause, "I did not come to destroy, but to fulfil." The aorist imperative *nomisete* comes from the verb *nomizo* and has the meaning "have in common use," "be the custom," "think," "believe," "hold," or "consider."<sup>46</sup> With the negative *me* the aorist imperative (subjunctive) forbids any such thought.<sup>47</sup> The emphasis is clear from the beginning that Jesus was in no way contradicting the law or the prophets, but that He opposed the

legalistic type of religion of the scribes and Pharisees and their misapplication of the law and misinterpretation of the prophets.

The verb *elthon* (from *erchomai*) is a significant expression; it does not simply mean the coming of Christ, but Christ coming into the world with a mission.<sup>48</sup> When Jesus came from God into the world, He was conscious of His mission; He was not concerned with abolishing the law or the prophets, but fulfilling it. The infinitive verb *katalusai* has the sense of “to do away with,” “to abolish,” “to annul,” “make invalid,” or “to put an end to.”<sup>49</sup> By the use of the aorist imperative with the negative *me* along with the use of *elthon* and *katalusai* (infinitive of purpose), Jesus emphatically denies that His mission has to do with abolishing or doing away with the law or the prophets.<sup>50</sup>

The question now is what does “the law and the prophets” refer to? It is a reference to the entire Old Testament. Matthew mentions both nouns together in three other places of his Gospel, but uses the conjunction *kai* to connect them together (Matt 7:12; 11:13; 22:40). Significantly, here both nouns have the definite article and both are divided with a disjunctive. Lenski observes, “Here the adversative ‘or’ divides the Old Testament into two parts: ‘the Law’ or Pentateuch; ‘the Prophets’ or all the rest of the Old Testament. Jesus did not come to disturb or to set aside either of the two.... Jesus, therefore, most emphatically proclaims his full adherence to the whole Old Testament canon.”<sup>51</sup> Jesus, being the very God Himself, knew that the entire Old Testament is the very words of God and committed Himself to fulfil them.

Another important word in verse 17 is *plerosai* (“to fulfil”). Jesus states, “I did not come to destroy, but to fulfil.” The whole stress is concentrated on the aorist infinitives, which denote purpose: *katalusai* with the negative *ouk* enhances the force of the positive *plerosai*. The verb *plerosai* (from *pleroo*) can be understood many ways:<sup>52</sup> (1) it could mean that Christ would do the things laid down in Scripture; (2) it could mean that Christ would bring out the full meaning of Scripture; or (3) it could mean that in His life and ministry He would bring Scripture to its completion. Each one has its own significance and Scripture points to it. However, Matthew here emphasises more in terms of Jesus fulfilling the Old Testament through His perfect

obedience to it and His life becoming its complete fulfilment. Webb writes, "His life fulfilled the moral law in the accomplishment of comprehensive, perfect obedience, and fulfilled the preaching of the prophets by literal performance of their predictions. His teaching fulfilled the instruction of the Old Testament, opening its meaning so men could grasp the depth, spirit, and power of that record as none had ever done before Him."<sup>53</sup> The entire Old Testament, the law and the prophets, points to Christ, and He, through His life and ministry, fulfilled it completely.

In verse 18, Jesus affirms that every letter of the Holy Scriptures is important and will be preserved. He vindicates the authority and the significance of the smallest portion of the Old Testament by referring to the smallest portions of the Hebrew text itself. Verse 18 begins with the conjunction *gar* which introduces the object of Christ's mission to fulfill the Old Testament.<sup>54</sup> Followed by it is the formula, "*amen I say to you.*" The word "amen" is the transliterated Hebrew word for "truth." As a noun, it means "faithfulness," and as an adverb, it means "verily, truly."<sup>55</sup> It occurs in statements that affirm or confirm a solemn truth (Deut 27:15-26; 1 Kgs 1:36; Neh 5:13). Jesus particularly uses it at the beginning of important sayings to emphasise absoluteness. The words, "I say to you", add up to a very solemn formula of affirmation and indicates that the words that follow are of great significance.

Followed by this authoritative formula, Jesus makes the statement about the enduring nature of God's words. The phrase, "*until the heaven and the earth pass away*", emphasises the perishable nature of the present world and the imperishable nature of God's words. The phrase, "the heaven and the earth", does not refer to the future eternal abode of the saints, but the present physical universe, which is reserved to be destroyed by fire (2 Pet 3:7, 10; Rev 21:1). The verb *parerchomai* means "to pass away, come to an end, disappear"<sup>56</sup> which here expresses the temporal nature of the physical world.

Jesus continues the statement with a phrase of strong negation, "*one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.*" The word *iota* is the Hebrew letter *yodh*, which is the tiniest letter in the Hebrew alphabet. The word *keraiia* is a very small projection, a little hook, that distinguishes one Hebrew letter from another (eg, *resh* and *daleth*). The aorist subjunctive *parelthe* is used with double negative *ou me* to

convey the strongest form of negation.<sup>57</sup> The idea is that the present universe will one day pass away because it is temporal, but for the words of God, nothing will pass away from them; all must be fulfilled.

Therefore, what Jesus is saying here is that not the smallest letter, not even the tiniest part of a letter, will pass away from the Scriptures until all be fulfilled. It forms a very emphatic assertion of the permanency of the Scriptures, made by the Author Himself. Calvin seizes the importance of these words by saying, "There is nothing in the law that is unimportant, nothing that was put there at random; and so it is impossible that a single letter shall perish."<sup>58</sup> Every word of God, yea, every jot and tittle, is inspired and infallible. Thus every word of God, yea, every jot and tittle, must be preserved for the Church today. Koshy writes, "The purity and authority of the whole Scripture is dependent on every section of the Scripture, every book, every chapter, every word, and every letter. Even the smallest letter or a portion of a letter cannot be lost, if the authority and infallibility of the Scripture have to remain unaffected all through time."<sup>59</sup> Jesus, in His statement, assured this necessity; every jot and every tittle of God's Word will be forever preserved.

However, some say that this verse does not teach the preservation but the fulfilment of Scripture. For example, Glenny writes, "Matthew 5:18 is clearly speaking of the fulfilment in Christ of OT ethical (3:15) and prophetic (1:23; 2:15; 4:14; etc) texts.... Matthew 5:18 does not even refer to the NT text, let alone speak of its perfect, supernatural preservation."<sup>60</sup> Now it may be challenged, if this verse is only concerned with the fulfilment of Old Testament prophetic passages as Glenny says, then the question is how did this verse become a proof text for verbal inspiration? Most, if not all, theologians use this verse to support their understanding of verbal inspiration. For instance, Erickson cited this verse along with John 10:35 ("*the scripture cannot be broken*") under his discussion on "The Preservation of the Revelation: Inspiration" to emphasise "the authority and permanence of the Scripture."<sup>61</sup> Laird Harris, in his *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Scriptures*, writes on Matthew 5:18,

Christ is clearly referring to the sacred writings of the Jews as a unit and a well-defined sacred unit, too. But He says very positively that this Book is perfect to the smallest detail. It is not merely verbal inspiration that He



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teaches here, but inspiration of the very letters!... In any case, the main point is clear. Jesus declared that the Scriptures were letter perfect.<sup>62</sup>

It must be said that this verse is not just about fulfilment, but the enduring nature of God's every word. Harold G Stigers explains, "Jesus Christ was saying that what Scripture embodied was the enduring Word of God and that it would abide as long as the purposes of God existed."<sup>63</sup>

Since the words of God endure forever (v 18), Jesus in verse 19 affirms the relevance of every Scripture. In this verse Jesus warns against anyone who disregards any portion of the words of God. Jesus states, "*Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven.*" The conjunction *oun* connects this verse with the previous verse and states the consequence of one who disregards any portion of the Scriptures. The word "break" is *luo* which can mean "to destroy, bring to an end, abolish, do away with."<sup>64</sup> Therefore, it does not simply talk about an isolated breaking of a commandment, but as Morris puts it, "the attitude condemned is one of doing away with the commandment in question, regarding it as nonexistent, as null and void."<sup>65</sup> No commandment of God is to be taken lightly. Every commandment is to be kept. Every child of God has the obligation to practice and proclaim exactly what the Word of God says. If anyone does otherwise, Jesus says, "*he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven.*" The phrase conveys the fact that "a wrong attitude to God's commandments means a lowly position in God's kingdom."<sup>66</sup> This will affect his reward in the Lord's kingdom. On the contrary, the person who regards God's Word exactly as it teaches and does accordingly, he is called great in the kingdom; he will be greatly honoured by the Lord.

Jesus, in Matthew 5:17-19, establishes the authority of the jot and tittle of the Scriptures. Jesus came to fulfil the Scriptures through His perfect life on earth and His death at Calvary. Jesus came to fulfil the Scriptures because the Scriptures are perfect to the jot and tittle. This passage teaches the verbal inspiration, preservation, and authority of the Holy Scriptures. Therefore, no one should disregard any portion of the Holy Writings. Since every portion of the Scriptures is authoritative, it calls for the jot and tittle inspiration and preservation of the words of God.

### Matthew 24:35

Matthew 24:35 reads, “*Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away*” (Mark 13:31; Luke 21:33). Here, Jesus makes an important statement about the eternal nature of the Holy Scriptures. This once again affirms that every word of God will endure forever. God will not allow anyone to destroy or take away His words, but will preserve them for all eternity.

Matthew 24 is part of Jesus’ Olivet discourse which forms His last major discourse and His most prophetic and apocalyptic message of the coming of the end of the world. When Jesus sat upon the Mount of Olives, His disciples came to Him with the following questions (24:3): (1) When shall these things be (the destruction of the temple)? (2) What shall be the sign of Thy coming? (3) When will the world end? Jesus, in His Olivet discourse, answers these questions. Jesus points to the distant future during which the “times of the Gentiles” will continue until the end of the Great Tribulation (24:14-15, 21), and then shall the Son of Man come (vv 29-31).

In verse 32, Jesus uses the illustration of the fig tree to help His disciples understand His predictions about the end-time events. Through the parable of the fig tree, Jesus explains to them that when these events, described in the previous verses, reach the apex of their fulfilment, the actual and ultimate return of Christ follows immediately (v 33). In verse 34, Jesus further states that the generation, in whose lifetime all the signs mentioned occur, shall not pass away until all these things be fulfilled. In other words, what Jesus says is that all of the abovementioned signs will happen within the span of one generation, and that particular generation will live to see the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Having predicted the future events that will precede His coming, Jesus adds in verse 35, “*Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.*” These are words of solemn authority which Jesus uses to seal what He has stated.

Jesus explicitly states that both “heaven and earth” will pass away. This expression first appeared in Matthew 5:18, where it was used as an analogy to express the enduring nature of the words of God. In the current text, it is used in the similar fashion. The phrase, “heaven and earth”, does not refer to the future eternal abode of the saints, but the present created universe, which is reserved to be destroyed by fire (2 Pet

3:7, 10; Rev 21:1). Before the creation of the new heaven and the new earth, as promised in Revelation 21, the old heaven and the old earth will pass away. The old world is full of sin and when God sends His judgment of punishing sin, the universe will be dramatically affected in the divine judgment. What Jesus drives home is the fact that the things of this universe that are around, above and beneath us—mountains, valleys, rivers, vegetation, animals, the sky, the earth, the sea etc—no matter how firm and strong some of them may appear to be, are not forever. All these things will be destroyed by fire.

Contrary to the perishable nature of the physical world, Jesus says, “*my words shall not pass away.*” Jesus’ words are of a different order and will never perish. From these words of Jesus, several exegetical factors are to be considered. First, the use of *hoi mou logoi* (“my words”) is to be understood as all the words and every word of God. Jesus’ statement should not be restricted to mean just His words. Lenski says, “Such a restriction would imply that other words of his would, indeed, pass away, ie, as having no reality back of them and thus being soon forgotten. Because all the words of Jesus do not pass away, therefore also these about the end will stand unshaken as being utter verity and truth.”<sup>67</sup> At the same time, Kent Brandenburg observes that the use of the plural *logoi* communicates an emphasis on the individual words themselves, not just the Word of God in general. He says, “All of the specific Words of God will continue to be available. Since the text does not say “some of the words” or in some other way restrict this aspect of this promise, the clear conclusion should be that every single word and all of the Words of God’s inspired originals (autographa) exist and are available for believers.”<sup>68</sup> Therefore, the absence of a qualifier implies that Jesus’ words refer to His Word as a whole and to His every word.

Second, the use of the double negative *ou me* along with the aorist subjunctive *parelthosi* is the strong negation of the future.<sup>69</sup> It makes the words of Christ even more emphatic.

Third, the verb *parerchomai* means “to pass away, disappear.”<sup>70</sup> The verb has a temporal aspect.<sup>71</sup> Thus, the old heaven and earth will come to an end.<sup>72</sup> The words of God, on the other hand, are not bound by time but are eternal and will continue to be available into all eternity. The same verb is used in Matthew 5:18 to express the enduring

nature of God's words. The same idea is expressed by the Lord again in John 10:35, where He mentioned, "*the Scripture cannot be broken.*" Note also the contrast between the tense and mood of *parerchomai* in the two parts of the sentence. In the first half of the sentence the verb is used in the future indicative, and in the second half, it is in the aorist subjunctive. The future indicative conveys that the heaven and the earth will certainly pass away;<sup>73</sup> whereas the aorist subjunctive with the double negative *ou me* conveys the emphatic negation, saying it is definitely not possible that God's words will ever pass away. Therefore, Jesus reminds His disciples that what they do see and experience around them, ie, the physical world, will one day pass away, but what they hear from His own mouth, ie, the Holy Oracles of God, will stand eternally. When God judges the world, whatever is touched by sin will pass away. But, the Scriptures, that are holy, clean and pure (Pss 12:6; 19:7-9), will never pass away.

Matthew 24:35 is an emphatic declaration by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ that God's words will stand forever. Every word of God is the direct utterance of the Most High God, and therefore, it cannot be destroyed, or taken away, but will be preserved forever.

### **John 10:35**

John 10:35 reads, "*If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken.*" It is another important Scripture passage where Jesus affirms the impossibility of losing the Scriptures. This not only affirms the authority of the Scriptures, but also emphasises that every portion of the Scriptures is important and will stand forever.

Jesus, in John 10, makes two important declarations: "*I am the door*" (v 9) and "*I am the good shepherd*" (v 11). The Jews who listened to Jesus, having heard these declarations, were confronted with a dilemma of who this man was, saying, either He was a mad man or the Son of God. Hence, as Jesus walked in Solomon's Porch, the Jews came to Him, asking, "*How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly*" (v 24). This led Jesus to make a tremendous claim about His deity, "*I and my Father are one*" (v 30). To the unbelieving Jews, Jesus' claim was blasphemy. The Jewish law laid down the penalty of stoning for blasphemy (Lev 24:16). So they made their

preparations to stone Jesus. In His own defence, Jesus appeals to the Scriptures. The phrase, "*and the Scripture cannot be broken*" is a reply to His own question which was brought up in the quoting of Psalm 82 (v 34). He could appeal to the Scriptures in defending Himself because the Scriptures could not be broken.

In verse 34, Jesus quoted from Psalm 82:6, which says, "*I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the Most High.*" Psalm 82 is a warning to unjust Hebrew judges to cease from unjust ways and defend the poor and the innocent. The judges were commissioned by God as "gods" to men. They were judges in a theocracy in which God Himself was the supreme Ruler and Judge. They, on the other hand, were God's representatives among His people. In that sense, they were "gods." God tells them that although He Himself called them "gods" and children of the Most High, yet because of their wickedness they shall die like common men. Jesus quoted only the first part of the verse to emphasise that even the Scriptures said of men that they were "gods" who were specially commissioned by God to some task. So Jesus' point is that if the Scriptures can speak likewise about men, why can't He speak of Himself in the same fashion?

Before His conclusion, Jesus adds this certain statement, "*and the Scripture cannot be broken.*" It is important to note that Jesus uses the term, *he graphe*, by which He refers to the entire Word of God.<sup>74</sup> In the immediate context, it refers to the Hebrew Scriptures of His day—the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings, ie the whole Old Testament Canon.<sup>75</sup> Through these words, Jesus put His imprimatur on the whole of the Old Testament. The negative phrase *ou dunatai* asserts the impossibility of the action. Lightner writes, "The word 'cannot' expresses a Divine and moral impossibility. The point is, Scripture cannot be annulled, dissolved, abrogated, or rendered void because it declares the will and purpose of God."<sup>76</sup> The verb *luthenai* (from *luo*) literally means to "destroy, bring to an end, abolish, do away with."<sup>77</sup> The same verb is used in John 7:23 of overriding the Sabbath and in Matthew 5:19 of the commandments of God. Lenski explains the meaning of the words as follows, "Every statement of the Scripture stands immutably, indestructible in its verity, unaffected by denial, human ignorance or criticism, charges of errancy or other subjective attack."<sup>78</sup> Young writes,

The concept of breaking a law is one that is clearly comprehended. If a man breaks a law, he is guilty and so liable to punishment. When he breaks a law, the lawbreaker treats the law as nonexistent, and in effect annuls it. The Scriptures, however, possess an authority so great that they cannot be broken. What they say will stand and cannot be annulled or set aside.<sup>79</sup>

Jesus, in John 10:35, asserts the impossibility of losing any portion of the Scriptures. The Scriptures are God's holy instructions which cannot be annulled by men or by any other force. It applies not only to the Old Testament, but also to the New Testament. The Scriptures are therefore absolute in nature and will always remain as they are.

### **Conclusion**

The verbal and plenary preservation of the Scriptures is a scriptural doctrine. This doctrine rests upon the inviolable promise of God to preserve His words. This has been expounded in the Old Testament as the psalmist in Psalm 12:6-7 declares in definite terms that God's words are pure and God will preserve them forever. Isaiah 59:21 is another emphatic assertion by the covenant-keeping LORD that His words shall always be in the possession of His people from generation to generation. The same promise continues in the New Testament where Jesus Himself states several times that His words will exist till the end. In Matthew 4:4, Jesus affirms that every word of God is important and necessary. In Matthew 5:17-19, He confirms that every jot and tittle of the Scriptures will be preserved forever. In Matthew 24:35 and John 10:35, He assures us that His words will never pass away and can never be broken. These promises and affirmations are authoritative and trustworthy because the Lord Jesus Himself asserted them.

Have the Scriptures been lost or no longer as perfect as before as some men say? *"God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged."* (Rom 3:4). The Scriptures have been preserved by God intact throughout the ages, and shall remain infallible and inerrant to the last letter and syllable forever.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup>Westminster Confession of Faith I:VIII.

<sup>2</sup>"Formula Consensus Ecclesiarum Helveticarum Reformatarum," *Collectio Confessionum in Ecclesiis Reformatis Publicatarum*, ed H A Niemeyer (Lipsiae:

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Sumptibus Iulii Klinkhardti, 1840), 730. Translated by Donald L Brake, "The Doctrine of the Preservation of the Scriptures" (Master of Theology thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1970) in *Counterfeit or Genuine? Mark 16? John 8?* ed David O Fuller, (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids International Publications, 1975), 181.

<sup>3</sup> William W Combs, "Preservation of Scripture," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 5 (2000): 15.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Strouse, "The Permanent Preservation of God's Words: Psalm 12:6, 7," in *Thou Shalt Keep Them*, ed Kent Brandenburg (Sobrante: Pillar and Ground Publishing, 2003), 30.

<sup>6</sup> Samuel Terrien gives a similar structural analysis, using the verse division in the Hebrew text:

I. The Duplicity of the Sons of Adam (vv 2-3)

II. The False Words (vv 4-5)

III. The Divine Promise (v 6)

IV. The Pure Words (vv 7-8)

V. The Aberration of the Sons of Adam (v 9)

He explains, "An *inclusio poetica* appears in vv 2 and 9; Strophe III constitutes the summit of the psalm. Here as elsewhere for the genre of Complaint, Strophes I and II are echoed in Strophes IV and V, as the false words of the human brood are contrasted with the true and pure words of the Lord. Both sets are articulated around the core verse, which is a prophetic oracle introducing the proclamation of confidence. This proclamation blossoms forth into three elements: a meditation (v 7), a new petition (v 8), and the abrupt declaration that reveals the *raison d'être* of the entire psalm (v 9)." See *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary*, ECC (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans, 2003), 153.

<sup>7</sup> Shin Yeong Gil, "God's Promise to Preserve His Word: An Exegetical Study of Psalm 12:5-7," *The Burning Bush* 6 (2000): 159.

<sup>8</sup> BDB, 372.

<sup>9</sup> BDB, 373. The word is translated "clean" in Psalm 19:9; 51:10 and in many other places, and "pure" in Habakkuk 1:13; Malachi 1:11. It often occurs in connection with the word gold, and is then always rendered "pure," ie, free from alloy (Exod 25:22, 27, 29, 31, 36, 38, 39; 28:14, 22, 36; 30:3; etc.). It is used with the mercy seat and other items in the Tabernacle (Exod 25:17, 24, 29, 31; 28:36; 30:3). The Lord commanded Moses to make perfumed incense which would be "pure and holy" (Exod 30:35). The word is also used of the purification of the booty taken in war either by fire or by "the water of purity" (Num 31:23). The moral or inward purity is emphasised with the purity of heart (Prov 22:11; Ps 51:2, 7, 10). See also TWOT, sv "*thaher*" by Edwin Yamauchi.

<sup>10</sup> BDB, 864. This word is primarily used for gold and silversmiths and for the process of refining metals before they were worked into fine vessels (Prov 25:4). TWOT, sv "*tsaraph*" by John E Hartley. The same word is used in Psalm 119:140 and in Proverbs 30:5 to describe the purity of God's words.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 279. The basic idea of the verb is of making something pure. Like the verb *tsaraph* the idea connotes refining or testing something to determine its degree of purity (Job 28:1; Mal 3:3; 1 Chron 28:18). TWOT, sv "*zaqq*" by Leon J Wood.

<sup>12</sup>F Delitzsch, *Psalms* (repr, Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans, 1986), 197.

<sup>13</sup>W S Plumer, *Psalms* (repr, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1978), 178.

<sup>14</sup>BDB, 1036.

<sup>15</sup>NIDOTTE, sv “shamar” by Keith N Schoville. The verb first appears in Genesis 2:15 where Adam was given the responsibility of taking care of the Garden of Eden. The second occurrence of the verb is in Genesis 3:24 where it refers to the cherubim and flaming sword God placed in Eden to prevent human access to the tree of life. Among the most frequent uses of the verb is the admonition to be careful and diligent in respect to religious and spiritual responsibilities. The righteous nation is the one that keeps faith (Isa 26:2). God’s faithful ones are to command their children to keep the way of the Lord (Gen 18:19; Exod 20:6; Lev 18:26; Deut 26:16). The Pentateuch repeats again and again the admonition to keep (pay careful attention to) the decrees and commandments of the Lord (Lev 22:31; Deut 5:29; 6:2; 26:17). The same is repeated in the other parts of the Old Testament as well (Josh 22:5; 1 Sam 13:14; Ps 119:8; Prov 4:4; Jer 35:18; Ezek 18:19).

<sup>16</sup>Doug Kutilek, “A Careful Investigation of Psalm 12:6, 7,” *The Bible Evangelist* (October 1983): 7.

<sup>17</sup>E Kautzsch, ed, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, rev A E Cowley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), 440, section 5, o. This gender discordance is also noted by Bruce Waltke and M O’Connor, “The masculine pronoun is often used for a feminine antecedent.” *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 302.

<sup>18</sup>Strouse, “The Permanent Preservation of God’s Words,” 32.

<sup>19</sup>Examples outside the Psalms are found in Genesis 31:9; 32:15; Exodus 1:21; Job 1:14; 39:3; 42:15; Song of Solomon 4:2; 6:6; and Proverbs 6:21. See also Quek Suan Yew, “Did God Promise to Preserve His Words? Interpreting Psalm 12:6–7,” *The Burning Bush* 10 (2004): 96–97.

<sup>20</sup>BDB, 665.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid. See also TWOT, sv “natsar” by W C Kaiser.

<sup>22</sup>*Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, 155, section 1, a.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid, 157, section 4, i.

<sup>24</sup>See table in *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, 157–8, section 4, i.

<sup>25</sup>TWOT, sv “shamar” by J E Hartley. It is observed that the similarity between *natsar* and *shamar* is strikingly illustrated by Psalm 119. In this psalm, *natsar* is used 10 times and *shamar* 21 times. In Proverbs, *natsar* occurs 19 times compared to 30 times for *shamar*. Poetic parallelism places the two words in balancing stiches in six verses: 2:8, 11; 4:6; 13:3; 16:17; and 27:18. NIDOTTE, sv “natsar” by Keith N Schoville.

<sup>26</sup>Strouse, “The Permanent Preservation of God’s Words,” 33.

<sup>27</sup>Shin, “Psalm 12:5–7,” 165.

<sup>28</sup>Quoted by Jeffrey Khoo, *Kept Pure In All Ages* (Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College Press, 2001), 37. See also Jeffrey Khoo, “John Owen on the Perfect Bible,” *The Burning Bush* 10 (2004): 74–85.

<sup>29</sup>Edward J Young, *The Book of Isaiah* (repr, Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans, 1977), 3:411.

<sup>30</sup>BDB, 136. See also TWOT, sv “berith” by Elmer B Smick.



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<sup>31</sup> Young, *Isaiah*, 411.

<sup>32</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah* (repr, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 18:270.

<sup>33</sup> Edward E Hindson, "Isaiah," *The KJV Parallel Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1994), 1406.

<sup>34</sup> BDB, 924.

<sup>35</sup> Albert Barnes, *Isaiah* (repr, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), 2:355.

<sup>36</sup> Young, *Isaiah*, 441.

<sup>37</sup> TWOT, sv "dabar" by Earl S Kalland.

<sup>38</sup> Young, *Isaiah*, 442.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas Strouse, "Every Word: Matthew 4:4," in *Thou Shalt Keep Them*, 35.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> James A Brooks, and Carlton L Winbery, *Syntax of New Testament Greek* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1979), 104.

<sup>42</sup> R C H Lenski, *The Interpretation of St Matthew's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1943), 144.

<sup>43</sup> For all 62 references, see Christopher B Raper, "It is Written" (Pensacola: Pensacola Theological Seminary, 2002), 5-11.

<sup>44</sup> Cited in Strouse, "Every Word, Matthew 4:4," 38.

<sup>45</sup> BDAG, 782.

<sup>46</sup> BDAG, 675.

<sup>47</sup> Daniel B Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 487.

<sup>48</sup> BDAG, 394.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 522.

<sup>50</sup> Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 591.

<sup>51</sup> Lenski, *Matthew*, 205.

<sup>52</sup> BDAG, 828-9.

<sup>53</sup> Gary C Webb, "Not One Jot or One Tittle: Matthew 5:17, 18," in *Thou Shalt Keep Them*, 43.

<sup>54</sup> BDAG, 189-90. In Matthew 5:18 it has a causative sense, expressing the reason for what has been stated in verse 17.

<sup>55</sup> BDB, 53.

<sup>56</sup> BDAG, 776.

<sup>57</sup> In Greek, *ou me* plus the aorist subjunctive is the most decisive way of negating something in the future. BDAG, 646. See also Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 468.

<sup>58</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, trans William Pringle (repr, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 278.

<sup>59</sup> Prabhudas Koshy, "Jesus' View of the Holy Scripture: An Exposition of Matthew 5:17-19," *Bible Witness* (October - December 2002): 14.

<sup>60</sup> Edward Glenny, "The Preservation of Scripture and the King Version Debate," in *One Bible Only?* ed Roy Beacham and Kevin Bauder (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2001), 116.

<sup>61</sup> Millard J Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 203.

<sup>62</sup> R Laird Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Scriptures* (Greenville: A Press, 1995), 35.

<sup>63</sup> Harold G Stigers, "Preservation: The Corollary of Inspiration," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 22 (1979): 217.

<sup>64</sup> BDAG, 607.

<sup>65</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel of John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans, 1995), 110.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> R C H Lenski, *The Interpretation of St Luke's Gospel* (Minneapolis, Augsburg Publishing House, 1943), 1027.

<sup>68</sup> Kent Brandenburg, "My Words Shall Not Pass Away: Matthew 24:35," in *Thou Shalt Keep Them*, 63.

<sup>69</sup> Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 468.

<sup>70</sup> BDAG, 776.

<sup>71</sup> Brandenburg, "My Words Shall Not Pass Away," 63n91.

<sup>72</sup> The same word is used in 2 Peter 3:10 and Revelation 21:1 to describe what will happen to the old universe.

<sup>73</sup> The indicative mood is, in general, the mood of assertion, *presentation of certainty*. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 448.

<sup>74</sup> It is significant that not only the Old Testament is called Scripture, but also the New Testament writings. In 2 Peter 3:15–16 the apostle Peter while commenting on the writings of the apostle Paul uses the word "scripture" (*graphe*), the same as in John 10:35. Peter here places Paul's writings on an equal basis with the Old Testament Scriptures and all other in the New Testament. Earlier, in verse 2 of the same chapter, Peter placed the holy prophets of the Old Testament on the same level of inspiration and authority as the apostles of the New Testament, emphasising the inspiration of all Scriptures. Paul also places the Old and the New Testament Scriptures together, implying both are on an equal footing. In 1 Timothy 5:18 he writes, "For the scripture saith, *Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward.*" Paul quoted from Deuteronomy 25:4, "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn," and placed it alongside Luke 10:7, "The labourer is worthy of his hire," and called both "Scripture."

<sup>75</sup> *ISBE*, sv "Canon of the OT" by R K Harrison and G L Robinson.

<sup>76</sup> Robert P Lightner, *The Savior and the Scriptures* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1966), 68.

<sup>77</sup> BDAG, 607.

<sup>78</sup> R C H Lenski, *The Interpretation of St John's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1943), 767.

<sup>79</sup> Edward J Young, *Thy Word Is Truth* (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans, 1957), 27.

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## **“GO, AND SIN NO MORE”: A SERMON ON THE PERICOPE DE ADULTERA**

Gia-Hien Nguyen

The Bible in John 7:53–8:11 tells of how the scribes and the Pharisees brought to the Lord Jesus a woman who was taken in adultery in the very act. They used the Law of Moses to test the Lord Jesus' reaction to this woman so that they might accuse Him. However, the Lord Jesus knew their hearts, and said to them, *“He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.”* Consequently, they were all convicted of their sins by their own conscience and soon left one by one. The Lord Jesus was alone with the woman, and He asked her, *“Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee?”* and she said, *“No man, Lord.”* Then, the Lord Jesus said unto her, *“Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.”* (John 8:11). What does this mean for you?

### **The Heart Is Most Deceitful and Sinful**

From the Bible text, we know that early in the morning, the Lord Jesus came again to the temple in Jerusalem. All the people came to the Lord, and He sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and Pharisees brought a woman taken in adultery to the Lord, and they set her in the midst to be judged. The woman must have felt extremely ashamed, being publicly exposed and openly humiliated! Many judgmental eyes were probably staring at her with contempt and self-righteous condemnation. But there was one exception: the Lord Jesus who came to save sinners.

First, let us better understand historically the role of the scribes and Pharisees. Who were they, and why did they bring the adulterous woman before the Lord in public? The Scribes were the experts in the law, scholars well versed in the law (in the New Testament era). Usually, they were mentioned together with the high priests, Pharisees and the elders and formed the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin comprised the

leaders of the Jews, a group who had the authority to judge and condemn. The Pharisees were the separated ones or separatists. They were the organised followers of the scribes. Their purpose was to take on the pattern of the pious Israelite as established by the scribes. They were the most embittered opponents of Jesus and the early Christians.

In the days of the Lord Jesus, the scribes and Pharisees endeavoured to appear outwardly righteous before the public and people, but internally their hearts and minds were still full of pride, sin and unrighteousness. The Lord Jesus exposed their hypocrisy and iniquity so that they might reflect and be convicted of their sins in humble repentance, *“Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity”* (Matt 23:28). Yet they stubbornly refused to repent and instead became filled with hatred against the Lord, planning and plotting to destroy Him and His ministry.

From John 8, we read that they brought to the Lord Jesus a woman taken in adultery, set her in the midst of the people, and said to Him, *“Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?”* (vv 4, 5). What was their purpose in doing so? The Bible tells us about their wicked motives to tempt or test the Lord so that they might accuse Him. This displays just how deceitful and sinful the human heart is (Jer 17:9; Mark 7:21-23)! We should more closely examine how they attempted to trap the Lord Jesus, hoping thereby to destroy Him and His ministry.

According to the Law of Moses, both the adulterer and the adulteress should be put to death (Lev 20:10); however, they did not bring the man together with the woman. Therefore, they only followed and did half of God’s command. Many nowadays also do the same: only teaching, preaching, and obeying selected parts of the Bible that they like, but ignoring the rest, even *“all the counsel of God”* (Acts 20:27).

Now, what if the Lord Jesus agreed to stone the women? If the Lord Jesus agreed to stone the woman, they would accuse Him of violating the Roman law for the Jews were not allowed to put to death anyone without the consent of the Roman judge (John 18:31). They might also accuse the Lord of not knowing the Mosaic Law if He condemned the woman without the man. Furthermore, if the Lord Jesus also condemned the woman as they did, He would not be the Saviour of

sinner because He said that He did not come to judge but to save (John 3:16-17; 12:47-48).

But if the Lord were to let the woman go, they would accuse Him of not keeping the Mosaic Law. They thought that the Lord would surely fall into their deceitfully devised trap because there was no way He could not say yes or no without getting into trouble. However, sinful human beings can never be wiser or more powerful than God who is all knowing, and Jesus is God Himself!

### **Hearing God's Word, the Conscience Is Convicted**

The Lord Jesus is the almighty, all-knowing, holy and gracious God and Creator, so He knew full well how deceitful their hearts were, and the trap they wanted to deploy. Therefore, the Lord did not answer them a word. However, they continued pressing the Lord, and so He said to them, "*He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her*" (John 8:7).

The Lord Jesus challenged them to stone her if they had no sin or if they were sinless. Who has no sin or is sinless in this world? Many think that they are good because they have never committed a serious crime, murdered anyone, physically harmed anyone, or committed adultery. The terrible problem is, they judge themselves according to their own moral standard, which can never be right and acceptable before God. The righteous God will judge all humans according to His moral standard, even according to His Word.

The Lord Jesus says, "*He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day*" (John 12:48). Let us examine ourselves according to God's Word to see how sinful we humans are. God condemns sin even in human hearts, minds and intentions, so all humans are sinful before God, "*For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man*" (Mark 7:21-23). Then, who is able to say that he or she has never had sinful lusts, hatred, covetousness, pride, envy, or lies?

Moreover, God created human beings so that they might love Him, worship Him, serve Him, glorify Him, and obey Him. God has

## “GO, AND SIN NO MORE”

many good and holy commandments in the Bible for humans to do, and if they just fail to even keep one of the commandments, it is sin already (Jas 2:10; 4:17). Thus, the Bible confirms that *“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”* (Rom 3:23), and *“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us”* (1 John 1:8).

Therefore, when the Jews heard the Lord Jesus’ word, *“He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her,”* they were *“convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst”* (John 8:7, 9). Here, the Jewish religious leaders and people who condemned the woman were all convicted of their sins by their conscience through the word of the Lord Jesus, even God’s Word. God created humans with a living soul, including a conscience to convict them of their sins (Gen 2:7; Rom 2:15). What about your conscience? If you hear God’s Word and are convicted of your sins, your conscience is still sensitive. However, it is not enough to simply acknowledge our sins, we must humbly come to the Lord Jesus, confess our sins before Him and ask Him to forgive and save us. We must exalt Jesus and make Him our Lord and Saviour. Have you done that? Sadly, the Jews did not do that. They did not acknowledge the Lord Jesus as their Lord, Saviour and Messiah, so they left Him. What about you?

### **Go and Sin No More**

The Lord Jesus is holy and sinless, so He did not leave as the Jews did. The Lord has the authority to judge and condemn the woman, but He said to the woman, *“Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee?”* and she said, *“No man, Lord.”* And the Lord Jesus said to her, *“Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more”* (John 8:10–11). What can we learn from the Lord Jesus’ word?

God the Father has given His Son the full authority to judge all humans (John 5:22–23). Surely, the Lord Jesus Christ will come again the second time to judge all, *“But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death”* (Rev 21:8). Do you think you can escape the Lord’s judgement? We ought to thank God that the Lord Jesus came the first time not to condemn sinners, but to die for

sinner and rise again to save those who will repent of their sins and truly believe in Him, *“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. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved”* (John 3:16–17).

The truth is if you and I reject the Lord’s love and salvation for us, then we can never be forgiven and saved, and we shall face certain judgement and condemnation on Judgment Day! How about you? If we humble ourselves, acknowledge our sins and receive the Lord Jesus as our Lord and Saviour today, when He comes again the second time, He will be our Saviour and not our Judge. Have you received Jesus as your Lord and Saviour?

As the Lord Jesus our Creator and Saviour did not condemn us, you and I ought not to condemn others until His Second Coming, for He is the Judge. When you and I see others fail to do God’s Word, we ought not to condemn them but to pray for them, share the Gospel and God’s Word with them, introduce the Saviour Jesus Christ to them, and encourage them to trust in the Lord and His Word. Moreover, God’s Word challenges us, *“There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?”* (Jas 4:12).

Truly, the Lord Jesus came the first time to save and not to judge, but no one can abuse His love, grace, mercy, forgiveness and salvation. That is why the Lord said to the woman, *“Go, and sin no more.”* She had to stop living in sin. All those who believe in the Lord Jesus and have enjoyed the Lord’s forgiveness and salvation ought to stop living in sin. Can you and I stop living in sin? Sadly, due to man’s sinful, deceitful and wicked nature (Jer 17:9), no one can stop living in sin!

To overcome sin and stop living in sin, sinners have to exalt the Lord Jesus to be their Lord and Saviour as Paul did, *“O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”* (Rom 7:24–25a). The Lord gives them a new heart and a new spirit and put His Spirit in them to cause them to keep His Word and commandments (Ezek 36:26–27). Christianity is not like any other religion because the Lord Jesus Christ is able to save sinners, regenerate them, and transform them to be God’s children and His Bride by His Word and His Spirit.



*“GO, AND SIN NO MORE”*

The Lord Jesus came the first time to earth to die for sinners and rise again from the dead to save all who would repent of their sins and exalt Him as their Lord and Saviour. However, the Lord will come again soon, to receive all true believers and to judge unrepentant sinners. What about you and me? Are you a true believer of Jesus Christ or are you still an unrepentant sinner? May the Lord graciously help all of us to repent of our sins and shortcomings, exalt Him as our Lord and Saviour, and help others to do the same. Amen.

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# THE REFORMED PASTOR AS A MINISTER OF THE WORD

Samuel Joseph

## **Text: 2 Timothy 4:1–8**

Timothy, as a young man born into a Christian home, and taught the Christian faith by his godly mother and grandmother, witnessed the labours and afflictions of the apostle Paul, and was called to follow the apostle and serve the Lord with him. Later Paul asked Timothy to stay with the church at Ephesus, while he (Paul) went to Macedonia. There was much in the Ephesian church that needed to be dealt with: false teaching, administrative issues, problems within and without. It was a lot for one man—by all accounts a timid man, at that—to handle. But Paul wrote to instruct and encourage Timothy, and we have these inspired epistles, the very words of God, instructing us also concerning the pastoral ministry. Here we can learn the *charge* of the ministry, the *centre* of the ministry; the *context* of the ministry; and finally the *crown* of the ministry.

## **Charge of the Ministry**

The *charge* given to Timothy is solemn and serious. He is called as a servant of the living God, to have care over the house of God, the church (cf 1 Tim 3:15). He is called as a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, to shepherd the flock He purchased with His own blood. He is entrusted with something most precious! And he will have to give an account before the Lord, the Judge of all. This charge expresses the weightiness of the pastoral ministry: something sacred has been committed to Timothy, the ministry of the gospel. He must keep this charge, maintain the purity of the faith, defend the doctrine against error, study and rightly divide the scriptures, and declare God's truth without fear. This is the calling of a pastor, a minister. Of course, all Christians have a sacred trust committed to them—the Christian faith is the faith “once delivered unto the saints,” and we are all accountable

to God for our handling of His word—but there is a special calling and consecration for the pastor, to be committed full-time to the ministry of the word. He must feel the weight of this burden, and take up this solemn responsibility, to serve the Lord.

### **Centre of the Ministry**

But what is Timothy to do, in the discharge of this accountability? What is to be the *centre*, the focus, the mainstay of his ministry? His duty is described here succinctly and forcefully: he is to preach the word. To preach is to make an authoritative declaration of God's word to man. There is an authority in the church, which is not found in lecture halls or press conferences, because the preacher's authority comes from God. The centre of the pastor's duty is to preach, with the authority of God behind him, and over him. Thus also, the preacher's message also comes from God: he is not given authority to preach his own word, but God's word. It is God's message, and He wants it declared. This is what Timothy is to focus on; this is the particular calling of the minister—he must be in the pulpit, because he must fulfil that responsibility, as his particular burden. To that end, further instruction is given here concerning Timothy's preaching ministry. He must be instant; that is, he must be ready and available, at his post, regardless of whether it is seasonable or convenient. He must reprove, rebuke exhort: he must apply the word in these ways, because that is God's purpose in giving it (cf 2 Tim 3:16–17). And all this must be done with longsuffering, with patience. He must persevere in teaching, instructing, even those who “oppose themselves” (2 Tim 2:24–25).

### **Context of the Ministry**

This is all the more important, in light of the *context* of Timothy's ministry. He is called to minister in the “last days” (cf 2 Tim 3:1). That is a reference to this present age, between the first coming of the Lord and His second coming. It is an age filled with “perilous times,” for this is a fallen world, and as the Spirit of truth is at work, so too is the spirit of error. In these last days there is the ever-present danger of apostasy and hypocrisy: thus, Timothy must preach the word, because the time will come, when there will be no appetite for the truth, and the people will seek out only those teachers who tell them what they want to hear. To that end Timothy is to be watchful, to be wary, to remain steadfast

against the temptation to stray from truth that has become unpopular. He must be prepared to endure afflictions, and to persevere in the work of an evangelist, in the gospel ministry. He must be faithful to the end, and complete that to which he is called; he must “make full proof” of the ministry entrusted to him. Such is the gospel ministry also today, for we are still in the “last days.”

### **Crown of the Ministry**

How encouraging it must have been, then, for Timothy to be reminded of the *crown* awaiting him at the end. Paul encourages Timothy by referring to his own example: though he will soon be departing, Paul has no fear, but rather hope; for he knows that he has served faithfully. He has been watchful, endured afflictions, done the work of an evangelist; he has completed his course, made full proof of his ministry. He is expectantly awaiting the crown, as he can stand before the Judge without shame. So too for Timothy, if he serves faithfully. So too for pastors today—indeed, so too for all Christians, for this crown is awaiting all who love the appearing of the Lord, who will not be ashamed when He appears. This is the pastoral ministry: a high calling, serving the best and highest of masters. It is a weighty responsibility, to care for God’s flock. But because the Lord loves His church, He has given her ministers chosen and equipped by Him (cf Eph 4:11–13). It is a most needful ministry, in perilous times.

### **Why the Need**

But why do you need to hear all this? What does this charge, given by Paul to Timothy, have to do with you? You need to hear this, because you need to know what a pastor is, what the role and office of a pastor entails. Some need to hear this, because the Lord will call you unto the ministry. If He is calling you, do not linger, do not turn away, do not despise this calling, as though it is beneath you! It is a high calling, and a privilege. It is most needful: the fields even now are white and ready for the harvest. Even in this secular age, the same age-old questions echo in many hearts. As long as the Lord tarries there are souls to be won, and churches to be built up.

Even if the pastoral ministry is not your calling, still, you need to know what God has given to the church, to you, in the pastors He sends watch over you. Don't take for granted, that you have a pastor, a

shepherd, ministers of the word! It was not very long ago, that the ministry of the word was largely covered up by sacramentalism and tradition. Part of the heritage we gratefully receive from the Reformation, lies in the recovery of the realisation that God meets and graciously deals with His people primarily through His word. Something is missing in the church, where this is not recognised; where the ministry of the word is diminished, the church is deprived of some crucial good that God intends for her to have. As the importance of this ministry was recognised by Paul, charged upon Timothy, recovered at the Reformation, so it needs to be acknowledged today. We have the word so readily available to us, and we have ministers to preach the word; but there is a renewed effort of the enemy to snatch the word away, to choke it with thorns and thistles. How many Christians in other lands and other times would rejoice to sit where you sit today! Blessed are our ears, we may say, for we hear the word every week; yet how reluctant we often are to come and hear. The joy of the word is turned to apathy in our hearts. Let us recognise that the command for ministers to preach the word, comes with an accompanying command for all of us to be faithful hearers and doers of the word. There is a crown for us also in this! For all of us, working together as a church, shepherd and sheep, preachers and hearers, serving the Lord, united in His name and His truth, until He returns.

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*The Rev Samuel Joseph is an MDiv and ThM graduate of the Far Eastern Bible College. The above was his ordination sermon on Reformation Sunday, 29 October 2023. He serves as Preacher-Teacher at True Life Bible-Presbyterian Church.*

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## COLLEGE NEWS

**The College reopened for a new semester with a Day of Prayer** on 17 July 2023. FEBC alumnus—Samuel Goh—now a student at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary was the Lord’s messenger. He spoke from Psalm 51. The lecturers and tutors and directors of the College who were present then gave their respective exhortations to the students and the new students shared their testimonies. A time of prayer followed.

**The lecturers/tutors (and courses) for the July to November 2023 semester** were: Rev Dr Jeffrey Khoo (Life of Christ I, Heroes of the Reformation), Rev Dr Quek Suan Yew (Old Testament History I, Homiletics), Rev Dr Prabhudas Koshy (The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament), Rev Dr Koa Keng Woo (Bible Geography I, Cults III), Rev Stephen Khoo (1 Samuel), Rev Tan Kian Sing (Philippians), Rev Clement Chew (Hebrew Elementary I, Doctrine and Practice of Love), Miss Carol Lee (Youth Christian Education), Rev Zhu Jianwei (Westminster Standards [Chinese]), Pr Joshua Yong (Contemporary Theology III, Greek Reading I), Miss Joycelyn Chng (Christian School Administration), Pr Cornelius Koshy (Greek Elementary I), Pr Samuel Joseph (Westminster Standards, Greek Exegesis I), Miss Khoo May Lynn (Pianoforte), Mrs Patricia Joseph (English Intensive I), and Mr Aw Beng Teck (English Intermediate I/ English Advanced I [combined]).

**Thirteen Basic Theology for Everyone courses** were offered to the public on campus and online in the July to November 2023 semester—12 were livestreamed (Westminster Standards, Heroes of the Reformation, 1 Samuel, Cults III, The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, Philippians, Contemporary Theology III, Doctrine and Practice of Love, Youth Christian Education, Old Testament History I, Westminster Standards [Chinese], Life of Christ I), and one was video-screened (Systematic Theology I: Theism).

**Total enrolment in the July to November 2023 semester** was 563: 33 fulltime residential students and 530 part-time/online students from 17 countries— Australia, Cambodia, China, Congo, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand, and USA. There were 11 new students: Damenangpynskhem Rani (India), Fredo Gatchalian

Mendoza (Philippines), Jerinah Ged A Orgasan (Philippines), Maritus (Indonesia), Park Hakyoung (Korea), Park Juan (Korea), Rachel Leong (Singapore), Rini Sulfin Zamasi (Indonesia), Thang Sian Mung (Myanmar), Thian Za Mawi (Myanmar), and Zakharia Suhartono (Indonesia).



**An FEBC Gospel Rally** was held on Friday, 1 September 2023 at the FEBC Hall, 7.30pm. Rev Clement Chew was the Lord’s messenger on the topic “God Loves You” (John 3:16) and Rev Zhu Jianwei was the Chinese interpreter. The LORD brought two visitors who were unbelievers to hear this gospel message of God’s love.





**The FEBC Board of Directors** saw the resignation of Elder Tai Mern Yee as member and Treasurer on 19 July 2023 and Rev Dr Quek Suan Yew as member on 16 August 2023. The Board appointed Rev Stephen Khoo as the new Honorary Treasurer on 1 August 2023. The Board currently comprises six members: Rev Dr Jeffrey Khoo (President), Elder John Leong (Secretary), Rev Stephen Khoo (Treasurer), Rev Dr Koa Keng Woo, Rev Dr Prabhudas Koshy, and Mr Wee Hian Kok.

**Peter Yoksan (MDiv 2005, ThM 2009) and Samuel Joseph (MDiv 2018, ThM 2019)** were ordained as Ministers of the Gospel on Reformation Sunday, 29 October 2023 through the laying on of the hands of the presbytery (1 Tim 4:14). Rev Yoksan is Pastor of Calvary Hanura Permai Bible-Presbyterian Church (GAPPI) in Kubu Raya, West Kalimantan, Indonesia. Rev Joseph serves as a preacher at True Life Bible-Presbyterian Church in Singapore and teaches Greek and theology at the Far Eastern Bible College.





**Ordination of Samuel Joseph**



**Ordination of Peter Yoksan**

**FEBC Students @ Gardens by the Bay**

