

# MARANATHA BIBLE-PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

30 August 2020

## English Worship Service

*"Present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Colossians 1:28)*

Address: 63 Cranwell Road, Singapore 509851

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Sunday School: 10 am

Sunday English / Chinese Worship Service: 10.45 am

Wednesday Prayer Meeting: 8.30 pm

**Rev Colin Wong (HP : 9665 8160); Elder Daniel Tau (HP : 9761 5415);  
Elder Peter Ong (HP : 9626 7045); Elder Royce Yeo (HP : 9362 3067)**

## THE AMBIGUITY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

The image of the local church is extremely ambiguous. One writer describes it perfectly. He said, "There is a paradox at the very heart of the church – the painful tension between what the church claims to be and what the church seems to be; between the divine idea and the human reality; between romantic talk about the Bride of Christ and the very unromantic, ugly, unholy and quarrelsome people we know ourselves to be. It is a tension between our final glorious destiny in heaven and our present very inglorious performance. This is the ambiguity of the church."

Like the Corinthian church, Maranatha Bible-Presbyterian Church is called "the church of God" in the Eastern part of Singapore (1 Corinthians 1:2). This church is a divine community in the midst of a human community. The worshippers are called the holy people of God. They have been set apart to belong to God. He has chosen them to be His special people, and they belong to Him exclusively (John 15:19). Being a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, they are called not only to a glorious salvation, but also to proclaim God's excellencies who called them out of darkness into His marvellous light (1 Peter 2:9).

However, like any church on earth, undesirable elements linger – quarrel, pride, complacency, jealousy, immorality, covetousness, boastfulness of spiritual gifts and sour relationships. Sometimes, it is shameful even to speak of those things that some church members did in secret (Ephesians 5:12). This holy church of God is not very holy after all.

What should we do? Should we mourn for the spiritual condition of the church? I think we should (Nehemiah 1:4). Should we throw in the towel? I don't think we should (Galatians 4:19). Should we leave Life and find a "perfect" church? I don't think we should (Romans 14, 15:1-7).

I think we need to come to terms with it in this way. On the one hand, biblical Christians are not perfectionists (Philippians 3:12, 13). We don't dream of developing a perfect church on earth. One great evangelist wisely says, "By all means look for the perfect church and when you find it, join it, but remember when you join it, it ceases to be perfect." John Newton, the author of "Amazing Grace," once

said, “I am not yet what I ought to be and I am not what I want to be. I am not what I hope to be in another world, but still I am not what I used to be. And I am, by the grace of God, I am what I am.” Thank God, He has not finished with us yet! On the other hand, biblical Christians are not defeatists or pessimists. We don’t tolerate sin and error in the church as if it didn’t matter. By the grace of God, we will deal with it one by one.

To some of you who are perfectionists I say, “You’re right to seek the doctrinal and ethical purity of the church, but you’re wrong to imagine that you will ever attain perfection in this life. Not until Christ comes will He present His Bride, the church, to Himself – a radiant church without stain, wrinkle or blemish, holy and blameless” (1 Corinthians 15:51-56).

To those who are pessimists and defeatists, I say, “You’re right to acknowledge the reality of sin and error in the church. You’re right not to close your eyes to it and pretend that it is perfect when it isn’t. But you’re wrong to tolerate it” (James 4:17). There is a place of discipline in the church and even, in extreme cases, for excommunication. The leadership of the church will not tolerate sin and error (Song of Solomon 2:15). Unholy elements of the church will be dealt with accordingly in due time.

Like the Corinthian church, Maranatha Bible-Presbyterian Church has been sanctified in Christ, but it is still sinful and called to be holy. The church has been enriched (1 Corinthians 1:5), but it is still defective. The church has been united in Christ, but it is still unnecessarily divided because of diverse personalities and principles (1 Corinthians 1:10-12).

When will these ambiguities of the church cease and when will we have a perfect church on earth? I am afraid to say that it will never come to pass on this side of eternity. However, that does not mean that we will not do anything about the sanctification of the church. Paul says in Philippians 2:12 and 13 – “Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”

Paul’s exhortation here was tempered with love. He called them, “my beloved.” Apparently, the Christians were very dear to him. He commended them for their remarkable readiness to obey him at all time. Now he specifically urged them even all the more to obey him in his absence to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling.

The phrase “work out your own salvation” does not teach salvation by good works. The Greek verb for “work out” means “to continually work to bring something to fulfilment or completion.” It is as if Paul is saying, “Don’t stop halfway; go on until the work of salvation is fully wrought out in you” (Galatians 4:19). Therefore, it cannot refer to salvation by good works (Romans 3:21–24; Ephesians 2:8, 9), but it does refer to the believer’s responsibility for active pursuit of obedience in the process of sanctification (1 Corinthians 9:24–27; 15:58; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Galatians 6:7–9; Ephesians 4:1; Colossians 3:1–17; Hebrews 6:10, 11; 12:1, 2; 2 Peter 1:5–11). The salvation spoken of here is not justification, but sanctification, victory over sin and the living of a life that is pleasing to God.

Furthermore, the Philippians were not told to work for their salvation but to work out the salvation God had already given them (James 2:18-26). This is human responsibility.

How should they do it? The answer is with “fear and trembling.” This “fear and trembling” is not the kind of fear and trembling that portrays a slave cringing before his master. It is not something that drives us away from God, but rather it is something that drives us to seek God.

Paul said that God is at work in the believer’s life. Here he described God’s enablement to bring to

completion the work of salvation in us. He wanted them to know that it was God who worked in them so that they could do His good pleasure and accomplish His good purpose.

The Greek word for “work” means “to energize, to work effectively.” It is God who energizes us both to do his good pleasure and accomplish his good purpose. The Christian life is to be lived at its best. It is not a “let go and let God” affair. He or she is responsible for his or her own sanctification (Hebrews 4:11). Both divine enablement and human responsibility are involved in getting God’s work done. Christians are partners with God, labouring together with Him.

Dearly beloved, you and I are living between times: between Kingdom come and Kingdom coming; between the divine ideal and the human reality; between the already and the not yet. Not until Jesus comes will the ideal become a reality and all ambiguity will cease. Paul states it clearly in 1 Corinthians 15:51-54 that unless and until our bodies are miraculously changed and transformed in the twinkling of an eye by the power of the resurrection at His Second Coming from corruption to incorruption and from mortality to immortality, will the ideal become a reality and all ambiguity of the church cease.

Until then... let us press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:14). Amen.

*Pastor Colin Wong*

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**Theme for the Quarter :**  
**FREE IN CHRIST**  
**(An Exposition on the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians)**

**English Worship Service :**  
**Elder Peter Ong speaks on Chosen of God (1 Peter 1:1-2)**