

PGT

The Pillar and Ground of Truth



A publication of

FIRST EVANGELICAL REFORMED CHURCH

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CHURCH THAT LIVES FOR CHRIST!

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear reader,

The editorial committee is excited to bring you a re-launch of The Pillar and Ground of Truth ("PGT"). For background, PGT is a magazine that started in 1982, but publishing stopped even before many of us today became members of FERC. Reading some old copies of PGT, one would see that it was doctrinally oriented, and even served as a beacon of truth across the region as it was mailed out to people beyond our congregation in Singapore. The re-launched PGT, however, will have slightly different goals, as follows.

Firstly, the landscape of Reformed resources has changed; there is an abundance of Reformed online ministries that are producing faithful and deep materials, so the PGT does not seek to compete with them.

Secondly, the PGT then seeks to plug a gap that these online resources cannot fill, which is to speak directly to the needs and issues of our congregation. However, the PGT is not another annual report nor is it meant to be full of administrative details. Rather, the articles will speak substantively to current developments in our church. For example, in this first issue we have invited Elder Jing Heng to share his testimony of his calling to full-time ministry. And with potentially big changes like the building renewal, we have an article examining church unity across history and how the lessons learnt may apply to us.

Thirdly, the committee desires that as the re-launched PGT matures, we can publish more articles from members of the congregation. If you already have ideas on what to contribute to the next issue, do reach out to members of the editorial committee, and your proposal will be considered (but subject to approval, of course).

It is also our desire that knowing the developments of our church as well as the rationale of certain decisions and programmes will ultimately cultivate in us a heart of deeper love for the brothers and sisters that we worship with every week. As our congregation grows and experiences change, we need to cultivate unity with regard to church decisions and direction. We are the visible manifestation of His united body. This issue explores facets of church life, so we can participate joyfully in the assembly of God's people.

May this issue and, the Lord willing, the many issues to come, bless you in engaging you more deeply with the congregation.

The PGT Editorial Committee

Hew Zi Heng

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LESSONS FOR OUR CHURCH:

Christian Unity from Reformation History



Written by

MARK C. CHEN

We are a Reformed church. We trace our heritage to the Reformation where the glorious gospel was recovered after centuries of syncretism with paganism. The Reformers were bold men who opposed the false gospel of the Roman Catholic institution. We see this in our church documents – the Three Forms of Unity. And all of them were written to instruct positively, but also to be polemical.

They deconstructed the errors of the Catholics and Anabaptists, as well as the later Arminians. Reformed people are a fighting people. And it is good and right to fight at times.

But at other times, we fight because of deep but perhaps misplaced convictions. Surely, we cannot be so convicted that everything becomes a fight? And surely, not everyone that disagrees with us is an enemy of the cross? Therefore, it is not right to fight all the time.

But it is my observation that many Reformed folk do not know when to stop fighting. And that attitude severely affects church unity. Let us see a few lessons from Reformational church history.

Reformation, Not Revolution

But we need to understand that the Reformation, fundamentally, was not a movement to split the church. Its intent was to preserve the church. Luther did not have an impious destruction of the church in mind, but rather its basic Christian renewal.¹ Love for the church was the catalyst for

the nailing the 95 Theses on the door of Wittenberg Church.

Even before his conversion, when he wrote against specific abuses in the church, his aim was to rid the church of such excesses and hypocrisy. And after his conversion, when he taught the doctrine of justification, he did it for the spiritual renewal of the church. He taught that we are not justified by being church members or by buying indulgences.



Sketch of Martin Luther

When Calvin wrote his Institutes of the Christian Religion, it was to plead with the French King not to persecute the French Protestants. He argued that the Protestant Reformation was not teaching another religion, but the faith of the apostles and early church.

In fact, all the Reformers, not only quoted from Scripture, but from the Apostolic and Early Church Fathers. This was to show that the Reformation religion was an ancient faith, and that it was Rome that had departed from this ancient religion.

Now, it is important to note they thought the Roman Catholic Church was worth saving. They never denied there were true believers in the

¹ Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, ed. Roy A. Harrisville, (Edinburgh: Augsburg Fortress, 1999), 67. Albrecht Beutel, "Luther's Life," in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*, ed. Donald K McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 10.

² Luther's Works, vol. 40, 231-232.

³ Jack Arnold, "Martin Luther: From Struggle With Rome Until Death (1517-1546)," <http://www.thirdmill.org/files/english/html/ch/arnold.rmt.4.html>.

Roman communion or doubted the validity of some of her ordinances.²

But in Luther's words, it was a crippled church, and so the rehabilitation of the church depended on a Reformation.³ They never had a church split in mind. But if they never intended to split the church, and we ask the obvious, why did the church split?

Truth Above Visible Unity

There were many reasons why the church split. One obvious reason is that the gospel of the Reformers hit a vital nerve of the established church. They undercut the importance and value of the Papacy, making of no importance the indulgences the papacy claimed to administer; in other words, eternal life and other spiritual benefits were not dependent upon the Pope, as once thought. All that was needed was simple faith in Christ and trust in God's Word.

And when threatened with excommunication and expulsion from the Roman Catholic Church for their teachings, the Reformers faced the option of either separation for truth's sake or unity in unbiblical compromise. Neither option was utopian – but the former was faithful to Scripture. And it was justifiable. By that time, they were convinced that there could be no reconciliation or reformation if Rome continued to view herself as infallible.

“..the Reformers faced the option of either separation for truth's sake or unity in unbiblical compromise. Neither option was utopian – but the former was faithful to Scripture. And it was justifiable. By that time, they were convinced that there could be no reconciliation or reformation if Rome continued to view herself as infallible. ”

So, to defend the gospel and to live out the Reformation, the Reformers separated themselves from Rome. But while they separated and formed other congregations, the Reformers still acknowledged that they were part of a larger church – the catholic or universal church, which they expounded in their confessions.

Schism and Schismatics

However, this was not the view of some, namely, the Radical Reformers. The Reformation was not the uniformly glorious and moral movement that many claim it to be. It had its own share of human and ecclesiastical excesses.

One such example is seen in the Radical Reformers (and the reaction to them). These were men who did not acknowledge the larger church. To them, the only church spoken of in Scripture was the local church.

And as such, they focused inordinately on the purity of the Church. No doubt, each congregation should strive towards purity of doctrine and practice. But both Luther and Calvin taught that there was no perfect church on earth, and as long as the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments were pure, that church no one should abandon on account of every trivial difference. Even the purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error.

But because Radical Reformers were ceaseless in their quest for purity, they caused schism wherever they were, leading to them being pejoratively called Enthusiasts (as they were all sense and zero sensibility), Cathars (named after ancient heretics notorious for haughtiness), Revolutionaries, and Donatists (another ancient group of heretics known for their schism).⁴

One of the motivating factors for their extreme separatism was their eschatological mindset – their belief in Christ's imminent return caused them to see error everywhere and to set up their pure and true congregations.

An interesting account is told of John of Leiden, who went to Münster and became one of her

⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV:1:23

⁵ A. Vos, "John of Leyden," in *Who's Who in Christian History*, ed. J.D. Douglas and Philip W. Comfort (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1992), 377–378.

prophets; he led the people of the city to expunge all those who didn't believe as they did. He proclaimed himself the Anointed of God, took the name King David (along with 16 wives), and fought with everyone else in the Christian world, until his movement and he were thankfully crushed.⁵

Fortunately, the Radical Reformers did not constitute a large part of the Reformation. On the whole, despite some disagreements, the Reformers themselves adopted a catholic and generous spirit.

Charity and Unity

Despite their justifiable separation from the Roman Catholic Church and the Radical Reformers, the Reformers did strive for unity. They didn't always achieve it, but they certainly did try.

In 1529, Protestants met in Marburg to discuss their similarities and differences. The chief participants were Luther and Zwingli, another prominent Reformer. They had much to agree on, in fact, 14 points, but they parted without agreeing on the 15th, being the nature of the Lord's Supper.

In fact, the disagreement was very sharp. Despite their disagreement, Zwingli approached Luther with the right hand of fellowship, but Luther declined to accept it saying that Zwingli was of a different spirit!

When Zwingli pleaded that Luther confess their union in all things so that others would remember them as brethren, and also to bear with the differences on secondary points for the sake of peace in the churches, Luther rebuffed him. Philip Melancthon recorded that Luther would not allow such fellowship if they held each other's doctrine in error. The Lutherans effectively excommunicated the Zwinglians.⁶

The split was final.

Why? As I said, some people do not know when to stop fighting. They fight for the important things, but thereafter cannot ascertain what is important and what is secondary. Certainly, it would not be the last time that Protestants would be out of agreement.

But what follows is more encouraging. The next

year in the Diet of Augsburg in 1530, Luther's friend Philip Melancthon wrote the Augsburg Confession, as a careful and cautious summary of Lutheran doctrines. In the preface, there was a plea for Christian unity, and a promise that the Lutherans would "in no manner...evade any thing which can tend to promote Christian concord."⁷

And this promise was indeed fulfilled. 10 years after Augsburg, Melancthon produced a revised edition, *The Variata*. He rewrote some parts in order to make peace with Calvinists. And John Calvin himself signed the 1540 version.⁸

Similarly, Heinrich Bullinger, the successor of Zwingli in Zurich, forwarded the efforts of unity. Just as Luther disagreed with Zwingli on the nature of the Lord's Supper, Calvin, too, disagreed with Zwingli. However, in 1549, Bullinger and Calvin succeeded in overcoming the differences in doctrine and produced the Zurich Consensus. This resulted in a united Reformed witness.

Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli are known as the three men of the Reformation, systematizing and promoting Biblical truths. But the fourth, being Bullinger, was the one who truly promoted unity. The Second Helvetic Confession, which he penned, came to be adopted by the Reformed Church in Switzerland, Scotland, Hungary, France, and Poland, being known as the most recognized Reformed confession after the Heidelberg Catechism.

Bullinger was a personal friend and confidante of John Calvin, Martin Bucer, Philip Melancthon, Theodore Beza, Thomas Cranmer, John Hooper, Lady Jane Grey, the Protestant kings of England and Denmark, and the German princes. His work of unity and catholicity greatly influenced and advanced the cause of Reformation. That is the spirit that many of us need to adopt.⁹

Lessons for Us Today

Often the theme of unity and compromise is looked upon with suspicion by those with a separatist and hawkish mentality. Yes, there is such a thing as false doctrine. There is such a thing as unbiblical ecumenism. There is also such a thing as broad evangelicalism. But there is also such a thing as agreeing to disagree on secondary issues.

6 Joel D. Fredrich, "A Different Spirit: An Investigation of the Division at Marburg with Special Reference to Luther's Polemics and Ecclesiology", <http://essays.wisluthsem.org:8080/bitstream/handle/123456789/1643/FredrichSpirit.pdf>

7 Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical Notes: The Evangelical Protestant Creeds, with Translations*, vol. 3 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1882), 5.

8 Carl R. Trueman and Eunjin Kim, "The Reformers and Their Reformations," in *Reformation Theology: A Systematic Summary*, ed. Matthew Barrett (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 116.

9 Philip Schaff and David Schley Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 8 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), 205.

Compromise is not a bad word. In fact, compromise as part of biblical unity is a fragrant virtue.

Do we ever stop to consider if much of the fighting for truth and the separatism that goes on in the name of truth is really just plain old schism?

From this period of church history, we learn valuable practical lessons.

Firstly, reformation takes time. No church is perfect and there will be plenty to reform – in doctrine, in practice, in character, and in behavior. But often we get impatient and behave more like revolutionaries – we give up hope for the church, we express our displeasure noisily, and we give up on the church in dramatic fashion.

But the Reformation teaches us that efforts to maintain unity (while upholding the gospel) is paramount while separation (not schism) is practiced when there is no other recourse. And we need wisdom to know the difference.

Secondly, this historical event teaches us to be faithful to the essential truths of Scripture. Let us agree with the gospel truths. And let us admit that there are many small things we can disagree on while not making these minutiae the basis of fellowship. And as a confessional church with articulated levels of ecclesiastical fellowship, we have identified what matters to us.

Thirdly, let us consider the church as Christ sees her – she is his Bride, whom he is preparing for that great marriage supper – she is not yet perfect, but being perfected. And when we see ourselves as imperfect, we hardly expect better from others. We become patient with others. Schism always happens because of pride; we may proclaim loudly our desire to protect the truths of Christ, but do it in a spirit that is contrary to the spirit of Christ. Schism must be crushed.

Fourthly, we must do what we can to preserve unity. While this ecclesiastical account has to do with the great doctrines of the faith, the gospel, and how on that basis we can regulate our relationships, we can easily apply it to other areas of church life. I can think of two areas.

Let us consider our Bible studies. In fact, there is much to agree on in our care groups. The learning

thrust and contextual applications propel us to mutual edification. Sometimes the text demands polemical discussion where we can sharpen one another. But it is concerning when a Bible study delights too frequently on controversy, spawning combativeness. Are we Anabaptists? Do we need a Martin Luther?

While the semper reformanda spirit should never die down in us, perhaps we need to be more like the second generation Reformers than the first. We are, after all, not fighting those of another gospel in our own church.

Let us also consider the coming changes in our church. We are speaking much about church building renewal, a new ministerial student, and church growth (planting?). These are all wonderful topics related to the gospel! And therefore, we must be excited about these things. There will be legitimate concerns on spending, vision, communication, etc.

But how do we preserve unity? There must be a strong gospel emphasis, an irenic spirit of communication, humble compromise, and a happy spirit of yielding to one another. Why? It would be highly ironic if we fall out over such wonderful gospel endeavors.

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THE CALL TO MINISTRY

1 Timothy 3:1: "This is a true saying, if a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work."

Written by

FONG JING HENG



Introduction

As most readers know, 1 Timothy 3 is a key passage about pastoral calling as it sets out the qualifications to the office of a pastor. And verse 1 connects these qualifications with a desire for this office. I find this challenging as I am generally reluctant to express a desire for many things, including any special church office. Further, people often talk in a way that invariably attributes this desire to me, for example, "he desires the ministry", which makes me feel under the spotlight.

I believe that I can overcome this reluctance only because the desire in question is a God-given one. Why do I say this?

Enduring desire

First, the desire is enduring. Since at least university days, people have asked me if I might "go full-time" (since over 10 years ago). These questions hit a sore spot. While over time I developed a stock reply to deflect these questions, I couldn't clearly say "no".

As time went on, this desire didn't leave me.. It endured and shaped my life. One example is my



Screengrab of Elder Jing Heng preaching during FERC's evening service

reading habits. As I became serious in my faith, I started to read and acquire increasingly more Christian books. I might try to mask any desire to others, but my changing bookshelf reflected an inward change in my priorities.

At work in the legal service, there was a constant sense of restlessness. I thought about asking for a new posting, doing further studies, or moving somewhere else. But I hesitated to do so, partly from a sense that such measures wouldn't cure the root cause of this restlessness.

The desire also affected pre-marriage discussions. One night out with Eileen, my girlfriend then, I mentioned that I felt if I were to ever change my job, it would be to "go full-time". She could accept and support this. When we bought our house, we were on the same page to try not to overspend, in anticipation of a possible drop in income. And after our marriage, her encouragement was important for me to eventually seek Pastor Nam Tuck's guidance sometime in 2022.

Enlightened desire

Second, I think this is an enlightened desire. Over the years God has brought me from someone who disliked church to someone who believes he might work here. How did this happen?

There were changes in areas of service. As the church that I grew up in was rather small, I was involved in various areas of service. While I appreciated that, I also found out over time what

engaged me most were the areas related to handling the Word. Joining FERC has only increased this belief, especially with the chance to exhort over the pulpit last year. I hope to have the whole counsel of God and for that to change me and others around. Since handling the Word is uniquely within a pastor's calling, I believe for me, a desire for full-time Christian ministry should be taken as synonymous with a desire to pastor.

There were also changes in focus. As someone young and unsure of my salvation, I struggled to fit into church initially. But more mature Christians helped me settle in and modelled a sanctified life. This challenged me to focus more on looking out for others in church, to know where they were spiritually and how we could help them.

There's also the opening to serve the Chinese-speaking. Like many in Singapore, I'm used to English in church and most other areas of life. But to my surprise, I found myself pulled into and able to contribute in the Chinese Ministry (CM). This was prominently in teaching (in my previous church, Sunday School and an evening gospel class, and later, FERC's CM Covenant Instruction) and also interpretation and translation. While aware of my limits and unsure how God may use these gifts in the long term, I am thankful for the openings these gifts present.

Irresistible desire

Third, the desire for ministry seems irresistible. For someone in my position, I think it's fair to say that going full-time defies normal logic.



Photograph of a man holding a Bible.

There's a clear impact on finances and comfort. While cushioned among other things by FERC having the means as well as a willingness to support it's fairly clear that going full-time would cost me and my family. Life as a pastor also promises more scrutiny and stress compared to my current vocation. In addition, the more I know about the pastoral ministry, the more I become aware about the pastoral ministry, the more I become aware of my inadequacies.

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While I'm grateful to have some years of experience that a younger person may lack, there remain many areas of a pastor's work that are outside my comfort zone.

With such push factors, it makes sense to turn away. Yet I remain committed to pursuing full-time ministry. I think this cannot be understood using human logic, but should instead evidence a God-given desire.

Closing

I expect to start formal theological studies in the second half of 2025. Please pray for me and my young family (Eileen and two young boys, Luke and Matthew), that we would “Only fear the Lord, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you” (1 Sam 12:24).

INTRODUCTION TO PREACHERS AS HERALDS

2 Timothy 1:11 – “Preachers as Heralds”



Written by

JASON P. VAN VLIET

Introducing Jason P. Van Vliet

Dr. Jason Van Vliet is the Principal of Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary where he also serves as Professor of Dogmatics or Systematic Theology. In this chapel message, he encourages seminarians to do the work of a herald. And this is something we need to consider as a church.

We are growing as a church. We have been having more opportunity in the mission field. We have received many Macedonian calls. And we are also sending another member for theological studies. In our last Good Friday gospel meeting, there were so many who came because they were invited. They heard the gospel!

It is a reminder that we need to have heralds, and more heralds who would proclaim the gospel with clarity and conviction. May our young men give themselves to the ministry of the Word. May our young women join their brothers in the mission field. Let us pray for preachers to be bold and holy because they are God's royal, military, and religious messengers.

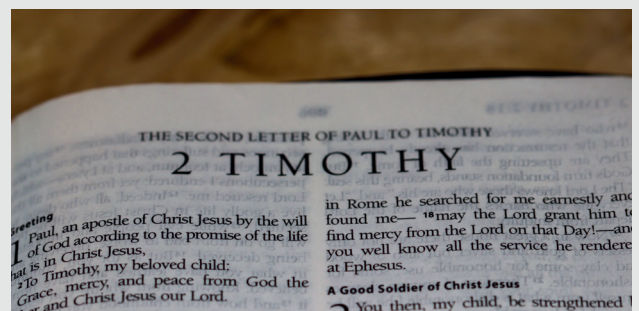
Dr. Van Vliet was the speaker at the KSYF retreat this June and also ministered at our worship services.

A message, by Dr. Jason Van Vliet

(reprinted with permission)

This past summer I heard some preaching about preaching. At least part of the sermon was about how and why a minister should preach the Word. And in that sermon, the minister mentioned that preachers are heralds. And then he went on to describe that in the ancient world heralds might be sent from the battlefield back to the home front to announce a victory. And what a privilege, what a joy that must have been, for that herald to run back into the middle of the capital city and announce to all the citizens, and especially the anxious wives and mothers: “Hear ye, hear ye, our king and his loyal army have won the battle!” And, so the minister went on to say, preachers today, like the heralds of old have the privilege and the joy of announcing the victory that Christ has won.

It was not the first time that I have heard this comparison of ministers today and heralds of the ancient world. But it piqued my curiosity. What exactly did the herald of old (also known as the kerux) do? What position did he hold? What responsibilities did he have?



Photograph of 2 Timothy in the Bible.

And connecting this with the text in front of us, why does the apostle Paul at precisely this point in this letter, call himself a herald (kerux)? Surprisingly, he does not do this very often. In fact he only does it one other time in 1 Tim 2:7, where he writes, again to young Timothy, “And for this purpose I was appointed a herald [a kerux] and an

apostle—I am telling the truth, I am not lying—and a teacher of the true faith to the on their main task of delivering messages, they took along a special spectre in their hand. This spectre made it clear to everyone that this was not just a travelling storyteller, this was not just a smooth-talking used-chariot salesmen, no, this man – with the spectre – he was a royal herald who came with a message, a message with authority, a message from the king.

Well, it is all part of encouraging Timothy to be bold in his work as a minister of the gospel. You see, Timothy had a sincere faith (v. 5)—no problem there. In fact, this kind of strong, sincere faith could be traced back at least two generations in Timothy’s family: both in his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois. And Timothy had a gift from God (v. 6)—no problem there. God had equipped him with the ability to be a good preacher. And Timothy even had the laying on of hands (v. 6); he was duly and properly ordained. So everything seemed to be in place. There was only one concern: sometimes Timothy could be timid. Maybe more than sometimes. Maybe it was often, or almost all the time.

Like many of us, if not all of us, Timothy’s timidity may have come from feelings of inadequacy. Like Moses, we are quick to ask: “Who am I?” and “Do I have what it takes?” However, there was something else. Verse 8 indicates that Timothy could also be ashamed. Look, there was persecution going on. Paul himself had been imprisoned, beaten, and almost killed on various occasions. And when the going got tough, Timothy did not always get going. Sometimes he shrank back: ashamed, embarrassed, maybe even just plain scared.

His father in the faith, the Apostle Paul, says, “Timothy, don’t do that! Do not be ashamed! God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, and love, and self-discipline.” And then as part of underlining and emphasizing all of this in the verses 9-12, Paul says “I was appointed a herald....” And since Timothy is called to follow in the apostle’s footsteps, by implication, that means that Timothy must be a herald, too.

But what exactly does that look like? What’s a herald to do? As it turns out, much more than we might first expect. At the time the Apostle Paul wrote these words, the herald (kerux) was a royal, military and religious position, all wrapped up into one. Let’s start with the royal.

A herald was not a person who was hired on the spot to deliver a message for the king. In that way,

sending out a herald was not like calling up Fed-Ex and asking them to express deliver a package. No! Kings and princes had their own, full-time herald, if not heralds, in the plural. These men were specifically appointed to the position of kerux. They were officially part of the royal court. And if they were not busy bringing messages here, there or anywhere, then they would help out with other jobs that needed to be done: serving guests or harnessing up the horses for the king.



Photograph of a sculpture of a herald sounding a trumpet.

But when they went out on their main task of delivering messages, they took along a special spectre in their hand. This spectre made it clear to everyone that this was not just a travelling storyteller, this was not just a smooth-talking used-chariot salesmen, no, this man – with the spectre – he was a royal herald who came with a message, a message with authority, a message from the king.

In fact, as time went on, and the structure of the political system changed, not only kings, but also certain states, or civil assemblies, or we might say parliaments, hired their own heralds. There were heralds that announced games, such as the Olympic games. And there were heralds that announced festivals and feast days. There were even heralds that announced upcoming market days. Sports, feasts, and general merchandising: if the people needed to know about it, the herald made sure they knew it.

Knew about it, that is, on behalf of the state, or on behalf of the king as the case may have been. But always: on behalf of, in the name of, under the authority of someone else. You see, that’s the one thing about a herald. He’s not his own man. It’s not his initiative. It’s not his message. It’s not his event. The herald is the courier... but he’s definitely not the crux of the matter. He’s not the centre of attention.

Of course, the herald might well feel like he is the centre of attention. Because if he stands up,

straight and tall, in the middle of the city square and he booms out with a loud, clear voice, "Hear ye... hear ye!" Well, now the whole crowd stops, looks at him, and listens. Dozens, even hundreds of people, are looking at him, wondering what he will say. And he is wondering how they will react. That's all well and true. But even though, understandably, he feels like he's the centre of attention, that is – most emphatically – not the case. It's not about the kerux, it's about the king who sent him.

Which is most comforting, and confidence building, for Timothy and for us. One of the biggest mistakes a preacher of the gospel can make, is to think – consciously or sub-consciously – that it's about him: his intelligence, his eloquence, his passion and his persuasiveness.

Yes, a preacher ought to put together a sermon that flows, logically from one point to the next. In other words, his logic and intelligence are involved in process, but they are not the crux of the message. Christ and him crucified, in other words, the cross is, literally, the crux of the message. And yes, a preacher ought to phrase things well and express them in a memorable way. But all the eloquence in the world never produced an ounce of genuine faith. It's the gospel, and the hearing thereof, which – through the Holy Spirit – works faith in the heart of man (Rom 10).

And yes, a preacher ought to preach with passion and persuasion. But the object that needs to be moved and persuaded is something called the sinful human heart. And Scripture says that that sinful human heart is best compared to a stone (Ezek 11:19)—a big, hard, flinty stone. And Scripture adds that that heart needs to be regenerated. Not just moved, but rather re-moved and replaced with a heart of flesh. And it's going to take a lot more than a herald's verbal persuasion to do accomplish that feat. It's going to take nothing less than the sovereign power of the Holy Spirit.

You see, it's not about the kerux. It's all about the King, Jesus Christ, and his gospel, and his Spirit. And the more convinced of this a preacher is the more confident he will be, when he steps into the pulpit.

That is the herald's royal responsibility... what about the military and religious duties? Heralds had a very important role to play on the battlefield, especially at the beginning and the end of these

confrontations. When war loomed on the horizon, then it was often the royal herald who summoned the troops. And not only summoned them, but when the army – or at least the generals and the sergeant-majors – were all gathered together, then it was the herald who often led the pre-war assembly in prayer! Of course, in a pagan context, he would have been praying to the gods, the idols, especially the gods of war. But the point is: a herald had a special, religious function. In fact, there was even a special position called the hiero-kerux: the priest-herald!

And then, off they went to war, the generals, the majors, the soldiers, and the horses. And when the fighting was drawing to a close, and terms of peace or surrender had to be negotiated, then, once again, it was time for the herald to step to the fore. He was the one who went into the enemy camp – with his spectre – and he did the negotiations. There – in the midst of those tense talks – he had to represent his master: accurately, and loyally, and wisely. Obviously, the future of many lives and not a few livelihoods as well rested upon his shoulders. It wasn't always easy being a herald.

Thankfully, brothers, even though ministers of the gospel today are heralds, they don't have to enter into tense negotiations with the enemy. There is no dealing with the devil! There are no consultations with the Ancient Serpent, or sin, or death. Because Christ, our king, has conquered them all, yes, the Apostle Paul says it even stronger: he has destroyed death (1 Cor 15:26). He has washed away all our sins. He has mortally wounded the Dragon, and the demise of the Roaring Lion is only a matter of time.

There are no terms of peace that need to be negotiated. There is only the Prince of Peace who deserved our celebration. And these are glad tidings of which we may be, and yes, we may aspire to be, heralds!

Sure, sometimes – like a Timothy – we're still timid. But when a herald becomes timid, he needs to stop thinking so much about the messenger, and start concentrating more on the message, the gospel. He needs to stop thinking so much about the messenger, and start focussing on the One who sends out the messenger: Christ the eternal King. After all, that's what being a herald is all about!

WHEN A MEMBER RESIGNS

“So, what might be some legitimate reasons to leave the church?”

Introduction

When you want to resign from your local church, do you know how to go about it in a godly way?

Unless you no longer believe the gospel, you need a legitimate reason to leave the church. Why? Because the local church is the assembly of the visible Body of Christ from which we are not to forsake. We are to gather to “consider one another in order to stir up love and good works” (Heb 10:23-25), like fulfilling the Great Commission, which you could not do alone. Hence, our Belgic Confession included Article 28: That every one is bound to join himself to the true Church.

So, what might be some legitimate reasons to leave the church?

Legitimate Reasons

One is a *consequential reason* – you need to relocate to a faraway place or overseas. Even then, you should not just leave without first looking for a local church there to which you could conscientiously join as a member for worship, witness, and your spiritual well-being. If you must leave before that, you should keep your membership until you could settle in a local church over there, so that your elders could still provide the spiritual oversight you need in the meantime.

A second more spiritual one is a *conscientious reason* – you have changed your conviction on the fundamentals of the faith. As you grow in biblical knowledge and understanding, you might feel that you could no longer acquiesce to some of the church’s core teachings, some of which you might even deem as heretical. Even then, you should not just leave without first discussing your new convictions with your elders and giving them a chance to convince you otherwise.

It is even more incumbent on you to highlight the inconsistencies to your elders if the preaching and practices are contrary to what the church confesses, like not exercising church discipline

Written by

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when it is a mark of a true church. If they disagree with your interpretation, you could raise the issue to a higher body, like the Synod. If there is no such recourse, you could also discuss the matter with some more mature members who might be able to persuade the elders to rethink their stance.

Alas, everyone might be content to stay with the status quo, like not disciplining errant members. If only you could not worship anymore with a clear conscience under such preaching and practices, then you could resign. But first ask for a leave-of-absence to look for another church that is more aligned to your beliefs. If you are involved in some ministries in the church, you should also give some time for the leaders to find a replacement to take over your duties before leaving.

A third one is a *considerate reason* – you feel that the church is no longer conducive to your own or your loved ones’ spiritual growth. It could be that the church lacks fellowship and service opportunities because it functions more as a preaching outpost for the religious to congregate and worship. They live in privacy and hardly interact as a loving covenant community. Thus, you feel stagnant and disengaged. There is also no godly peer support that your children would need.

On the other hand, changes in your life circumstances might compel you to look for another church, like your need for wheelchair access. Your children might need specialized ministries for the mentally and physically challenged. You might need to care for your elderly parents attending another church with services in dialects. So, if you could conscientiously join their

church, it might be more profitable for your spiritual growth to serve there instead of taking an indefinite leave-of-absence.

Though legitimate, such considerate reasons could easily be used to cover up the illegitimate reasons for leaving the church. What might some of these be?

Illegitimate Reasons

A *culpable reason* is leaving over selfish or trivial matters. Your comfort or convenience is your primary consideration. What works is more important than God's Word. You leave because the sermons are boring and not practical, you feel pressured to serve, you could not find friendship or a potential spouse, etc. The church then becomes like a consumer product that you try and throw. If so, instead of resigning, you should repent of such a low view of the Body of Christ.

Another *censurable reason* is leaving because of personal offences or sectarian conflicts in the church. Even if it is not possible to resolve the offence and be reconciled with the brethren involved, you are still called to forgive and forbear to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph 4:1-3; 30-32). If the offence is flagrant, you could escalate the matter to your elders for judgment (Mat 18:15-17). If you leave with an unsettled grudge, you would be adjudged the guilty party.

As for conflicts, the Apostle Paul had to deal with sectarianism due to contentions in the Corinthian church. He did not counsel the carnal/spiritual, the foolish/wise, or the weak/strong therein to leave the afflicted church for peace of mind. Instead, he exhorted them to "speak the same thing" and "be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1Co.1:10), that there be no schism. So, it is not a reason to resign but an issue to intercede for the peace of the church.

If you are thus deeply distressed, the godly thing to do is to approach your elders to help you understand the issue better and to pray for your peace. They would need time to address the issue and resolve the conflicts. However, if after the resolution, you deem the position taken by the church is unbiblical, it might become a conscientious reason for you to leave. Still, you should give your elders a chance to convince you otherwise if you decide to resign after further study and prayer.

But the most *condemnable reason* for resigning is to avoid church discipline. It is tantamount to excommunicating yourself from the Body of Christ. Although you would be excommunicated if you remain impenitent, you are placed under church discipline precisely to warn you of that chilling eventuality. You are denied the Lord's Supper to impress upon you that your sin is grave and that being remorseful is not enough, so that you would truly repent and be worthy to partake it again.

By resigning, you are saying that you would rather be delivered to Satan for the destruction of your flesh (1 Cor 5:5) than be deprived of your fleshly pleasure of sin. If God loves you and deals with you as with sons, you can be sure that He will thus chasten and scourge you, so that your spirit or soul may be saved (Heb 12:5-11). This is the ultimate end of subjecting you to church discipline. So, by resigning, you might just prove yourself to be a reprobate, and thus condemn yourself.

Now, how do you know if your reason for resigning is legitimate or illegitimate?

Legitimate or Illegitimate?

A simple test is your openness and readiness to discuss your reasons for leaving with your elders before resigning. If you just submit your resignation and refuse to meet with your elders to discuss the reason, you know your reason is illegitimate. Resigning in this way is ungodly and violates your membership vow to submit to your elders' oversight. They will then be unable to give you an honourable discharge, and you may find it difficult to join another church unless you repent.

Conclusion

In conclusion, when you resign with a compelling reason in a godly way, you egg on the church to reform its doctrines and practices if, indeed, they are unbiblical. You will also encourage the church to improve its ministries to better serve the changing needs of members, if possible. Nevertheless, you should remain first to help build up the church that God has placed you in as He pleased (1 Cor 12:18). Resigning should be your last resort if you want your elders to treat you seriously.

Now that you know how to resign in a godly way, may God keep you as a godly member in His church.

HANDLING CONFLICTS, FORGIVENESS & RECONCILIATION IN THE CHURCH

By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” - John 13:35



Written by

JASON CHEW

Dealing with conflicts is part and parcel of our everyday life. It would not come as a surprise to realise that church-goers face conflicts among themselves on every Lord's Day as well when they go to worship God. Here are some uniquely FERC challenges the moment we enter church.

First, we are confronted by a human traffic jam at the side gate while waiting for a reversing car to go out of the main gate. If the wait gets slightly longer, some might question why the usher does not let the human traffic move first? That's Conflict no. 1.

Then we must navigate the narrow stairways. There may be friendly conversations ahead of us which slow down the crowd behind. We may mumble in our heart, "Can they walk just a tad faster?" Conflict no. 2. Queuing to enter the toilet cubicles after service is another good example which I shall not elaborate on. Conflict no. 3.

We may think that these are small conflicts and they do not amount to anything more serious than a mere murmur underneath the smile that is still spread across our face. There are indeed conflicts that affect us to varying degrees. There is wisdom to let many of these conflicts pass and be forbearing (Eph 4:2-3). Nevertheless, many of these conflicts that surface within us are more telling of ourselves than of others.

James 4:1 tells us where these conflicts come from. Often, it is our own selfish desire, our old self, that is still having a hold on us. "From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not

hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?"

One of the chief ways we can feed our selfish desire is our self-focused attitude. It is obvious and it is "natural". The self is the most accessible source where we can "retrieve information" regarding our immediate situation. For example, "I am carrying a bunch of heavy stuff and it's reasonable that people who are not carrying heavy stuff should in kindness give way to me". Conflict could therefore arise when we have this self-serving attribution of need. When this self-biased need is met with our misattribution of the circumstances of others, a perfect storm may just arise. "These slow-moving chatters are inconsiderate". However, the people in front in this scenario may not be aware of the people walking behind them or not aware that they are carrying heavy stuff. They may also have other reasons for moving slowing that may not be obvious.

Love and humility, in fact, is the calling of every Christian. Phil 2:3-4 calls us not to act in a self-serving way but to consider the need of others more than ours.

In the scenario above, is it not wonderful that the brethren in front can confide with each other? In that way, a burden is shared. Is the burden of the heart a small thing compared to the physical burden we are bearing? Beneath the slow-paced walk of the two brethren could be a lifting of a heavy heart. Is that not wonderful? How can we look at the need of our brethren instead of putting our own need in the forefront? Is there a self-righteous attitude that is entrenched within us? These are just hypothetical scenarios. However, can you see where our usual thought process is leading us?

Come on, we want to talk about more serious conflicts, you may say. However, there is really no further innovation in doing life as a Christian.



Whether it's a big or a small conflict, love and humility are the way to go in handling it. A good place to start in reconciliation is self-examination.

“*Seldom do we choose to lay down our rights and humbly work through our difficulties with others. Instead, we say, ‘We’re different. I’m right. I’ve got to win’.*”¹

“Seldom do we choose to lay down our rights and humbly work through our difficulties with others. Instead, we say, ‘We’re different. I’m right. I’ve got to win’.”¹ Is it not humbling to know that Christ said, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35). The way we handle conflicts show others if we are true disciples of Christ.

As a Christian, we are called to imitate Christ; we are to embody Christ in our lives. Let’s take a brief look at the life of Christ. Right from the beginning, in the lowly birth of our Lord Jesus Christ into this world of sin and conflict, he humbled himself. Putting aside His glory in heaven, in love he became a humble, lowly man. Throughout the life of Christ, we read no record of him claiming any rights or having any self-serving desire (Matt 8:20). He lived a life as a servant-king. In humility he washed the feet of his disciples, including Judas’.

Wow! Now, let’s look at ourselves. We may grumble, “After all the things that so and so did to me, you want me to ...?”. Can we see the extreme example that our Saviour is showing us? A paraphrase of a famous preacher, “Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it’s thinking of yourself less”.² How true can that be! The Lord Jesus Christ’s suffering and humility on the cross, was that not driven by his love for us?

The main culprit of conflict is self. If we could examine ourselves honestly and have a clearer perspective of how a particular conflict arose within us, we would be in a better position for reconciliation. At times, we may not be able to evaluate the situation around the conflict clearly. We can seek counsel from brethren to walk alongside us amid conflict resolution (Prov 11:14), to help us make sense of the situation.

What was your first thought when you read the title of this article? Where does your mind lead you when you see the word “forgiveness”? “How can I forgive the person who has wronged me?” That might be the instinctive way of looking at a conflict. Self-examination could help us see our own contribution to the conflict and seek for forgiveness. That could well be the unusual way of seeking reconciliation in the body of Christ (Mat 7:3-5). We are all saints in the process of sanctification. However, let us endeavour to live our lives as one body in Christ.

¹ Ken Sande and Kevin Johnson, *Resolving Everyday Conflict* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), pg 17, Kindle

² C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001), pg 128

A BIOGRAPHY

Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981)

The Life of D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

Dr. David Martyn Lloyd-Jones was a physician, pastor, author, and church leader in the United Kingdom. JI Packer described him as “The greatest man I have ever known.”

He was born in Wales in 1899 and raised in the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Church, which was at that time going through the 1904-1905 Welsh Revival. In his teen years, the family moved to London for economic reasons. There, they attended the Charing Cross Chapel (WCM), but by that time the revival had dwindled and they survived on the “left-over emotion of the Welsh revival” (Catherwood). The churches were also affected by a growing theological liberalism.

He was a precocious student, receiving his MBBS at St Bartholomew Teaching Hospital (“The Barts”) so young (22 years old), that he had to wait a few years before he could qualify to study his Doctor of Medicine (British research doctorate). By his mid-20s he was a qualified and certified physician with a practice on the prestigious Harley Street.

But God was working in him throughout this time. He came to faith in his teenage years. He wrote, “For many years I thought I was a Christian when in fact I was not. It was only later that I came to see that I had never been a Christian and became one. What I needed was preaching that would convict me of sin and bring me to repentance and tell me something about regeneration. But I never heard that. The preaching we had was always based on the assumption that we were all Christians.” After he came to faith, he preached and sharpened his doctrine through theology debates in the Sunday School, opposing the theological liberalism he saw coming out of the seminaries.

So strong was his passion, that after he married Bethan Philips, he gave up his practice and entered the ministry. Giving up this bright future was remarkable considering his medical practitioner wife was the daughter of a prominent eye surgeon. But God called him to be a physician of souls. They had 2 daughters.

His ministry took him to Wales where he preached in a church with unconverted membership. His first

Written by

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sermon on 2 Timothy 1:7 contained these words - “Our churches are crowded with people nearly all of whom take the Lord’s Supper without a moment’s hesitation, and yet do you imagine for a moment that all those people believe that Christ died for them? Well then, you ask, why are they church members, why do they pretend to believe? The answer is, they are afraid to be honest with themselves. I shall feel much more ashamed to all eternity for the occasions on which I said that I believed in Christ when in fact I did not.”

Needless to say, many left. But through his preaching through whole Bible books, practicing a Puritan experiential homiletic of “logic on fire” (he was heavily influenced by the Puritans), others came and many turned to Christ as the Spirit converted them.

He was very critical of Finney-esque means he saw in many churches. He said, “Can many of the evangelistic methods which were introduced some forty or fifty years ago really be justified out of the Word of God? As I read of the work of the great evangelists in the Bible I find they were not first and foremost concerned about results; they were concerned about proclaiming the word of truth. They left the increases unto Him. They were concerned above all else that the people should be brought face to face with the truth itself.”

After 10 years, he received a call from G. Campbell Morgan to co-pastor Westminster Chapel and be his successor. Although Morgan was Arminian and Lloyd-Jones was Calvinistic, there was mutual respect. Their co-pastorate was peaceful and friendly. Upon Morgan’s retirement after the war, the church grew. By the time Lloyd-Jones himself retired in 1968, there were 1500 worshipers at the morning service and 2000 in the evening service. It was his desire for the revival of yesteryears that

propelled him in his ministry.

Through his influence and founding of various institutions, British evangelicalism spread. The Evangelical Library was founded where the writings of the Puritans could be accessed. Through the Westminster Fellowship and the Puritan Conference, the theology of the Puritans could be propagated. Through the Banner of Truth Trust, Puritan classics were reprinted. Through the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship, then the Inter-Varsity Fellowship, students were disciplined to follow and serve Christ. Through the Evangelical Magazine, Christians from all walks of life could be challenged and encouraged through thought-provoking articles. Through London Theological Seminary (founded in his later years), Bible-believing pastors were trained for the ministry. Through these institutions, his influence was far reaching, across denominational lines. He forged friendships with those in the evangelical wing of the Anglican Church like John Stott and JI Packer.

He was a prolific author, writing books on Bible exposition - Romans, Sermons on the Mount; pastoral theology - Preaching and Preachers, counseling - Spiritual Depression, and historical theology - The Puritans, Revival.

Despite the fruitfulness of his ministry and the astronomic growth of his own congregation, he never saw the kind of revival he desired and prayed for. This caused him to be open and friendly toward second blessing ideas in pneumatology. While he was not in every way exact with today's Charismatics, he is nevertheless posthumously claimed by them to support their views. This author has heard it said by his close surviving associates, that at the end of his life, there was a disappointment or even bitterness because of the lack of visible or discernible revival - even though there was consistent growth in holiness and fruitfulness in his congregation.

In 1980 Dr. Lloyd-Jones' health had already begun to deteriorate but he continued to preach as and when he was able. By late February 1981 he was very unwell but he was able to write a note saying, "Do not pray for healing. Do not hold me back from the glory." He passed away on March 1.

The Primary Context of D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones' Leadership

Why he was tireless in his preaching, fellowship with other Bible-believing Christians, and his efforts in para-church groups was to promote a biblical Christianity and to forge unity between believers.



Photograph of D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Image adapted from MLJTrust
<https://www.mljtrust.org/>.

Not all were enthusiastic, some saying to him, "We are Baptists, and we could not join with paedobaptists," while others said, "We are Calvinists and could not join with Arminians." His response to this was, "If I am convinced that a man is my brother I am going to bear with him. I am not going to divide from him. We are born again by the same Spirit into the same family. I do not separate from my brother."

But during his time at Westminster Chapel, he saw the rise of ecumenism. He warned against it. He saw this as part of making the gospel known and defending against worldliness.

"It was in his relations with the Church of England that the most serious controversy came. Martyn Lloyd-Jones was a strong believer in evangelical unity. He did not believe that denominational barriers should separate those who had a true faith in common. And, as the ecumenical movement gathered speed and the liberal wing in the churches made greater and greater concessions to the currents of worldly opinion, he came to believe that the right answer was for the evangelicals to leave the compromised denominations and form their own groups. He had no illusions about the possible ultimate fate of new church groups. They might, in their own time, go astray. But he maintained that each of us had to do the best for our own generation, regardless of what might come later, and that the ecumenical movement put those who stood for the long line of truly Christian theology and practice in an impossible position" (Catherwood).

This put him at odds with good friends in the Anglican Church, Congregational Union, and Baptist Union. He called them to come out of those

denominations. Many did and formed a fellowship of independent evangelical churches. Others did not. And the unity he sought so hard to forge declined, even with his good friends Dr. John Stott and J.I. Packer.

An Illustration of D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones' Leadership

From the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, Billy Graham conducted crusades in the United Kingdom. In 1963, he asked Lloyd-Jones chair the first World Congress on Evangelism (which would later be the Lausanne Movement). He told Graham that he would support and chair the congress if Graham would agree to 2 conditions - firstly, to stop having liberals and Roman Catholics on his platform and secondly, to drop the invitation system (which Lloyd-Jones believed was a source of mass confusion and harmful to churches).

They met for over 3 hours where Lloyd-Jones tried to convince Graham. The meeting was conducted courteously but his firm convictions were not capitulated. Neither did Graham change his views. Lloyd-Jones declined to endorse, commend, or work with Graham. This was also his attitude toward Graham's crusades. He publicly stated that to have visible unity with those who were opposed to the gospel was sinful.

And about the altar call. When he was in the United States in the 1970s at a conference, he was asked if Scripture justified the use of such a public invitation as used by Billy Graham.

He answered, "Well, it is difficult to answer this in a brief compass without being misunderstood. Let me answer it like this: The history of this invitation system is one with which you people ought to be more familiar than anyone else, because it began in America. It began in the 1820s; the real originator of it was Charles G. Finney. It led to a great controversy. Asahel Nettleton, a great Calvinist and successful evangelist, never issued an "altar call" nor asked people to come to the "anxious seat." These new methods in the 1820s were condemned for many reasons by all who took the Reformed position..."

And he gave many reasons - like it was not Peter who issued the invitation, but the unbelievers who interrupted him by asking - what shall we do to be saved - or the Puritans were afraid of false professions, but concluded): "...I can sum it up by putting it like this: I feel that this pressure which is put upon people to come " forward in decision ultimately is due to a lack of faith in the work and operation of the Holy Spirit. We are to preach the

Word, and if we do it properly, there will be a call to a decision that comes in the message, and then we leave it to the Spirit to act upon people. And of course He does. Some may come immediately at the close of the service to see the minister. I think there should always be an indication that the minister will be glad to see anybody who wants to put questions to him or wants further help. But that is a very different thing from putting pressure upon people to come forward. I feel it is wrong to put pressure directly on the will. The order in Scripture seems to be this - the truth is presented to the mind, which moves the heart, and that in turn moves the will."

Lessons from D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones' Life and Leadership

1. It is a noble calling to serve Christ and his church.
2. Systematic, biblical, and faithful preaching of the whole counsel of God's Word leads to growth.
3. Unity between Bible-believing Christians despite differences is vital (especially in days of apostasy).
4. Confrontation and separation can be carried out with firmness and suppleness.
5. Separation is a subset of unity - not the other way around.
6. Even great men of faith who trust in the sovereignty of God can be greatly disappointed.
7. We must want what God wants for the church and rejoice when it does not come in our time.

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