

JOEL 3:16 MATT 5:16

# SALT SHAKERS

Issue 74



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## AN APOCALYPSE?



*Introduction to the  
Apocalypse*

*Abound in love (2)*

*Killing Calvinism*

*1st Gen Interview*





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# Friends and Friendship



**Pastor Josiah Tan**  
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## Friends and Friendship – Part 3 of 6

### *Friends Walk Together*

Friendship is not merely a bond of love; it is also a shared journey through life. It's about dwelling together, living life together, spending time together.

This was evident with Adam and Eve before the Fall. Genesis 3:8 tells us God usually walked with them in the cool of the evening. Why? Because that's what friends do—they walk together. “And Enoch walked with God” (Genesis 5:24a). “and Noah walked with God” (Genesis 6:9b).

It may be hard to grasp that God would be our friend and walk with us. Yet, Exodus 33:11a emphasises this: “And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.” Do you share your life's journey with your friends? Calling them up and meeting face to face with them during the week? That's the essence of Exodus 33:11. The Sovereign and Eternal God is our friend, walking with us in time and space. The greatest manifestation of this is in Jesus Christ. God walks with us in Jesus Christ. God sent His Son to us, taking on our human nature, so that we can speak face to face with God as a friend.

This was evident in Jesus' earthly ministry. Consider what the Pharisees said of Jesus, “a friend of publicans and sinners” (Matthew 11:19b). Jesus walked with society's outcasts—tax collectors who exploited their own people for money, and notorious sinners. Jesus ate with them, associated with them, spent time with them.

While Jesus physically walked and dwelt with his friends during His earthly ministry, it points to the present reality that, though He has ascended to the Father, He walks with us now spiritually! This is why 2 Corinthians 6:16b says, “as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

Jesus walks and dwells with us through His personal Spirit. The Holy Spirit, given to Him by the Father, is given to us. This Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, dwells within us. Thus, we believe and confess that Christ, our Chief Shepherd, walks with His precious sheep. As He walks beside us, He holds our hand, strengthens us, and comforts us every step of the way. “For I the LORD thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee” (Isaiah 41:13). We, who are the chief of sinners, walk with Him every day and gather together as His friends to dine with Him every Lord's day.

So, what does it mean that God walks with us as our friend?

It means He is always with us in this life. He continually gives us strength to live by faith, works within us so that we live lives of holiness, and guides us on the narrow path to our eternal home in heaven.

### **Questions for reflection**

- God walks with us. How important is this truth to help us get through the day?
- God walks with us. Are we walking with Him (through reading, meditating, and praying), or are we walking away from Him (seeking friendship with the world) in our daily lives?
- God walks with us. Is it possible for us to walk with the ungodly at the same time? Why or why not?

## Friends and Friendship – Part 4 of 6

### *Friends Share Their Heart with Each Other*

Friends share a bond and a walk, but they also share their hearts.

In Genesis 18, we witness Jehovah God preparing to rain down righteous judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah, intending to destroy these cities. However, Lot, Abraham's nephew, resides in Sodom. In verse 17, we read: “And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do;” God regards Abraham as His friend, someone with whom He shares His heart. He confides in Abraham about His plan to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah.

Psalm 25:14 affirms, “The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant.” We do not share our secrets with everyone; secrets are kept close to our hearts and revealed only to our closest friends. Similarly, God shares His secrets with His friends—those who fear Him. The secret He reveals, according to the same verse, is His covenant: “I will be your God, and you will be my people.” This divine secret, spoken to only His elect people, draws them irresistibly to God Himself.

Therefore, Jesus tells us in John 15:15, “Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.” Friends share even the deepest recesses of their hearts. Jesus, therefore, reveals to us everything that the Father has disclosed to Him.

This intimate spiritual communion, where hearts are shared, is what true friendship is.



## Despite our spiritual decay, God draws near to us.

Now if the God of heaven and earth chose not to disclose His plans to us, or if He did not share His secrets with us, we would have no grounds to complain. Who are we? There is nothing in us that would naturally attract God to us. We might think of ourselves as “quite okay” or “decent humans compared to others,” but this is part of our spiritual blindness and sinfulness. Despite our spiritual decay, God draws near to us. Even with our sores and wounds of a totally depraved nature, God, in His grace, comes close to us and whispers His heart: “Nevertheless I will remember my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth, and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant.” (Ezekiel 16:60)

We have treated the first Question. What does ‘friends and friendship’ mean? According to God’s word, friends share with each other: First, a bond of love. Second, a walk, that is they dwell and live together. Third, they share their hearts, even that which is in the deepest recesses of their hearts. We will turn our attention to the next question, “How are we to choose our friends?”

### Questions for reflection:

- God, our Sovereign friend, shares His heart with us, how are we faring in pouring our heart to Him, in prayer which he commands?
- How shall we counsel a friend who has been pouring his heart out to his unbelieving schoolmates, spending much time with worldly friends?
- How does God sharing His heart with us ought to shape our friendships with others in the church and what we discuss with them?

## “Abounding in Love One Toward Another” (2)



**Rev. Heath Bleyenbergh**

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*1 Thessalonians 3:12 “And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you.”*

In the previous article, I explained the beautiful virtue of love. We explored various characteristics of that biblical love and saw the supreme demonstration of that love, namely, the Lord Jesus Christ who laid down his life for his sheep. Love is that firm and deep sacrificial affection for one another.

Now we make the application specific and direct – show this love and demonstrate this love in your lives. This knowledge which you have of the beautiful virtue of love is not to remain as some cold, abstract, theological concept in your minds but it must be something that lives and breathes in your souls and becomes a part of you, even consumes you.

Now we explore what the text means when it says “increase and abound in love.”

### A Christ-like Love

Before we explain and apply those words “increase & abound”, I want to establish what is the nature of this love. In John 13:34-35 we read “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”

This is instructive. Jesus is declaring that we don’t get to dictate the terms of this love that we show to one another. By nature, that’s how we would want things to go – that

we would dictate how and in what manner we show love to others. We say “I will be kind to that person, but only to a degree. But if they show themselves to be in any way hostile to me, then I will remove my love.” Or this, “I will love that person because they are very easy to love. I don’t have to go out of my way. They make it very convenient for me to love them.”

That’s not what Jesus commands “love others as you want to love them; love others according to what you think is appropriate.” Rather, Jesus instructs us “Love one another.... as I have loved you.” (John 13:34). Jesus in his love for the church doesn’t hold back. He is willing to give everything, even his life. Jesus showers his love upon sinners, even upon his enemies. That’s the language of Rom. 5:8, “God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Also in Rom. 5:10a, “For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son.” The love of Jesus Christ is of such a nature that it goes out to sinners, and even to those who are enemies!

Furthermore, Jesus loves those who are often very difficult to love. Consider the disciples. They weren’t always inclined to listen to Jesus. Peter tells Jesus “No Jesus, those things aren’t going to happen to you. Don’t speak like that.” Often we find the disciples vying and bickering with each other about a place of preeminence in Christ’s kingdom. And there in the Garden of Gethsemane they would forsake the Lord. Peter would deny him vehemently. By nature, we’re no different than the disciples. From a human point of view, we’re very difficult to love. Yet Jesus loved His disciples, even unto death. And He loves us the same way.



Let this love of Jesus Christ for you warm your hearts. After having meditated upon the love of Christ for all his people, this now becomes our calling from Christ “Love one another, even as Christ loves you.”

That means we are to love the brother and sister in the church even when we find them hard to love. That’s the reality of life. That’s even the reality of church life. There are people in the church with whom we just don’t have a lot in common from an earthly point of view. There are members in the church who have a personality that doesn’t get along with my personality. Perhaps they do things that forever annoy me. Then there are others who are very quick to disagree with me. There are others who are inconsiderate and maybe even hurt me in one way or another. Then you remember that Jesus loved us when we were yet in our sins. And we must look beyond the idiosyncrasies and the annoying things in our fellow saints. We must look beyond those things to see and recognize the work of God’s grace in them! In so doing, we will then proceed to reach out and fellowship with them in the bonds of love which we have together in Christ.

Moreover, if we will love each other as Christ loves us, we must be willing to sacrifice for the welfare and salvation of each other. Christ-like love means that we are concerned with the desires, wants, and needs of the other members of the church. In love, we must be willing to sacrifice for each other—our time, energy and resources. And not only that, but even give the ultimate sacrifice. “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (I John 3:16).

There are all kinds of different ways and opportunities to manifest that love of Christ first shown to us. This becomes the source of all the love that we show – the love of Jesus Christ first shed abroad in our hearts.

### **An Increasing in that Love**

Regarding this love, I Thess. 3:12 says “Increase and abound in that love.” That’s the apostle saying “Good job. Continue making progress.” It means “Thessalonians, you are doing well, but you haven’t reached the full measure.” It means there’s room for growth and for more increase! The apostle

reiterates this call to increase in I Thess. 4:9-10 “But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love on another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more.”

Increase and abound. Here we have two words which are very similar in meaning, yet with a little different emphasis. Increase. This is an increase in quantity, but also an increase in intensity. Abound. Abound means “to exceed, to overflow”. This is the word used to describe all those left over baskets of bread and fish when Jesus fed the 5,000 and the 4,000. There was food left over yet so that it abounded!

There are a number of things we learn from this description of increasing & abounding. First, this is the life of sanctification. We’re called to increase and abound. Increase and abound in our love for Jesus Christ, and our love for the brethren. Second, this “increase more and more” means that we will never reach the point of perfection. We’re always going to stand in need of the admonition “Keep increasing, keep abounding.” Third, therefore we ought never feel as if we’ve reached the point where we are “good enough.” That’s when we feel we’ve done enough, we’ve made pretty good progress, and now we’ve earned the right to take it easy for a while. Well, God be thanked for the increase we show. But it’s never the case that the Christian has done good enough so that he can coast. For all the good that could be said of the Thessalonians (see I Thess. 3:6ff) yet Paul knew that there was still something lacking. Paul’s desire was that they would “increase and abound” and that they would “increase more and more.”

What does this tell us about Christian love? It means we can’t have too much of it! And there’s really no limit to its expansion in our lives. Increase and abound in love.

### **The Objects of this Love**

Who are the objects of our love? I Thess. 3:12 reads “.... you increase and abound in love one toward another.” This is not optional. This is not a suggestion. This is the mark of one who first knows the love of God in his heart and then goes out and expresses that love to others.

“One toward another” is a reference to our brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ who attend the same church that we do. There was a church in Thessalonica. In that church were men, women and children. They came to church together. They studied the Bible together. Their lives were connected in so many different ways through the common faith they had in Christ Jesus. Paul is saying to the Thessalonians “You see all your fellow members Sunday after Sunday and then throughout the week. Think on them and focus on them. They are to be the objects of your love one toward another in the church of Jesus Christ!” “One toward another” doesn’t limit itself to my close group of friends that I especially feel comfortable with. “One toward another” has in mind all the members of the church! Our calling is to “increase and abound” in this love one toward another.

*There are all kinds of different ways and opportunities to manifest that love of Christ first shown to us. This becomes the source of all the love that we show – the love of Jesus Christ first shed abroad in our hearts.*



The word “increase” carries with it the idea of intensity. The question is “how fervent are we in our love one for another?” ‘Increasing’ means that we all can grow in our good attitude and fervency in all the various ways we can show love to the other members.

The word “abound” means there’s room to grow in quantity. To show so much love that we are overflowing in that love! So many different ways and opportunities to abound in love. To sacrifice what God has first given me in benefit of the fellow members.

Increase and abound in love one toward another. And doing so with the love of Christ! A love that gives, a love that sacrifices, a love that gives even when there’s no prospect of “thanks” in return.

In the second place, the objects of our love expand to others outside our local congregation. Who is included in the “toward all” of I Thess. 3:12? The next chapter gives us the answer. In I Thess. 4:9-10 we read “But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you; for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all — the brethren which are in all Macedonia.” Who are the brethren in Macedonia? That would be sister Lydia and her baptized family in Philippi, along with the jailor and his baptized family. The noble saints who were in Berea. The members of the other churches in Macedonia.

Therefore, a very good case can be made that the “toward all...” in I Thess. 3:12 is a reference to our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ who are members of other congregations and live in different parts of the world. To our brothers and sisters in the PRCA. Increase and abound in love toward them. To our brothers and sisters in Northern Ireland, in the Philippines and in India. We confess that we are members of a catholic (universal) church. Therefore increase and abound in your love toward so many other saints of God and churches that are scattered about.

In the third place, the “toward all” can be broadened out further. Even if one insists that the particular meaning of vs. 12 is to the brethren in other churches, we still would do no harm by reading vs. 12 “toward all men.....” as including those who are outside the family of faith.

That’s in harmony with the rest of Scripture. Matt. 5:44 “But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which

despitefully use you, and persecute you.” Then Jesus gives the reason in Matt. 5:46-47 “For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?” This means that love begins in the family of God, but it must go beyond. Jesus is saying that if we only love those who love us, then our love is very small and very shallow. Then our love is vain, selfish and arrogant. But when you love those who are your enemies, then you advance out of superficial loving into reflecting that deep fervent love that God has first shown unto us.

Here we make it very simple. So simple as the word of God makes it. Increase and abound in love toward all men? It means “Love thy neighbour as thyself.” The summary of the law in Luke 10:27 which states “love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself.” This refers to everybody God puts on your pathway. Whether it’s for an extended period of time such as co-workers, or the neighbour we see only once in a while. The word of God exhorts us in Gal. 6:10 “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” So it starts in the house of God, but it extends to all men.

### Concluding Application:

Let me end with one final application. Maybe at this point we’re feeling a little overwhelmed. “Pastor, there are so many ways that I ought to be showing this love. So many different ways I can be increasing and abounding. It’s quite overwhelming and I don’t know if I can handle all this responsibility!” And that’s true. There are so many different things you and I can be doing; Good and necessary things in showing love one to another.

But don’t be discouraged. Don’t be dismayed because the task is so daunting. This is what it all boils down to. Increase and abound in love means this — Live what Christ has made you to be.

You and I, what are we? We are sinners saved by grace. Christ has saved us from death and corruption. He has delivered us from idol worship that we might worship and praise the one true God. He has regenerated us. He has given us new thoughts and desires. Our affections now are on those things which are above where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. He’s given us to see His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Therefore — live what Christ has made you to be! - A Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ, a godly man, a godly woman and a godly child. Jesus has made us humble, and thankful, and grateful. Live that way! Be godly. Be godly in your relationship with others. Let others know by all your earthly conversation that you don’t belong to yourself, but that you belong to your faithful Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Know who you are — a child of God — and then live that way.

***“One toward another” has  
in mind all the members of  
the church! Our calling is to  
“increase and abound” in this  
love one toward another.***



Then by God's grace, the increasing and abounding will follow. And then we will make those lists, and we will put that extra thought and effort into how we can increase and

abound and overflow... even to a superlative degree.....in our love one for another, and toward all men.

# The Millennium (1): Introduction to the Apocalypse

## (a): Its Character



**Pastor Marcus Wee**  
Co-Minister of CERC

Apocalypse: the destruction of the world. Such is the meaning of the word in popular use. But we Christians need to know this: biblically, the word "apocalypse" is simply another word for "revelation". And so an introduction to the Apocalypse is simply an introduction to the book of Revelation.

In this extended series of SaltShaker articles, we plan to treat the topic of the millennium, the 1,000 years as it is described in Revelation 20. We do so from the perspective of the church's hope. That is the point of eschatology, the study of the last days. The church lives in the last days, and learns about the last days, in hope: hope of the second coming of her Saviour, Jesus Christ, on the clouds of glory, even in the midst of suffering and persecution in this world.

From that perspective of our hope, we begin our treatment of the millennium with an introduction to the Apocalypse, the book of Revelation. This will set us on a firm foundation on which to properly understand the millennium of Revelation 20.

### Introductory Information

The book of Revelation, divinely inspired by the Holy Spirit, has the apostle John as its human writer. John identifies himself at the beginning of the book, in its first verse: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John" (Rev. 1:1).

The apostle John wrote this around the year 95 AD, near the end of his life, as an aged man. As part of the worldwide persecution of Christians by the Roman emperor Domitian, John was banished to the isle of Patmos (1:9).

John writes to the seven churches of Asia Minor: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea (1:11). These seven churches were instituted local churches which existed during that time. They represent the universal church of Jesus Christ across the length and breadth of this earth, at every time in NT history. The letters to the seven churches, and the contents of the whole book of Revelation, are written for us as well, as a church of Jesus Christ.

The purpose of God in inspiring the book of Revelation is to give comfort to His persecuted saints. John himself was being persecuted, identifying himself as "your brother, and companion in tribulation" (1:9). John writes to persecuted saints, like those from the church of Smyrna, the church in tribulation, and the church of Pergamos, which lived in the shadow of Satan's seat.

Thus he writes to all God's people who suffer persecution in this world, even as 2 Timothy 3:12 makes plain: "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." We note three things about the character of the Apocalypse: it is prophetic, apocalyptic, and symbolic.

### The Book of Revelation Is Prophetic

This is made plain throughout the book. v. 3a: "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy". We read also in 22:7: "Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book." When we think of prophecy, we often think of the prediction of future events, or fore-telling. And that does belong to prophecy.

But prophecy is not only limited to predictions, or fore-telling; prophecy also involves forth-telling; that is, telling forth, or explaining something, giving its meaning and significance. And forth-telling, or explaining, involves not only the significance of future events, but also the significance of past and present events.

And that is what Revelation is about: not only foretelling future events, but forth-telling also events of the past and present.

It is such forth-telling of events, explaining their meaning and significance, that gave comfort to the persecuted saints in AD 95, and that also gives comfort to us, today.

The book of Revelation is not a fancy crystal ball that allows us to speculate about the future; that gives no comfort. Rather, it is a book that explains the meaning of events, present and future, for the hope and comfort of God's people in every age.



## The Book of Revelation is Apocalyptic

“Apocalyptic” refers to a specific genre of literature that focuses on the end times and the destruction of the world. Such apocalyptic literature usually involves dreams and visions. They employ many different symbols. They are often revealed by angelic messengers.

There are other books of the Bible that are apocalyptic. Think of the prophets and their reference to the “day of the LORD”, referring both to the first and the second coming of Christ. Think of the four beasts in Daniel 7, the four horses in Zechariah 6, the olive trees and the candlesticks of Zechariah 4, and the nations of Gog and Magog in Ezekiel 38-39. These writings are apocalyptic: pertaining to the end times and the destruction of the world. All these, and more, are picked up on in the book of Revelation.

But the book of Revelation is apocalyptic, because it is revelation, as mentioned at the beginning of the article. “Apocalypse” is a Greek word that refers to the unveiling of something; hence the word “revelation”.

What does Revelation reveal? Not first of all visions and angels and events. But Revelation reveals Jesus Christ. That is mentioned already in the first words of the first verse of the first chapter: “The Revelation of Jesus Christ”. Jesus Christ is revealed.

Jesus Christ is revealed, unveiled, especially in His second coming. “Behold, I come quickly”; Christ reminds His people, time and time again, throughout the book.

And that is the gospel! That the one who came the first time to die for His people’s sins is coming the second time to save us completely, soul and body. That is the gospel of hope that God unveils to His people in the Apocalypse.

## The Book of Revelation Is Symbolic

It uses symbols throughout the visions. This is made plain to us also in the opening verses of the book. Revelation 1:1: “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John”.

These things are “signified”. They are signs of what is to come. They point to a spiritual reality.

Symbols are not meant to be interpreted literally, as if there are literal horses running and a literal dragon, and literal locusts that come out of a literal bottomless pit. But these things are to be interpreted symbolically, pointing to spiritual realities in the present and the future.

Such symbolism also applies to the numbers in the book of Revelation. The number seven recurs throughout this book: there are seven candlesticks and seven seals. There are seven angels who blow seven trumpets and who pour out seven vials.

**“Apocalypse” is a Greek word that refers to the unveiling of something; hence the word “revelation”.**

There are four beasts and four and twenty elders. There are the 144,000 saints of God. And there is the 1,000 years.

All these, and more, are to be interpreted symbolically.

And God Himself at times gives us the meaning of those symbols, both of events and of numbers. For example, in the very first chapter, we are told that the candlesticks and the stars have symbolic meaning. Revelation 1:20: “The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.”

God Himself gives the meaning of the mark of the beast, the number 6-6-6. Revelation 13:18: “Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.”

These are not isolated instances, but paradigmatic: they are meant to be examples of how various events and numbers are to be interpreted in the book of Revelation: not literally, but symbolically.

## Rejecting Wrong Interpretations

### *The Spiritualistic View*

This view states that the events in Revelation are merely a depiction of good versus evil, and that good triumphs over evil. Supposedly, this provides encouragement for us to struggle against our own personal demons.

The so-called spiritualistic view is to be rejected. To be sure, good does triumph over evil— Christ shall have dominion—but Revelation is more than that.

It is the unveiling of Jesus Christ, the gospel, not a mere fairy tale that ends with “happily ever after”.

### *The Futuristic and Preterist (Past) View*

We reject the futuristic interpretation of the book of Revelation, that puts most of these events (Rev. 4-19) in the distant future, with no relevance to us today. This is the view of dispensational premillennialists.

So too do we reject what is called the preterist view, that puts these events in the distant past, teaching that they have been already fulfilled. This is the view of postmillennialists.



In both cases, there would be no application, and no comfort, for the church of today. The events in Revelation are not only for the past, or for the future; they are for the past, present, and the future.

#### *The Continuous-Historical Method*

This method seeks to tie specific verses in the book Revelation to current events in the world. Supposedly, we can find a specific verse that applies to covid, another to mpox, yet another to the war in Ukraine and in Gaza, and so on, and can do that till the end of history.

That is not how the book of Revelation is to be interpreted.

The book is not structured in a linear fashion, going chronologically from one event to the next, from beginning to end. Rather, the book is structured cyclically, in repeating cycles. This we shall consider more in a future article, Lord willing. The events of the Apocalypse are repeated again and again, cycle after cycle, for our hope. Let us approach this book from that perspective.

“Behold, I come quickly!”

## Nehemiah’s Ejaculatory Prayer in Artaxerxes’ Palace



**Rev. Angus Stewart**

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#### **Its Features**

There are various types of prayer, including public prayer, private prayer and fervent prayer (James 5:16-17). In persevering prayer, the believer does not give up, even if, after some time, he or she has not received an answer. Instead, the saint keeps on asking, seeking and knocking. Our Saviour commends this sort of praying many times (e.g., Luke 18:1-8), so let us not give up!

Ejaculatory prayer has especially three features, all of which begin with the letter “s.” First, ejaculatory prayer is spontaneous. This is praying that is informal, unplanned, on the spot. It does not involve bowing one’s head or closing one’s eyes or folding one’s hands or falling to one’s knees. Ejaculatory prayer is offered not at specific times of the day in the closet (Matt. 6:6) but at any time and anywhere. Second, ejaculatory prayer is silent. It is not spoken out loud, usually because there are other people around so it would be inappropriate. Third, ejaculatory prayer is short. It is a prayer quickly darted to heaven, a brief petition hurled upwards like a javelin. In fact, the Latin word for a dart or javelin is the source of our English word “ejaculatory.”

The prayer of Nehemiah 2:4 is clearly ejaculatory. First, it is spontaneous. After Artaxerxes asks, “For what dost thou make request?” Nehemiah tells us, “So I prayed to the God of heaven”. Second, it is silent. The Medo-Persian emperor did not hear Nehemiah say anything out loud to God (for that would have been weird). Nor did he see any movement of his cupbearer’s lips, unlike Eli who saw Hannah’s lips move in silent prayer (1 Sam. 1:12-13). Third, Nehemiah’s prayer was short. Evidently King Artaxerxes did not even notice any pause before Nehemiah responded to his question.

I take it that you, beloved, are not strangers to ejaculatory prayer, that you too speed off brief darts of prayers to your

heavenly Father amidst your many daily activities and that you do it often!

Let us consider some very basic points regarding this ejaculatory prayer of Nehemiah, including, first, when he made it. Nehemiah was working, engaged in his gainful employment as an imperial cupbearer. Ejaculatory prayer, unlike closet prayer, is possible while at our jobs, whether we are teaching a class or driving a car, serving customers or trading shares, engaged in computer programming or metalworking, etc.

Second, where was Nehemiah when he offered this ejaculatory prayer? In an imperial palace! If he can dart a prayer to Jehovah from there, so can we, by God’s grace, whether we are at school, in a hospital, at the office, in an aeroplane or at home.

Third, before whom did Nehemiah make this ejaculatory prayer? In the presence of an idolater who was probably the most powerful man on the planet! Yet, even then, who was this earthly monarch compared to the sovereign ruler over all! “Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven” (Neh. 2:4). We too can shoot our prayers to our covenant God in Jesus Christ our Redeemer before our bank manager, teacher, mother-in-law, employer or persecutor.

Notice that, by God’s grace, Nehemiah did not let his emotions stop him from making an ejaculatory prayer. First, he was “very sore afraid” (2) yet he prayed. David declared, “What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee” (Ps. 56:3). Similarly, we could say, “What time I am afraid, I will pray to Thee, with ejaculatory prayers, in situations where it is impossible to pray out loud or at length.” We must not panic or get flustered or alarmed such that we give way to terror and forget to trust or pray.



Second, Nehemiah's eagerness did not keep him from ejaculatory prayer. He earnestly wanted to go to Jerusalem to rebuild its walls. But when Artaxerxes asks, "For what dost thou make request?" (Neh. 2:4), Nehemiah does not blurt out, "Please send me to Judah to repair its capital's perimeter defences." Instead, we read, "So I prayed to the God of heaven" (4) and then he petitions the emperor (5). Neither fear nor eagerness should keep us back from making our ejaculatory prayers!

Nehemiah 2:4 is striking in that, first, it contains the most famous ejaculatory prayer in all of Scripture, though it occurs in a relatively obscure biblical book. Second, surprisingly, the content of this ejaculatory prayer is not given. Though it is the most famous ejaculatory prayer in God's Word, its words are not recorded! From its context, however, we can deduce that it was a petition along these lines: "Lord, help me to speak to Artaxerxes so that he sends me to rebuild Jerusalem's walls!" Third, years later Nehemiah remembered this ejaculatory prayer. He must have darted many thousands of requests to God but it is this key one that he has recorded here in inspired Scripture.

Brethren, none of our ejaculatory prayers are likely to be famous. We ourselves remember few of them, never mind their precise words. But let Nehemiah 2:4 encourage us to dart more prayers to the Lord of heaven, especially in times of temptation or trial, or when contending with enemies or difficulties, even if it is even merely, "Father, give me patience," when our children are acting up, or "Lord, help me," when we are weak and distressed. Remember that ejaculatory prayers are the most versatile of all prayers, and can be made at any time, anywhere and in any situation.

Beloved, "we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace," whether in public prayer or closet prayer or ejaculatory prayer, "that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:15-16)!

### Its Background

We are not to think that Nehemiah's ejaculatory prayer in the palace (Neh. 2:4) had no background or that it came completely out of the blue. It was preceded by four months (1:1; 2:1) of prayer with fasting (1:4) "day and night" (6). Before his spontaneous, short and silent ejaculatory prayer (2:4), Nehemiah engaged in closet prayers that were deliberate, lengthy and (probably) vocal (1:4-11). These closet prayers were also fervent and persevering—for four months! In fact, Nehemiah's conversation with Artaxerxes had even been prayed for earlier that very day! "O LORD, I beseech thee," the cupbearer cried, "let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man [i.e., the Medo-Persian emperor]" (11).

In other words, Nehemiah did not "wing it," as the saying is, thinking that an ejaculatory prayer in the palace would do

*...ejaculatory prayers are the most versatile of all prayers, and can be made at any time, anywhere and in any situation.*

and that he did not need closet prayer. Nor did Nehemiah reckon, "I have already prayed for four months so I do not need ejaculatory prayer." For Nehemiah, it was both closet prayer (1:4-11) and ejaculatory prayer (2:4). In this too, beloved, Nehemiah shows himself as a man who sought the welfare of God's people (2:10) and our worthy example.

The background of Nehemiah's ejaculatory prayer in the imperial palace, however, goes back even further than the previous four months of prayers. Remember that he asked the men of Judah who had recently returned from Jerusalem about the situation of the Jews there (1:2-3). Why? Because Nehemiah loved God's church. He was a man who trusted in the covenant God through the coming Messiah, and so knew the forgiveness of sins. As a thankful saint, he was leading a new and upright life.

All of this, of course, was vital as regards his testimony before Artaxerxes. Nehemiah informs us, "Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence" (2:1). This prompted the Medo-Persian emperor's response: "Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart" (2).

Nehemiah was a man who rejoiced in his Saviour (Ps. 33:1; Phil. 4:4) and realized that "the joy of the LORD [was his] strength" (Neh. 8:10). He manifested "the fruit of the Spirit" namely, "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law" (Gal. 5:22-23).

Artaxerxes recognized Nehemiah's qualities. Otherwise, he would never have asked his cupbearer why his heart was sorrowful (Neh. 2:2). This gave Nehemiah the opportunity to explain: "why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?" (3), whereupon the emperor asked, "For what dost thou make request?" (4). This led to Nehemiah's ejaculatory prayer: "So I prayed to the God of heaven" (4), which set up the conversation that resulted in his being commissioned to rebuild Jerusalem's perimeter walls (5-8), the work with which he is forever associated!

### Its Answer

Only after his ejaculatory prayer does the cupbearer present his humble request to the Medo-Persian emperor: "If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it" (5).



Clearly, Nehemiah is not one of those people who sit around cleverly planning projects so that other people do the work and they do nothing. Nehemiah believed in hard work and costly sacrifice first of all for himself. The man who was soon to be appointed as the governor of Judah was certainly not an “armchair general”! This is crucial for all leadership, especially for leadership in the church of Jesus Christ.

Being an office-bearer in a faithful church is not merely or even chiefly about telling other people what they should do. It requires sacrificing one’s own time, increasing one’s own efforts and denying oneself in the advancement of the kingdom of God.

But it is a supremely worthy cause! Remember the labours and hardships of the head of the universal church. Merely thinking of the willing obedience and agonizing sufferings of our Lord Jesus, laying down His life for the salvation of His elect sheep (John 10:11, 15), means that pastors, elders and deacons can hardly think of their service to Him in terms of bossing others around or putting their feet up.

After the emperor approves of Nehemiah’s request, with the queen also being in attendance (Neh. 2:6), the two men begin to work out the details. First, they arrange the length of Nehemiah’s leave of absence (6). His first governorship ended up lasting 12 years (5:14; 13:6) but maybe, in this scene in the royal palace, Nehemiah was given a year or two to build the wall, with Artaxerxes only later granting him an extension or extensions. (Nehemiah also had a second stint as ruler in Jerusalem; 13:6ff.)

Second, letters were written, both for safe conduct and for the main building material that was not available on site in Jerusalem. We note that Nehemiah’s appeal mentions the name of the imperial forester and as many as three projects needing wood: “If it please the king, [1] let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey

me over till I come into Judah; and [2] a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king’s forest, that he may give me timber [a] to make beams for the gates of the palace which appertained to the house, and [b] for the wall of the city, and [c] for the house that I shall enter into” (2:7-8).

Here we learn that Nehemiah had formulated a plan. He had not only been praying—closet prayer (1:4-11) and ejaculatory prayer (2:4)—but he had also been preparing. He had thought it all through and he knew what he was about. Thus Nehemiah was not only a man who sought the welfare of the children of Israel at God’s throne of grace, but he was also a godly and capable leader.

Our heavenly Father always had a plan! He answered Nehemiah’s prayers by moving Artaxerxes’ heart, out of His favour to His faithful servant and church in Jesus Christ, so that “the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me” (8). All of this was the realization of His determinate counsel and gracious will for the salvation of His beloved people (Rom. 8:28; Eph. 1:11).

Not only was there a man among the Jews who sought “the welfare of the children of Israel” (Neh. 2:10), but there is a God in heaven who seeks, and always obtains, the welfare of all His regenerated and adopted children in Jesus Christ. Behold the Saviour in His state of humiliation obtaining our redemption on the cross 2,000 years ago, and behold Him now in His state of exaltation ruling over all things at God’s right hand in heaven. This is all to the glory of the Triune God, and for the wonderful benefit of the catholic or universal church and each faithful local church.

The wonder is, beloved, that He also includes us and our prayers, even our short, silent and spontaneous ejaculatory prayers, in His eternal and gracious purpose in Christ!

## Interviews with CERC’s First-Generation Christians - Stephen Tan



The interview was conducted, transcribed and edited by CERC Christian Literature Ministry members.

*Interviewer’s note: Stephen is married with 3 children and has a grandson. He first came to CERC in 2015 and it was life-changing. Read on to find out why.*

### How did you become a Christian?

My entire family is Buddhist and I grew up following my parents’ religion. When I was in secondary school, I would regularly help my next-door neighbour, who was a temple medium, with his rites. Around this time, I also had Christian friends who would pressure others to believe in God and so

I had the impression that Christians were forceful in their efforts to convert others.

When I was doing National Service, I went for night classes to study for my ‘O’ Levels. One of my classmates was a Christian and she shared the gospel with me and invited me to church. At first, I was reluctant to go, but after getting to know other Christians, my initial negative impression changed; although some Christians do go about spreading the gospel in less ideal ways, Christians just want to share the love of Christ with others.



I finally became a Christian at a gospel rally at Jubilee Presbyterian Church on 14 March 1981.

### Did you face opposition?

Apart from my younger brother who eventually became a Christian, independent of me, the rest of my siblings and parents remained as non-Christians. Back then, my parents were against Christianity because they were afraid they would lose their children if they believed in God. As a result, they did not allow me or my siblings to attend church. But I secretly attended church every Sunday anyway.

After a year or two of attending church, I decided to be baptised. I told my mother about it and she was against it. Then, my father had just passed on, and if he had still been alive, he would have been against it too. Thus, I did not get baptised but continued to attend church.

As time passed, my mother started to acknowledge that I was a Christian in small ways. I avoided food offered to idols as I believed that I should not be consuming them, and I was surprised when my mother started to tell me which foods were used to pray to idols so that I could avoid them. Her small acts of accepting my beliefs gave me the courage to ask her for the second time for permission to get baptised. She finally relented, and I was baptised.

### From non-Christian to a Reformed Christian

Once I became a Christian, I stopped mixing with my non-Christian friends as I did not want to continue living the way I did - I often played mahjong and gambled, and sometimes I even stayed out all night playing mahjong till the next day. My old friends asked me why I was around less often, and even commented "once you became a Christian, you don't want to mix around with us anymore". I simply responded that I was no longer interested in that lifestyle and I slowly lost those friendships.

In the 1990s, I married my wife, who was then a non-Christian, and we faced issues in our marriage and family life. As a result, I smoked a lot from the stress and loneliness - I used to go down to the void deck in the middle of the night to smoke up to half a packet, and I also smoked while driving my taxi. I tried to quit, but was not successful and still smoked on and off.

Nonetheless, thanks be to God for working in my life, because from the day I stepped into CERC, which was on 26 June 2015, I have not smoked another stick of cigarette. It has been almost 10 years since I quit smoking. I also learned to spend more time with God and trust Him with my problems. I used to have a lot of expectations of my family and my wife, but I slowly learned that it is better to change myself first, and let God use my example to change them.

Actually, I had no idea that CERC was a Reformed Church and only got to know about the Reformed faith and CERC through Elder Chew Lap Meng. He was my manager at work and he was also the one who brought me to CERC. Prior

to CERC, I attended other churches, like RiverLife Baptist Church, Victory Family Centre (VFC), and City Harvest Church (CHC). VFC was where I met Elder Chew, and I eventually left due to the rampant church politics. Someone who used to attend VFC then invited me to CHC. However, I left CHC in 2013 when a controversy with their pastor happened. I was similarly disappointed by their teachings; they were always asking for money, preached the prosperity gospel, and focused more on fellowship than the study of the Bible. They even dictated how much each person should give, which was inappropriate. From then, I did not go to church until 2015, when Elder Chew brought me to CERC.

When I first came to CERC, I found it very strict in a lot of things - there was a great emphasis on Bible study and one's walk with God, and we were discouraged from listening to certain music and watching certain TV shows. I wondered if I could survive here.

However, thank God for His grace that I adapted to the Reformed faith, not least because of the warmth I found here. I found that CERC was interested in one's personal life and walk with God, which led to spiritual growth, and I also experienced the love of God here when I fractured my foot from a fall in 2016. The elders took such good care of me, bringing me lunch and even a wheelchair, and I was touched by their care and seeing them living out the gospel. I eventually confessed my faith in 2016.

### Living out the Christian life

*2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

This verse spoke to me - I understood that I am no longer my old self and my body belongs to God, and therefore I live my life not for myself but for Christ.

Since becoming a Christian, I would share my faith with others and try to invite others to church. During the holidays, I would join outings to the beaches to witness the gospel. I also joined my first church, Jubilee Presbyterian Church, on an overseas mission trip. It was to reach out to a tribe in Sarawak that lived in the mountains with harsh conditions, with no electricity and very basic infrastructure. There, I was involved in the children's ministry and took turns with other team members to teach the children God's Word.

When driving my taxi in Singapore, I carry the church bulletin and brochures, and also play gospel music by "Streams of Praise", a Taiwanese Christian music group. The music comprises Hokkien and Cantonese songs that can be used to evangelise to the elderly. I remember once that the music touched a passenger who had stopped going to church for a while - she told me that she felt that God was speaking to her via the music and that it was time for her to return to church. Other times, I would also play English gospel music. Interestingly, some passengers do not mind listening despite not being Christians, and they even gain an interest in Christianity.



*I understood that I am no longer my old self and my body belongs to God, and therefore I live my life not for myself but for Christ.*

#### Advice for new believers

We must always remember that we need God. Without Him we are nothing, and I tell my children that no matter what they do, they must remember God. In God, we find ourselves worthy in the eyes of God

For people who struggle with their faith, please know that it takes time for the struggle to transform into deeply-rooted faith. God will make us willing to lead the life that He wants us to lead.

Abide in Him and He will abide in you.

## Killing Calvinism: How to Destroy a Perfectly Good Theology from the Inside



Cheryl Lim, Julia Ong, Koh Hui Yi, and Aweksha Moktan

The first three authors are members of CERC, while the last is a member of the CERC-Kolkata Fellowship.

**Killing Calvinism: How to Destroy a Perfectly Good Theology from the Inside** by Greg Dutcher. Maryland: Cruciform Press: 2012.

This 104-page book by Greg Dutcher, a pastor in Maryland, describes eight key ways in which Calvinists miss the point. He is a confessing Calvinist himself, and describes stories from his own social circles and frequently mentions the disparity between head knowledge and living out a Christian life.

#### Chapter One: By Loving Calvinism as an End in Itself

This chapter describes Calvinism as a windshield through which we can appreciate the glorious message of Jesus Christ and Him crucified. We appreciate the clear windshield for the beauty we can see through it; we do not appreciate the scenery just by staring at the windshield, as clear as it is.

You might ask, “but isn’t the beauty of the gospel precisely the biblical truths, summarised by the 5 points of Calvinism?” Dutcher also answers this by elaborating on Spurgeon as a historical example. Spurgeon was convicted that we cannot preach the gospel if we do not preach the Calvinistic truths of justification by faith, without works, the sovereignty of God or the particular redemption of the elect. Yet, his commitment was not to preach Calvinism as an end in itself, but always to preach the gospel, to direct people to Christ and His saving love towards His people.

#### Chapter Two: By Becoming a Theologian Instead of a Disciple

Being a disciple of Christ as Mark 3:14 describes involves being “with (Christ)”. Being a theologian, in contrast, is making knowledge the primary substance of our faith.

Certainly, we ought to obey verses like 2 Tim. 2:15 and Matt. 22:37 which allude to applying our faculties to studying and disciplining ourselves to know more about our God. However, we must be careful of knowledge that ‘puffs up’ as opposed to charity that edifies each other (1 Cor. 8:1). We do well to remember that true discipleship, even with the intellectual rigour of theological concepts, will always produce a more Christ-like character. Let us pursue holiness and humbly acknowledge the many things we do not know or understand. Let us prioritise letting our lights shine in the darkness instead of winning another Christian over to our theology. Let us constantly be amazed that God would choose one as sinful as we are.

#### Chapter 3: By Loving God’s Sovereignty More Than God Himself

In this chapter, the author cautions readers against isolating a particular truth or doctrine (such as God’s attribute of sovereignty), and emphasising it at every possible opportunity. This, he describes as “zealotry untempered by wisdom” (p. 38). Instead, any one of these doctrines should be viewed as lenses through which we better see God and understand the rest of His wonderful works. Though we may rightly love any one of these doctrines, we should avoid lopsidedness but grow to see the glory of God in all His perfections, letting this shape our spiritual lives.

#### Chapter 4: By Losing an Urgency in Evangelism

Do we have a passion for the spread of the gospel and the salvation of our neighbour? Or are we inclined to use God’s sovereignty as an excuse that evangelism does not matter, thus covering up our laziness? In this chapter, the author encourages us to imitate the apostle Paul, who, armed with the right doctrine of salvation, was so motivated to evangelise



that he often suffered great hardships as a result (see 2 Tim. 2:10, 2 Cor. 11:23-28). As we await Christ's return, the joy of the gospel should move us to labour for the lost.

#### Chapter 5: By Learning Only from Other Calvinists

This chapter warns us against being quick to dismiss the wisdom of non-Calvinists. It is important for us to recognise that God gives genuine wisdom and insights to all true believers, not just Calvinists. It would be arrogant for us to assume that just because we are "right" on predestination, we are the only ones who can be right on everything else. There is also much we can learn from others' personal walks with Jesus (e.g. their zeal for the gospel, the joy they have in Jesus, the Christ-like love they show others). Additionally, when judging the teachings of non-Calvinists, we are reminded to have a right attitude as well (Jam. 4:11).

#### Chapter 6: By Tidying Up the Bible's "Loose Ends"

This chapter is a firm reminder that Calvinism is a system of theology seeking to summarise and unite the bible's teachings, and not the bible itself. As we grow in our faith and knowledge of God's word, our theology should become more nuanced and rich as we let the bible tweak and shape it. When we come across tricky or difficult passages, we must not be lazy and dismiss them or explain them away with our theology, but rather give deep thought to them so that we may grow to love and understand God's word more and more.

#### Chapter 7: By Being an Arrogant Know-It-All

This chapter describes and warns against the arrogance and pride that a Calvinist may have regarding his theological knowledge and doctrinal beliefs such as T.U.L.I.P.. Some Calvinists may thus be puffed up, thinking that we are the

*When sharing the truth in any capacity, we are to be kind and gentle, displaying a merciful spirit.*

most knowledgeable and righteous Christians, with only us and our congregations saved, thus looking down on non-Calvinist Christians. The author describes how Calvinists may be attracted to producing new levels of academic rigour without being humbled by the doctrines of grace. Knowledge puffs up (1 Cor. 8:1), and without love and humility to temper our knowledge, an intellectually rigorous theology like Calvinism can be a dangerous breeding ground for pride and self-exaltation. The author warns that if our Calvinism has become a platform from which we look down upon others, we desperately need God's grace to humble us and cause us to confess our pride and arrogance.

#### Chapter 8: By Scoffing at the Hang-Ups others have with Calvinism

In this chapter, the author shares prior experiences of scoffing at Christians who have difficulties understanding Calvinism. Calvinists may fail to empathise or deal gently with others' emotional barriers towards Calvinism, instead mocking at their struggles, and retaliating with sharp words that often develops greater opposition towards Calvinism. The author emphasises on teaching with grace and wisdom, preferring to teach Calvinism anonymously by simply teaching what the Bible says (2 Tim. 2:24, 1 Pet. 3:15, 1 Thess. 2:7). When sharing the truth in any capacity, we are to be kind and gentle, displaying a merciful spirit.

## Update to Congregation - Trip to CERC-Kolkata, 18-22 Oct 2024



**Pastor Marcus Wee and Elder Lee Kong Wee**  
Co-Minister of CERC and Elder in CERC

#### Update to Congregation - Trip to CERC-Kolkata from 18-22 Oct 2024

1. This report serves to update the congregation of the trip to our Kolkata mission field by the delegation of Pastor Marcus Wee and Elder Lee Kong Wee from 18 to 22 Oct 2024.
2. The main highlight of the trip was the interview for baptism and confession of faith of an individual and two families:

- Mr Balai Das (Baptism)
- Mr Nripen Nath Mal (Baptism) - communicant member.
- Ms Atashi Mal (wife of Mr Nripen) (Baptism) - communicant member.
- Ms Anjali Mal (daughter of Mr and Mrs Nripen) (Baptism) - non-communicant member.
- Mr Subhash Pradhan (COF) - communicant member.
- Ms Jayanti Pradhan (wife of Mr Subhash) (Baptism) - communicant member.
- Mr John Pradhan (son of Mr and Mrs Subhash) (Baptism) - non-communicant member.

3. The interview was conducted with translation by Rev Singh, and so took longer than usual. More tiring, but certainly edifying. While each person and family has varying degrees of faith and understanding of the Reformed doctrines, they all demonstrated a clear conviction for the biblical truths they have come to know and grown to love. For most, their stand for the truth meant strong rejection by their family members, or persecution in one form or another. We thank God for preserving them in their steadfast testimony for His truth and pray that He will continue to uphold them and help them grow spiritually, believing, living and maintaining the truth.
4. On Sunday, 20 Oct 2024, the fellowship met in the late morning for their devotions. Pastor Wee gave a message from Psalm 139:1-6, speaking of God's omnipresence and the great comfort of this truth. In the evening around 5:30pm, the delegation joined the fellowship for their worship service. Rev Singh led in the worship service in Bengali, while Pastor Wee preached from **Exodus 35, 36** on "**The Christian Duty of Giving**" (with translation by Rev Anubrata, an Anglican minister and long-time visitor of the fellowship, of course). One key area of focus for the delegation for this trip was to instruct the fellowship on the importance and necessity of them being self-supporting as a fundamental principle of their existence as an instituted church, God willing. The sermon was an apt instruction and application of this principle to the saints in Kolkata in their own circumstances. We reinforced this instruction by reading a letter from the Council to them (**Annex A**).
5. We spoke further yet on this matter with Rev Singh and the potential office-bearers after the worship service. We explained the careful approach of CERC Singapore in the use of money in the mission field, as we want to learn from past experience and lessons from other missionaries and churches and not cause unintended spiritual damage to the mission field through the careless and unthinking use of money. At times, such damage was done, even among sincere believers, and even when the use of money was proper, i.e. in the purchase of a church building.
6. Two principles need to be borne in mind:
  - a. Firstly, as a Reformed church, we want to and ought to be Reformed also in our missiology.
  - b. Secondly, we must trust in and learn to wait on God's Providence. In His providence, God did not gather a group of wealthy individuals and families to form the CERC-Kolkata fellowship. He could have done that, perhaps in Mumbai. But according to His sovereign will and providence, the Lord choose to do so in Kolkata, where the saints are relatively poorer materially. We should learn to wait on the Lord to bring the group to become self-supporting, however that may be, in His time.
7. On Monday, 21 Oct 2024, after a late breakfast and some sight-seeing in Kolkata city, we had the privilege to visit

Mr Nripen and his family at their home. It was about an hour's car ride away from Rev Singh's place. As the house was not accessible by car up to its door-step, we parked the car at a clearing where Mr Nripen and his daughter Anjali met us and led us to his home. We walked about 20 minutes on a narrow concrete path that was shared by people, bicycles and motorcycles. We were met at the door by a smiling Mrs Nirpen (Atashi) who invited us into their simple but warm and cosy abode. As good hosts, they served 'chai' (black) tea. Even though we did not plan to stay there for dinner, we ended up eating a delicious meal of black pepper beef noodles and Nripen's own home-made sweet treats for dessert. Nripen works as a baker and creates his own desserts (yummy!).

8. On Tuesday, 22 Oct 2024, we took it easy as we prepared to return to Singapore. The delegation had a final meeting with Rev Singh and Arun (potential elder) to discuss several matters, then we packed and rested a while before going to the airport. The four days flew by quickly.
9. As we continue to work with our fellow saints in Kolkata towards instituting them as a church, we too are learning many things along the way. From the experience of our sister churches in America, as well as the experience of many other Christian missionaries over the past centuries, we know the work of missions is joyful, yet challenging. Our desire is to be Reformed in our missiology and help our brethren in Kolkata be firmly and properly established in the biblical principles of being self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating as a local church. Pray that God will grant the Council and FMC, as well as the saints in Kolkata, wisdom and patience as we work together towards this goal.
10. In a brief report like this, we cannot share many other things that happened, especially the many warm interactions and fellowship with the various saints, young and old, not to mention the sights, sounds, heart-stopping traffic and rich cultural history of Kolkata. To do justice to all that and more, you will need to travel there and experience for yourself. The next delegation trip is planned for the 3rd week of Jan 2025, over the weekend of 18-19 January, the Lord willing. Do consider going, if the Lord opens the door for you. Chalho (Let's Go)!

Submitted by:  
Pastor Marcus Wee  
Elder Lee Kong Wee  
On behalf of FMC and Council CERC

## ANNEX A

**Letter to CERC-K: Delegation from CERC Singapore (18-22 Oct 2024)** (read by Elder Lee, with translation by Rev Anubrata)





Dear fellow saints of CERC of Kolkata,

1. It is our great joy that we can send another delegation, of Pastor Marcus Wee and Elder Lee Kong Wee, to be in your midst once again. We had faced uncertainty whether such a visit was possible, due to Pastor Tan's visa being rejected, but God has made it possible, according to His good will.
2. It has been a great privilege for us, CERC Singapore, to be involved in the work of missions among you for some 10 years now. This work is chiefly accomplished through the faithful preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We thank God for providing His servant for this work, one from among you, Rev Emmanuel Singh, to do this work faithfully from Lord's Day to Lord's Day.
3. The goal of missions is to gather God's people together into congregations, for outside the instituted church there is no salvation (Belgic Confession of Faith, Art. 28). Churches must be organized. And believers must become and remain faithful members of such churches. Wherever such churches are organised in a locality, a fundamental principle is that they must seek to establish themselves to be self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating – each local church calls their own pastor, elders and deacons; supports its own pastor, the church's ministries and the needs of their poor members; and grows as a church through the instruction of covenant children and evangelism. We in Singapore are committed to work with you to achieve this goal. As part of this work, we want to take this opportunity to impress upon you the importance of becoming a **self-supporting** congregation, when God willing, you are instituted sometime in the future.
4. This principle of a church being self-supporting is found in **1 Cor. 9:11, 13-14** *"If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things? [13] Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? [14] Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel."* This teaching of the Apostle Paul was clear to the church in Corinth, i.e. that God has ordained that the apostle and pastors who preach the gospel to them should live of the gospel by them. Upon the members of the local church falls the obligation and responsibility to provide and care for the daily needs of the minister who is one of them and brings the gospel to them.
5. We see this principle of self-support already in the early New Testament Church. In **Acts 2**, the infant New Testament church showed that it was self-sacrificing and, thus, self-supporting regarding the needs of the church. Implied in Acts 2 is the self-support of the church towards the apostles and their needs while they devoted themselves to the work of the ministry of the Word. The apostles and the church had been instructed by Jesus that the apostles would receive their ministerial support through these households among whom the apostles laboured (**Mark 6:7-10**). The church members had the duty to feed, clothe, house, and provide any other earthly necessities for the faithful labour of the apostles among them.
6. What does this principle of being 'self-supporting' mean for you, as you look forward to becoming an instituted church here in Kolkata?
7. It means **first of all** that you give sacrificially and willingly to support the minister you call. You give of your first-fruits, according to your means (**1 Cor. 16:1-2**). You do not give your left-overs, but your best, because you are giving to the cause of God's kingdom. This does not mean your minister lives in luxury; in fact, a minister often does not, but lives like many of the members of his congregation. But what it means is that he ought to be sufficiently supported so that he need not take on a secular job to make ends meet, but is able to give himself fully to the work of preaching the gospel and other aspects of the ministry. He lives according to his means, the means that you provide him through your sacrificial and willing giving.
8. **Secondly**, being 'self-supporting' as a church means you also give, as far as you are able, to help the poor and needy among your midst. Jesus said "For ye have the poor always with you" (**Matt. 26:11a**). In **Acts 2:44-45**, members of the infant New Testament church sold their possessions and goods, and the proceeds from those sales were used to support the poor among them according to their proper need. This care for the poor and needy was so important and necessary in the church that God, through the apostles, instituted the office of deacon specifically for this work (**Acts 6:1-6**). This work of mercy by the deacons is supported primarily by the sacrificial and thankful giving of members, who themselves have first tasted the mercies of Jesus Christ at the cross.
9. Dear fellow saints, the reason why we are impressing upon you the importance of being a self-supporting church, and the necessity of supporting your own minister, is not because we do not want to help you. We do. We are committed to helping and supporting you in the gospel of Jesus Christ, for as long as God gives us opportunity. We wish to help you by encouraging you in your duty of giving as a church, and we **do not wish to deprive you of that duty and privilege that is yours.**
10. We pray that the Lord will give you understanding and convict you of the important principle of being self-supporting, as you grow as a fellowship and seek to be established as a faithful Reformed church in Kolkata. May He continue to lead us as we work together towards you becoming an instituted church of our Lord Jesus Christ, God willing. We look forward to that day, in His perfect time, according to His perfect will.

Your servant in Christ,  
Elder Lee  
For the Council of CERC, Singapore

# Missionary Report from CERC-Kolkata Mission Field (July 2024)



**Rev. Emmanuel Singh**

CERC's missionary pastor in the CERC-Kolkata Fellowship, India

Dear Brethren,

Greetings to you in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Thank God for his mercies and providence in keeping us protected in the midst of our pagan nation. Our saints are doing well and growing in the Reformed Faith. Sonali and I are both not well, having some health issues. Continue to pray for us that the Lord will heal in his providence. Here is the July mission report.

**Mumbai Trip:** From 13 to 17 June 2024, I visited the saints at Mumbai. During this visit, I spent time with five people who gathered for the Bible study on the Lord's Day. I spent two days discussing with them the topic of the importance of the local church to be established. It seemed that I have to visit often to help this group to grow in the Reformed Faith. Continue to pray for Brother Joshua Benedict who is helping us to spread the Reformed Faith in this region of India. Brother Joshua is truly zealous and has a burden for the Reformed Faith. During my visits he takes leave from work to do the ministry. Keep the Mumbai work in your prayer.



CERC Mumbai Fellowship Group



Having dinner fellowship on the street side of Mumbai

**Gospel Meeting:** On 6th June we had a gospel meeting in the church premises followed by lunch fellowship. I preached the gospel to the visitors from John 5:1-15. The meeting went well. People came to hear the Gospel from far and nearby local areas. Continue to pray for the new visitors, that the Lord may work in their hearts as the heart of Lydia was opened by the Lord. We have taken their names and address for further communication.



Gospel meeting on 6 June 2024 at CERC-Kolkata



Lunch fellowship after the gospel meeting at church

**Pre-confession Class:** Pre-confession class is still ongoing. So far we have completed Theology, Anthropology and Christology. Now we are studying Soteriology. We are hoping by October 2024 to complete the pre confession class. God willing during the delegate visit. Session can interview them for the membership. Singh's family will not continue with us as they want to keep their electrical shop open on Lord's Day.

**Tuesday & Thursday Bible Study:** Every week we meet both days, from 9:00pm to 10:10pm for Bible study for the new Christians, including Pre-Confession candidates. On Tuesday, we discuss the Reformed Faith with questions and





answers. Those who are very new are part of this study. On Thursday we have the pre confession class.

**Saturday Bible Study:** On Saturday, we gather for Bible study. At present we are studying the book of Philippians. We are now at chapter 3.

**Sunday Worship and Preaching:** On Sunday, we meet at 5:30 pm for the worship. During the last few weeks, due to the elections and political violence, it was not safe to travel and the weather was too hot, so we did not gather in the morning. Now, we have resumed our Morning Devotion and study. I have been preaching during the past few weeks on Reformed Eschatology, and now I am going to preach a series on the Apostle's Creed along with LD 45.

**Youth Catechism Class:** We are interested to start very soon, a catechism class for the youth in our church. We are also welcoming other youths to join in the catechism class. We will start this by arranging a Gospel meeting for the youths, thereafter we will invite youths to come and learn the catechism.

#### **Brethren Pray for Us:**

1. Continue to pray for the building for worship. We are praying for our own place so that we can worship with freedom.
2. Pray for the Church order booklet printing.
3. We need more reformed literature to be available in Bengali language.
4. There is a widow who comes to our worship, attends our Bible study and has now joined the pre confession class. Her name is Minakshi Mondal. She has a 3 year old daughter and a 7 year old son. I shared the gospel to her dying husband in hospital last year. Her son Gourav is having urology problems and their doctor suggested for an operation. We need your prayers as she is struggling to arrange the money for the operation.

5. Pray for us. Both Sonali and I are not doing well. Sonali may need one more surgery for her uterine tumour. I am suffering from severe back pain and unable to stand for long. This is a recent development. We are trusting the Lord for His providence.

Thanks for reading my mission report. Continue to keep our mission work in your prayers. I submit this report to our CERC Singapore Council.

In Christ alone  
Your Missionary Pastor  
Rev. Emmanuel Singh





# COVENANT LIFE IN PICTURES: KOLKATA

*In October, Pastor Marcus Wee and Elder Lee Kong Wee visited our Kolkata mission field, primarily to conduct interviews for baptism and confession of faith of an individual and two families. The interviews, two of which are pictured below, were conducted with translation by Pastor Singh.*

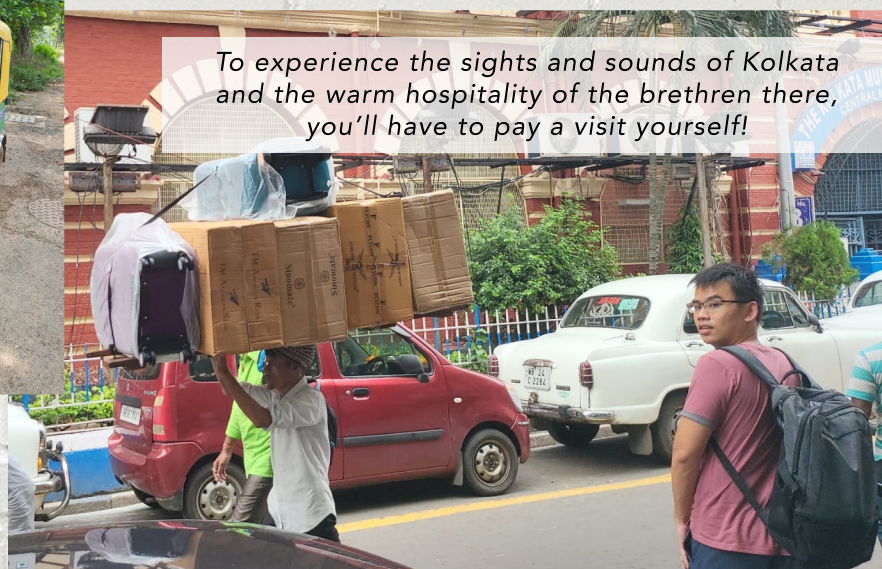


*Pastor Wee and Elder Lee also had the opportunity to speak with the potential office-bearers there, about the importance of being self-supporting as an instituted church in future.*



*Left, clockwise:  
Arun Nath, Sandip Halder,  
Swarnendu Pramanick,  
Pastor Wee, Elder Lee,  
Pastor Singh*

*Right: Visiting the home of Mr Nripen, Mrs Nripen (Atashi), and their daughter Anjali. Our delegates were treated to chai (black) tea, a delicious meal of black pepper beef noodles, and Nripen's homemade desserts!*



*To experience the sights and sounds of Kolkata and the warm hospitality of the brethren there, you'll have to pay a visit yourself!*



# COVENANT LIFE IN PICTURES

The Covenant Keepers / Covenant Keepers Senior retreat was held in December. Some highlights included a pickleball outing and a BBQ dinner on the final night!



The annual Vacation Bible School, also held in December, was well attended by children of our church as well as visitors. Praise God for a fruitful VBS!



Three of the four classes with their teachers



The kids' favourite storytime team!



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