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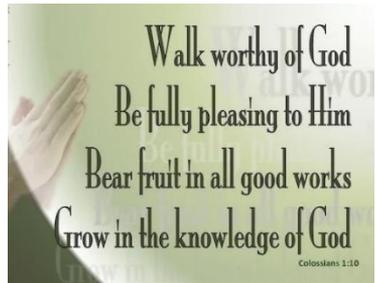
THE PRECEPTS OF A VIBRANT GROWING CHURCH

What is the Church (Col 1:9-18)?

"The church is a building for public worship, religious service, a particular sect or denomination of Christians, church government, or its power, as opposed to civil government, the profession of the clergy and a group of worshippers."

This definition of the word "church", taken from a Dictionary shows the potential confusion that exists in our day regarding that institution. The Greek word translated in that way (*ekklesia*) is used 114 times in the NT, referring to "a group of worshippers, or the elect of God", which is the last definition mentioned in a secular dictionary! The church according to Scripture, is not a building, a denomination or an activity - it is a group of people, the elect of God. This is true of both the universal (or invisible) church, which comprise the elect of God throughout the world who truly believe in Jesus Christ (Matt 16:18; Eph 5:25-27), and also the local (or visible) church, which is the group of redeemed men who profess to know Christ and meet together in a particular location for worship (Matt 18:17; 1 Cor 1:2). The word *ekklesia* (called out ones) is used in both ways in the New Testament, but the latter meaning is much more prevalent. So, throughout this book we will be referring to "the church" in that sense - the local body of believers who meet together to worship God and serve one another. It is vital that believers should be committed members of a sound local church where they worship and serve and not be perpetual visitors

Technically speaking, we do not worship "at a church" or participate "in church" – we are the church! And if you are a member of the body of Christ, you do not simply "go to church" or "sit in church" - you are a part of the gathered church who come together for worship with the rest of the body in the sanctuary of God. (Heb 10:24,25) This is important because many have decided not to gather physically as a church in corporate worship even if it is possible despite the pandemic. **The quality of a church is therefore not measured by the condition of its buildings or the appeal of its services, but by the preaching of the Word and the spiritual state of the people**



themselves. They are the church, so the church is only as good as they are in their spiritual condition.

Metaphors of the Church

The church which comprises the redeemed of God is described in the Bible as:

- ✓ A holy and royal priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices to God;
- ✓ A chosen race belonging to God;
- ✓ A separate nation whose King is the eternal God;
- ✓ A temple indwelt by the Spirit of God;
- ✓ A set of branches connected to Jesus Christ as the Vine;
- ✓ A flock led by the Good Shepherd;
- ✓ A household or family sharing the common life of the eternal Father; and
- ✓ A body of which the Lord Jesus is Head.

Using the first part of the alphabet as an acrostic, the church should be characterised by the following elements.

Apostolic. Following the example and precepts of the apostles (and hence Christ) in doctrine, church governance, sound and just biblical church discipline and the other emphasis in the early church was on gospel and building up and the comfort of the saints.

Biblical. The inspired Bible is the only infallible guide and authority that is to rule the whole church in all matters of faith and practice. The teaching of the Bible is the absolute standard of our lives and the church, not emotions nor experience nor man's teachings nor writings, no matter how good they are.

Confessional/Calvinistic/Christ-centred. Every church should have a statement of faith or a historic confession that it adheres to, whether it is in the constitution or written elsewhere which is subject to the word of God. **For us as a reformed church, it is defined by the Westminster Confession of Faith with a premillennial eschatology.**

Doctrinal. A church should be given to the study of sound Reformed doctrines from the pulpit, Sunday School, prayer meeting or Bible study group with a balance on practical, doctrinal and devotional content (i.e. this is in direct opposition to an emotionally charged-up church). The church weekly bulletin should also reflect this emphasis and other seminars and camps too.

Evangelistic. The chief business of the church, besides edifying the saints is to proclaim the glad tidings of great joy of the glorious redemption that comes only through the atoning work of our Jesus Christ on the cross on our behalf. A church that does not have a focus on soul saving or missions and gospel outreach is sadly wanting in its overall purpose and direction.

Fundamental. By this we mean that the church should stand firmly and unashamedly for the basic doctrines of the Bible concerning God, Christ, Sin, Man, Second Coming, Church, Holy Spirit and others, and be prepared to propagate or defend it. It should oppose liberal or modernistic churches which compromise and accommodate doctrinal error and falsehood (i.e. warn or admonish others of the potential spiritual danger associated with compromise). **Biblical separation is a result of this vital principle and should be the stand of every Bible believing and Bible defending church who is committed to purity and holiness. (2Cor 6:14-18)**

All the metaphors in scripture describing the church feature the common characteristics of unity and shared life and fellowship. Believers compose one priesthood, one nation, one race, one temple, one plant, one flock, one family, and one body. **We have been made one spiritually, and we belong together in communion, living out that oneness in local churches. We are commanded not to forsake "our own assembling together", so that we can "stimulate one another to love and good deeds" (Heb 10:24-25).** The Lord Himself is the Head of the church (Eph 5:26). He is the Saviour of the Elect and He governs the church by His invisible hand. Yet He uses man to serve Him faithfully in the local church and we are to study, understand and apply the biblical teachings of Christ concerning the life and ministry of our local Christian church. There are at least 4 areas in the church in which we must recognise the Kingship and direction of our Lord over His church.

1. Biblical Doctrine

The Kingship of Christ in the church requires the teaching of sound biblical doctrine and commandments of the king given in his word. Obedient and faithful subjects should know the decrees of their monarch. **The early church continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, prayer, fellowship and the sacraments (Acts 2:42). They were given to proper doctrinal foundations as pivotal to the growth and vitality of the local churches. The Word of God was the basis of all preaching and teaching in his church** and in 2 Tim 3:16-17 we are told, *"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."*

There are many false teachings and heretical practices taught by cults, modernists and New Agers that are being passed around and even accepted by some churches today. A Christ-honouring and bible-based church will keep itself from such unsound teachings that is contrary to the biblical doctrines of grace. 2 Tim 2:15-16 says, *"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness."* Be like what Jer 15:16 says, *"Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts."*

2. Reverential Worship of God

The practice of the headship of Christ in the church will result in God-honouring reverential corporate worship on the Sabbath day, which is sadly undermined or neglected today. The worship of the thrice-Holy God is our glorious privilege and eternal pre-occupation in heaven one day. Let us recognise the grace and sober manner in which we are to approach the thrice-holy God and seek him with fear and trembling as a gathered church with the serving of the sacraments and sound biblical church discipline.

An individual's or church attitude in worship is determined by his or their theology and concept of God. If he realises the attributes of God - His

Being, His character and works, that He is an Almighty and Sovereign Creator, Holy, Just and Righteous (Rev 5:4; Deut 32:4; Rev 4:8) - he will approach God with reverence and fear in holy worship. If, however his knowledge of God is warped and unsound, then it will be reflected in the manner in which he worships his God (and subsequently in his choice of music) - self-centred, flippant, frivolous, superficial, even worldly and unedifying to say the least.

A worship service should be characterised by such attitude as reverence, sincerity, humility and sobriety (John 4:24, 1 Chr 16:29, 1 Cor 14:40). **Collective Congregation participation should always be the chief expression of our worship, adoration and praise. There should be a restful meditative atmosphere where people can hear the Word of God and magnify His name without distractions.** While the New Testament does not give any definite or specific instruction as to a proper form of worship, there are, however, certain general principles that can be gleaned from different portions of the Scriptures.

Firstly, it is the Pauline exhortation to the church at Corinth, that *all things should be done decently and in order* (1 Cor 14:40), which provides a good guide for the choice of music and hymns and the charring and others who are leading the sabbath worship service. Not loud jarring music but meaningful, reverential and theologically sound words put to musical arrangement in an orderly manner.

Secondly, Jesus told the Samaritan woman to *worship God in spirit and in truth* (John 4:24); and hence, praise and worship must be a sincere, personal and intelligent spiritual activity, in which the mind, heart and will join together and submit to God in expressing praise, love, gratitude and obedience. **Whatever assistance we may derive from sacred music or instruments, these things cannot by themselves make a spiritual, intelligent act of worship and must never be allowed to develop to such significance that it eclipses or interferes with true biblical worship.**

Thirdly, we were told to "worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness" (1 Chr 16:29). Holiness, because the person we worship is the thrice-holy God; it requires a proper propriety and right decorum in public worship. Thus, **unedifying theologically unsound music is inconsistent with the principle of holiness in worship and the requirement for decency and order in reverential worship makes self-style entertainment worship are unacceptable to God by biblical standards.**

The kingship of Christ requires us to *come prepared for reverential worship* every Sabbath to praise, adore and extol the name of the Lord and to receive his word with fear and trembling, coupled with expectation and application in our hearts. The Westminster Confession in the directory of Public Worship has this to say about personal preparation:

Of the Assembling of the Congregation, and their Behaviour in the Public Worship of God

While the congregation is to meet for public worship, the people (having before prepared their hearts thereunto) **ought all to come and join therein; not absenting themselves from the public ordinances**

through negligence, or upon pretence of private meetings. Let all enter the assembly, not irreverently, but in a grave and seemly manner, taking their seats or places without adoration, or bowing themselves towards one place or other. The congregation being assembled, the minister, after solemn calling on them to the worshipping of the great name of God is to begin with prayer.

The public worship being begun, the people are wholly to attend upon it, forbearing to read anything, except what the minister is then reading or citing; and **abstaining much more from all private whisperings, conferences, salutations, or doing reverence to any person present, or coming in; as also from all gazing, sleeping, and other indecent behaviour, which may disturb the minister or people, or hinder themselves or others in the service of God.**

If any, through necessity, be hindered from being present at the beginning, they ought not, when they come into the congregation, to betake themselves to their private devotions, but reverently to compose themselves to join with the assembly in that ordinances of God which is then in hand.

That was the high reverential regard the God-fearing Puritans had for worship in 17th century England. **We need prayerfully consider to come and seek the Lord each sunday, worship in spirit and truth, in decency and order and in the beauty of holiness (1 Cor 14:33,40; 1 Cor 16:29)** and not like present day modernistic churches that are given to superficial self-styled worship.

Today churches are often obsessed with worldly techniques of loud music and secular fanfare and self-styled entertainment in show-time worship style that is unacceptable to God (i.e. prosperity gospel and showtime drama, dancing, musical productions and false prophecies, sensational and emotional appeals).

3. Faithful Stewardship and Fellowship

Every believer is both a son and steward in the light of God. Stewards are custodians and trustees. 1 Pet 4:10-11 *"As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen".* As stewards we are to be faithful and fruitful to abound in the work of the Lord.

God has entrusted the use of our time, talents and treasure and we are to employ them wisely, using them in a prudent and discreet manner that will bring eternal dividends. The parable of the pounds and talents remind us of the joy and duty of standing before God and our accountability before Him one day. (Mt 25, and 2 Cor 5:10). **Are we serving the Lord in the church? Are we employing your God-gifted talents and possessions to the advancement of His Kingdom? Let us use our time, treasures, talents and resources wisely for the strengthening of the saints and the advancement of God's kingdom.** Jesus says in Luke 6:38 *"Give,*

and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again." It is a privilege and joy to worship and serve the Lord with our hearts and substance, an expression of our love to him in a tangible way. Are we faithful stewards today for Christ's sake?

4. Evangelism & Missions

Are you burdened for missions in the propagation of the gospel to the ends of the earth, even in a health crisis? 1 Cor 9:16 *"For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!"* **The Lordship of Christ necessarily requires us to fulfil the Gospel Commission given by our resurrected Lord and share the gospel in season and out of season, to the saving of souls according to God's will.** Give a gospel tract, or invite someone to church (ie Christmas service) and be ready to give an account of your faith as and when asked (1 Pet 3:15). The early church was a witnessing church and many were saved (Acts 4:4) as the disciples were scattered abroad. Are we committed to sharing the gospel in and out of season (ie pandemic), to reach out and help fellow believers and to pray and intercede for one another even in a health crisis? Paul says in Rom 1:16 *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek".*

Let us remember to pray and do our part of the advancement of the kingdom of God. Rom 15:30 says, *"Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me."* **It is both a duty and privilege of the elect of God to be a witness for Christ. Be part of the evangelistic and discipleship ministry and reach out for Christ.**

Conclusion

The church comprises the elect of God, who are redeemed and justified and have the joy and duty of worshipping reverently, witnessing fervently, watching vigilantly, and working industriously for Christ as an assembly of redeemed and justified people. The church is to be governed and led by Christ as the Head of the church. His inspired and infallible word is the only authoritative rule of practice and faith. Every member of the family of God is to participate actively and be part of the growth and spiritual vitality in extending God's Kingdom and in edifying and building up all the saints in the knowledge of the Word (Eph 4:16).

With the presence of pestilences, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and prospect of war in the Baltic we need to also soberly remember the imminent coming of Christ, which may be sooner than we expect (Matt 24). One day Christ will return to set up a millennial kingdom on earth (at the end of the 7-year tribulation period where Anti-Christ will be vanquished and Satan cast into the bottomless pit) for a 1000 year period (Rev 20:1-6), ruling from Jerusalem as the centre of his benevolent kingdom. As saints, (Rev 5:10, Isa 2:3,4) redeemed by the blood of Christ, we will be co-reigning with Him,

and God has not forsaken his covenant people, Israel as well (Rom 11:26-30). It will be a glorious time to yearn and look forward to, for every expectant believer (Tit 2:13). Let us be ever ready for it any time.

May the Lord who led us to the ministry of **SHBPC continue to use us as a Christ-honouring, gospel-focused, Bible-centred and Bible-defending Reformed church that is given to the fervent propagation of the pure and unadulterated gospel and the vigilant defence of the truth of God's Word, even in a pandemic and a decadent age of spiritual lethargy, religious stupor and compromise in the ecclesiastical world.**

Jack Sin



Thank God for the Chinese brethren from the evening Chinese service who joined us for worship.

Pray for our working and studying Myanmar brethren, for their spiritual growth and safety of their families back in Myanmar.



SOVEREIGNHOPE
bible presbyterian church

presents



CHRISTMAS

Eve Service

WHEN GOD BECAME MAN

24 DEC
Friday
8 PM

SPEAKER
REV PHILIP HENG

LOCATION
160 Paya Lebar Road Orion @ Paya Lebar
#04-06 Singapore 409022

ALL ARE WELCOME

Please inform On Yue Kay by 20 Dec 2021
at 97450311

WATCH NIGHT SERVICE
31 December 2021,
Friday, 8PM

A BETTER HEAVENLY PLACE

John 14:1-6

Speaker: Rev Jack Sin

net/0311

Please inform Dn Yue Kay at 9745 0311 by Dec 27
SOVEREIGN HOPE BIBLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
160 Paya Lebar Road, Orion@Paya Lebar
#04-06 Singapore 409022
www.sovereignhopebpc.org

Memory Verse

Neh 10:29 They clave to their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord, and his judgments and his statutes;

Announcements

1. Welcome to our Worship Service! For our visitors, do leave us your contact numbers in our guest book before you leave.
2. Pastor speaks today on “**Why We Need to Keep the Covenants**” (**Neh 10:28-39**), continuing the quarterly theme of “**A Biblical Paradigm for Triumphant Christian Service**”.
3. Pastor speaks next Sunday on “**Serving with Accountable Stewardship**” (**Neh 12:31-47**).
4. Sunday School classes continues after worship service:
 - WCF Shorter Catechism Class – Pastor Jack
 - Understanding Biblical Eschatology & related Topics – Joseph
 - Studies in Numbers – Dn Kwong Leen
5. Chinese Fellowship meets on Sunday night at 7pm via Zoom with both local and overseas brethren. Included in the programme is a study on Church History in China on alternate Sundays. Join us for a time of profitable learning.
6. Do send your prayer items to Pastor and join us for Church Prayer Meeting on Wed at 8pm via Zoom. The prayer list is available in church.
7. Neighbourhood Bible Class meets on every first Friday of each month on the study of 2 Samuel. Come and join us!
8. Fide Vitae is giving a 20% discount on all books for the month of December.
9. Those who wish to bring a new friend to the worship service, kindly inform the safety officer Dn Yue Kay or Pastor at least a day in advance.
10. The Pandemic book can be purchased through Dn Yue Kay (Hp: +65 97450311) or via email at sovereignhopebpc@gmail.com.
11. Do kindly observe the safety measures of the church and assist with the weekly cleaning of the premises.
12. Love gifts, Offering and Tithes to the Lord can be given in the following ways:
 - **Cheque** payable to **Sovereign Hope Bible Presbyterian Church** and mail to church address. (Kindly write the full name of the church as indicated.)
 - **Fund transfer** to Church **UOB** Account **392-308-825-1**
 - **PayNow** to Church UEN: **T19SS0116FSOV**
