

**The Vine Committee**

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Did you know that JCC's Stewardship Month has been moved forward to October? That is about one month away. So it may be timely to talk about MONEY. Whose is it anyway? To the government, a percentage belongs to them for providing you the infrastructure, roads, houses, security, utilities, etc. To the schools, part of it belongs to them for providing you or your children education. To the insurance companies for providing protection, to the service companies for services rendered and the list goes on. So when you get your monthly pay check, maybe half of it will be GIRO off and you accept this as part of your normal monthly expenses.

Have you considered who really provides for you? Who gives you the wisdom, health and skills to earn a living? It is quite common for man to think that everything he earns is through his own hard work and so belongs to him. Doesn't the Bible say, "*By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food*"? (Genesis 3:19) We forget that if God does not provide the rain, all the sweat will not make crops grow. So who provides the rain, sun and soil that man may till and grow crops? (read Psalm 65) Perhaps it is because we have moved so far from farming (Singapore is not an agricultural country) that we cannot see God's hand in all our endeavours. We think we are self-made men, at times even forgetting our parents who provided for us the first twenty years of our lives.

If you have diligently paid your taxes to the government, lovingly provided for your elderly parents and generously taken care of your family's needs and find yourself with nothing left for God, then something must be wrong. Could it be the sequence? The government before your parents, your parents before your family and then lastly God. Consider Cain and Abel's offering in Genesis 4:3-5. Cain gave to God in the course of time but Abel took of the firstborn. The emphasis is on first rather than some time later.

TITHING - is it still applicable to New Covenant people?

Here, I am just recalling what Pastor Andrew talked about in DE class. It all started with Abraham, *giving a tenth of everything* (Genesis 14:20) and Jacob, *all that you give me I will give you a tenth.* (Genesis 28:22). Then Moses made it a law in

Leviticus - *A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD (Leviticus 27:30).*

Then in the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi 3:8, God rebuked the Jews for robbing Him. "Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' "In tithes and offerings." So we know that tithing is mentioned from the first book of the Old Testament to the last book. Did this rule carry on into the New Covenant? Perhaps we think that this is Law and we are under Grace.

In Luke 11:42, Jesus said, "*Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter **without leaving the former undone.***"

Generally, most people will notice that the emphasis is on justice and the love of God and it is a woe to give God a tenth. However, if we read carefully, Jesus is actually saying that we should not leave Tithing undone.

Some consider giving to God by channeling their tithes to mission work or other charities rather than to church. Is that wrong? I am not an expert in taxation matters but I think that a Malaysian working in Singapore for more than 183 days should be paying taxes in Singapore rather than in Malaysia. That is the humanistic view – where you receive the benefit, there you pay the taxes. However God is overall, so I cannot conclude that giving to other works rather than to JCC is wrong. Maybe just give to JCC a portion for the facilities they provide and also the feeding from the pulpit. I can imagine if all the foreigners here decide to pay their taxes to other countries rather than to Singapore.

Finally, how much should you give in New Testament times? Well some extreme examples have been given, eg the old woman with the 2 coins (Mark 12:42); Ananias and Sapphira, who lied about giving all (Acts 5:1); and "if I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing." (1 Corinthians 13:3) Although these examples talk about giving 100%, a more practical approach is found in 2 Corinthians 8:12, "***For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.***"

*"Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work."* (2 Corinthians 9:7-8)

So dear brothers and sisters, be blessed to be a blessing. Test God in this and see He will pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. (Malachi 3:10)

*Martin Cheah*

# SEX and the CITY (SINGAPORE)

**Sex is very much in the news these days.**

According to a survey (reported in the New Zealand Herald), researchers say that “men's friendships with women are driven by sexual attraction, regardless of whether they are single. Women, however, are more likely to consider their friendships with men as platonic - and only hope for more if their own relationship is in trouble.”

It is not surprising that some people subscribe to a stereotypical public judgment of man as the predatory scoundrel and woman as the unfortunate quarry in any immoral sexual liaison that find its way into the news.

Really, times have changed and more women are becoming more brazen in taking initiatives to express themselves impudently in inappropriate sexual deeds. I used to think that scandals about female teachers in sexual relationships with their junior charges could only happen in other countries. It is now in the news (July 2012) that here in Singapore, a young former top-secondary-school teacher (in her twenties) is under investigation for having sex with an under-aged male student who was under her charge. Last year, the Family Court heard a divorce case in which the husband alleged that his wife had improper associations with her former student since the student was 16 years old. There was also a case of a convicted female teacher sex offender in 2009. With the global reach of Internet smut, let's pray that Singapore is not playing catch-up with the statistics of sex offences by females in the West. As a matter of fact, women today are no longer as prudish as those in the Victorian era. Sexed-up images of women are everywhere (even in places with great irrelevancy) showing a new-found freedom for exhibitionism and experimentation with public sexuality.

Male teacher vs. female student in indecent affairs is often blamed on testosterone-charged men not exercising self-control. Can female teacher vs. male student in sexual sin be attributable to a lost battle between self-restraint and oestrogen-charged women? Sexual debauchery by whatever causes is sin. If the temptation is awful to curb, the consequences are severe and hard to attenuate; a sinner (whether “accidental” or “intentional”) will regret and may have to deal with a lifetime of ghastly shadows alone or in matrimonial relationship with children drawn into the emotional complications.

“Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.” (1 Cor. 6:9-10, NIV).

“It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality ...” (1 Thess. 4:3, NIV).

The commands apply to both men and women because it is not only men who are susceptible to sexual sin. Way back in time, as recorded in Genesis, it was Potiphar's wife who tried to seduce Joseph. Thank goodness that Joseph resisted, and so set a fine example for men who are subject to seductions. Unfortunately, some men do not follow this fine example. Men in high and mighty positions have fallen because of sex. High education and knowledge of the law do not help to fight temptation. Recently, a young woman (just short of 18 years of age) pulled down 48 men with her. Whether she was a naïve victim or a crafty villain; a lawyer, a school principal, a high school teacher and other society's elites had to pay the price of depravity of having sex with the under-aged woman. Out of so many, it would be no surprise if there are Christians among them. Christians are not by human nature immune to sexual sin; hence, the need for the warnings in the Bible.

When faced with seductions from the modern versions of “Potiphar's wife”, can men fail to resist the temptation and then blame their seducers? Obviously, the temptress has a personal responsibility to bear for her licentiousness, but this does not take away the personal responsibility of the tempted. Apostle Paul says clearly in 1 Cor. 10:13 (MSG), “No test or temptation that comes your way is beyond the course of what others have had to face. All you need to remember is that God will never let you down; he'll never let you be pushed past your limit; he'll always be there to help you come through it.”

When faced with temptation, God is always there to help. But do we avail ourselves of the help?

The American television series “Sex and the City” attests to the fact that promiscuity as a social issue is not confined to men alone. The comedy-drama centred its story on the different personalities and sexual exploits of four women. Here are two thought-provoking quotes from the show:

“Maybe some women aren't meant to be tamed. Maybe they just need to run free till they find someone just as wild to run with them.”

"Maybe all men are a drug. Sometimes they bring you down and sometimes, like now, they get you so high."

The quotes make me think about some cases in the city, Singapore. In February this year, a 24-year-old woman was convicted of incest with her father. More recently, two top civil servants were charged for corruptly receiving sexual favours in "sex for contracts" deals and a university law professor (former District Judge to boot) and his female student came under CPIB investigation in a "sex for grade" transaction. In pacts where rewards are exchanged (contract/grade vs. sex), they are agreements between willing parties in sealing an offer-and-acceptance. Whichever side is proactive or reactive, the conclusion is the same – a promiscuous union between consenting adults consummated under influence of carnal desires and greed with the high-stake risks and rewards. As is often the case, the rewards are transitory while the risks show up in mortifyingly indelible marks on one's life.

It is said that prostitution is the world's oldest profession; with social evolution, it has extended its reach out of brothels to the seclusions of clandestine rendezvous. Where there is sex supply, there must be sex demand to sustain the supply; or alternatively, sex demand brings out sex supply. It takes two hands to shake to mark an agreement; in sexual relationships where the two hands are a male and a female, both man and woman ought to seek a balance of power in a tug-of-war between temptation and resistance; if one person is tantalized to tempt, the other should be strong to resist; if one has the weakness to accede to temptation, then the other must hold sway with his/her strength to desist from the creation of enticement. We may do a spin of the above quotes from "Sex and the City" by changing the word "women" to "men" and vice versa. It becomes clear that what applies to men applies to women as well; both men and women have their capabilities for their own good to tame themselves (hold back from sexual sin) and resist the drug-like addictive effect of an iniquitous relationship with the opposite sex.

"Traditionally", men receive opprobrium for hooking up with "ladies of the night." Nowadays, liberated women are not shy to show themselves "progressive" with modern social mores; they invite into the sex entertainment market gigolos and male strippers for hen parties. It is no secret that "men of the night" are doing great business while holding on to respectable day jobs. The world's oldest profession has become "enlightened" to banish sexual discrimination in admitting members.

Married men and women are equally open to temptations. (According to reports, the woman in the teacher-student sex scandal is married with two kids.) While we do from time to time read sensational news of debauched sexual relationship, juicy news that excites journalists, the good news is that statistically, the majority of men and women are faithful to their spouses.

“Nothing is more noble, nothing more venerable than fidelity. Faithfulness and truth are the most sacred excellences and endowments of the human mind.” –  
Marcus Tullius Cicero

While sexual escapades affecting the minority are to be condemned, are we justified to condemn the sinners? If you answer YES, you have to beware that the answer will backfire on you when, much as you do not wish to entertain the thought, one day such a contemptuous sin knocks on your door in an unwary moment, whether a direct hit on you personally or indirectly “by proxy” through someone within a close circle. The big HOPE is that such things do not happen, God be merciful, but if we are prepared for the worst with the correct answer of a big-hearted NO to the above question, we will get to have the best state of affairs possible no matter what. In a short while, I shall drive home this point by a real example. (I hate the sin of paparazzi for their scandalous swiftness to run down the lives of their targets, but I do pray that the paparazzi will know their own shame and therefore are forgivable as we look to them to change their way, to do their job of reporting sans melodrama.)

Occasionally, we hear touching news of forgiveness: “Husband forgives unfaithful wife” or “Wife forgives straying husband”. Where there is shame felt by the sinner, he/she can’t be that wicked to be unforgiveable. Only *the unrighteous know no shame*. (Zeph. 3:5) So one who has sinned and feels shame cannot be out-and-out hopeless. When one has sinned, it is consoling to be forgiven. *Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.*” (Ps.32:1) Within marriage, as an acknowledgement of the vow “To have and to hold, for better or worse ... to love and to cherish, till death do us part,” forgiveness is great to both the giver and the recipient, and is to be encouraged for the sake of Christ’s love for us, for the sake of helping him/her who has fallen and is in the moment of greatest need for comforting and strength to stand up and walk straight again.

Some 15 years ago, I had the privilege of advising a couple who were adamant on divorce because of the husband’s adultery and his inability to

bear a serious conflict of character with his wife. Young children were involved in the sorry state of marital break-up. Thankfully, after prolonged effort with professional counselling, the couple agreed to make up. The husband gave up his adulterous relationship. Today, the children have all grown up well and the family is as normal as other happy families. Would the family have been better off without love and forgiveness in such a challenging time of emotional turbulence when a common “natural instinct” is to punish the “unforgiveable” sinner as much as he deserves instead of taking objective separate looks at the sin and the sinner?

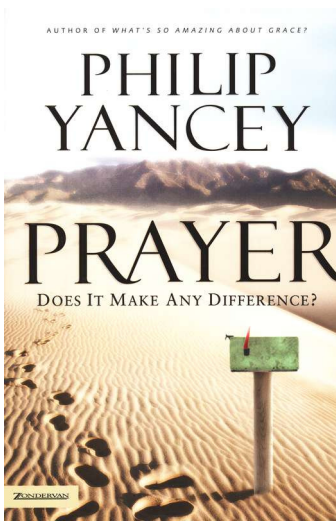
Good though forgiveness is to give and receive, it is not available to those who remain wicked in the sin (know no shame). Even to those who repent whereby the forgiveness is given, the sin committed is not without price. David was forgiven for his adultery with Bathsheba, but he lost his child from the adulterous relationship. (II Sam. 12:13-14) There are those who commit sexual sin and are forgiven, but they live with the agony of a chronic disease or psychological scar. In the real case I mentioned above of the marital break-up that was avoided, the husband did pay a heavy price – he suffered a heavy blow on his career directly as a result of his adultery. He left his stable job as a consequence of his moral blight. He learnt his lesson. By his repentance, it still took some years of wandering in his career wilderness before he had the opportunity to return to his former stable job. Now he enjoys a stable family life with his wife and grown-up children.

Back to the question I asked above with YES or NO answer, would you change your answer regarding condemning the sin or hanging the sinner? I believe that if anyone does a research on the outcomes of decisions in settling excruciating relationship problems arising out of sexual sin, repentance (knowing shame) cum forgiveness (founded on genuine love, not by compulsion or expediency) present the best chance for return to normality even if it takes time to walk the painful journey. On the other hand, without repentance or forgiveness, the relationship hostility drags on and grows appendages to become more knotty to unravel.

The big HOPE mentioned above is still the HOPE everyone desires. If it is not to be an empty hope, then abide by what Paul said to the Thessalonians, “... that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister.” (1 Thess. 4:4-5, NIV)

***JOHN LEE***

## PRAYER – DOES IT MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE?



There is a portion in this book by Philip Yancey which goes like this:

### **A Leap of Trust**

*I may go through a period when it feels as if God is absent, but if God were truly absent everything in the universe would cease to exist. I have learned to recognize that I am going through a particular season, and try not to judge reality based on how I am feeling right now.*

*He quotes Martin Luther: "When we try to dictate to God the time, place, and manner for him to act, we are testing him. At the same time, we're trying to see if he is really there. Doing that is putting limits on*

*God and trying to make him do what we want. It's nothing less than trying to deprive God of his divinity. But we must realize that God is free – not subject to any limitations. He must dictate to us the place, manner, and time.*

*I used to wonder how I could muster up more faith. I yearned for the kind of faith that Jesus remarked on with approval, the faith that readily believes in miracles. Alas, I never found it. I found instead a realistic faith that developed as a by-product of spending time with God. I came to trust God, even trusting that God's will is the best way for me, though rarely the easiest.*

*Prayer invites us to rest in the fact that God is in control, and the world's problems are ultimately God's, not ours.*

If you have the chance, read the book, it is only 319 pages thin. Yancey explores the questions surrounding prayer that you may wonder about but not know how to express. He shows you how to pray to a God who sees what lies ahead of you, knows what lies within you, and who invites you into an eternal partnership with Him---through prayer.





## FAMILY TIME AT THE GARDENS BY THE BAY

Sept 1 – About 200 participants in four buses went on a trip to Gardens by the Bay. According to Murphy's Law, if anything can go wrong, it will. So, if you were not there, what do you think could have gone wrong?

With such a big group raring to go, chaos reigned. Even before setting off, there was a big problem with the food distribution, whereby some had to go without the packed food for dinner. We set off from the Church at 5p.m. When we reached our destination, our big group added to the huge crowd already there. Everybody wandered off in their own directions. Some got lost in the big expanse of the Gardens. At 8.30 p.m. when all were supposed to gather at the bus boarding area, the place was dimly lit and panic ensued as the buses could not wait while there were still missing persons. Finally, a few had to miss the buses and we prayed that they would get home safely on their own.

Ha-ha-ha ... I have just pulled your leg. With due respect to Murphy for his Law, nothing of the sort of disaster above-described actually happened. Thank God that He blessed with good weather and journey mercy, and enabled everyone to have a great day of relaxing walk around the Bay South Outdoor Gardens after tucking in a nice mouthwatering packed dinner with fruit and water included. The dinner was handed out before the trip, and there was more than enough for all. In fact, we generously gave out the extra packs to sundry visitors at the park so as not to waste the food. It was a free-and-easy outing with dozens of the participants being non-members of JCC from our neighbourhood. We can tell the satisfaction on the faces of the young folks and senior citizens. The Gardens were very well equipped with lots of sitting places spread throughout with great accessibility for those seniors who needed rest. Everyone started the outing cheerfully and returned home safely in the chartered buses. Thanks to God once again!

How did the organizing committee manage to pull off such a feat of managing such a large group with a wide age range with composure? The large group was subdivided into smaller groups with a leader each, and all participants were very cooperative



with their punctuality both at the start of the outing and at its end when all gathered for the trip home. Despite minor hiccups (for e.g., inability to gather the full group for a photo-taking session), all went well in the cool air of the evening as the sun hid its face. My mother (80+ years old) and sister commented that the dinner was good; I thought, better must be my mother's unspoken contentment of being taken out for a tranquil walk by her children. All elderly folks are like this; they enjoy the company of their children for such outings. So for the young ones who are reading this, you know who to invite for JCC's next outing. Don't forget to sign up yourself first and, if you sense God's will for you to be a help to the committee, be raring to go for it.

Cheers to the organizing committee and all helpers for a trip well organized!



*JOHN LEE*

### **CHEERFUL, HELPFUL AND OUTSTANDING SERVICE**

John sees the cup half full. Unfortunately, I see the cup half empty. There was a lot of co-ordination hiccups. The Outreach team were so overwhelmed at the registration that there was no one to manage the crowd in the MPH. Unprepared Dialect team members were called up to sing an unfamiliar dialect song without musical accompaniment. The games could not get off the ground because the teams could not be formed properly. Thankfully, the leaders were very responsible in ensuring everyone was in the right bus.



At the Gardens by the Bay, everyone went their own way. Occasionally we run into each other while strolling in the Gardens.



What men cannot do, God can. He provided us with fine weather and a cool breeze. He provided a miracle that no one got lost in the garden and all made it safely back to JCC. I am sure if anyone got lost, the leaders would not be



able to find them because it is relatively dark at 8.30 pm.

Praises to the Outreach Team who managed an overwhelming crowd single-handedly.

*Martin Cheah*



## THANKS TO OUTREACH TEAM

Thanks for organising this event, many challenges (crowd control, programs, logistics, transportation, seeds sowing, follow up, etc). Despite all the challenges the Outreach team did well and I am sure will review and overcome shortcomings from feedbacks for future events for Outreach of this kind of size.





We are thankful that there are responses to our Flyer distribution from the block we visited. I will convey this to our Cell Group as an encouragement for future outreach programs.

Tony Koh



## A Modern Robin Hood

I want to be a modern Robin Hood – robbing the rich to give to the poor. No, I actually mean robbing the super-rich (in the billionaire class), not the ordinary rich; so the latter need not worry about my presence.



There is nothing wrong with robbing the super-rich not for my own gain, but in the name of charity. You see, I have no intention of harming my targets – financially or otherwise – in robbing them of their excess wealth which, most likely, they have no use for in this world after all. Think of the multi-billionaires of the past – Were they able to take their wealth to the grave with them? They were billionaires before kicking the bucket, but where did their billions go to when they bade farewell to the world? Some were frittered away; some ended up as fodder for court-fights over inheritance and therefore a large part of it ended up in the pockets of attorneys; and, at least better, were those that went into charitable foundations.

Ah ... nothing bad at all for the riches to go to charity. In similar vein, surely the philanthropists among the wealthy wouldn't, or shouldn't, take any offence with a little of my charitable uninvited help to distribute just a small fraction of their wealth? There are so many deprived people in so many corners of the world that without the help of me and similar-minded modern Robin Hoods, it would be impossible for the super-rich philanthropists to reach all who badly need the alms. As for those super-rich who are non-philanthropists but wealth hoarders who just enjoy the feel of their thumbs rubbing on fresh banknotes or the weight of gold making the presence of their moneybags safe in their knowledge, I don't think they would feel the pinch of a small deficit at the time of their passing; they would still have an abundance to smell and dispose of as their valuable legacy in whatever way they wish.

I read the news (The Jakarta Post, Mon Sep 03) that riots broke out in Binjai (North Sumatra) when a 30-year-old modern-day Robin Hood was arrested by the police. The Internet café that was robbed by the Robin Hood had its computers set alight by the mob. Even a police station was attacked – my goodness! What violence had the “charitable spirit” of the “Robin Hood” brewed?

Does the end justify the means? To answer YES would mean that I can justify my “Robin Hoodism” on the basis of the utilitarianism of my acts; likewise, it becomes justifiable other actions with so-called benevolent intentions – euthanasia, eugenics, lying, etc. – whereby there would be no need for laws to define the boundaries of organized social behavior; or there would be laws but a

dichotomy of offenders called good outlaws and bad outlaws. Social orderliness would turn on its head.

St. Thomas Aquinas answered NO to the question. He said this: "An evil action cannot be justified by reference to a good intention," which is the same as saying that the end does not justify the means.

One may try defending the modern Robin Hood by adopting the concept of social justice. It is the kind of defence that may be available to President Obama when he faces attacks from some Americans who accuse him of being the modern Robin Hood who takes from the rich and gives to the poor. But President Obama, having governmental authority on his shoulders, is a different kind of modern Robin Hood (if his accusers are right to bestow on him the name-tag). With reference to the Bible, while God is the ultimate Authority, man is bound to heed human authority (Rom. 13:1-7). So if President Obama is a "Robin Hood", he is a justifiable one even if I am not persuaded that it is justifiable for him to have the Robin Hood tag in the first place.

As I write this article, starting with a declaration that I want to be a modern Robin Hood, my thought undergoes a process of evolution and I cannot help being drawn to the opinion of the great theologian Thomas Aquinas (mentioned above) and to the Bible.

To be a modern Robin Hood is in part to do charity, to care for the poor. This charity idea is in accord with holy teaching:

- Heb. 13:16 exhorts, "Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.
- Luke 12:33 instructs, "Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.

I realize that the Bible says "share what you have" and "sell your possessions"; it never says, "share what you do not have" or "rob the super-rich to give to the poor."

In fact, God's 10<sup>th</sup> Commandment warns us not to covet our neighbour's house ... or anything that is our neighbour's. (Ex. 20:17)

So now, coming to the end of this article, my thought has evolved to become: I want to be a version of the modern Robin Hood – one whose charitable deeds do square with biblical principles, NOT robbing the super-rich to give to the poor. So my super-rich friends who got ruffled when starting to read this article can now be unruffled that I do not covet my neighbour's wealth. ☺



**JOHN LEE**



### Congratulations to new GrandFather, RONNIE LIM.

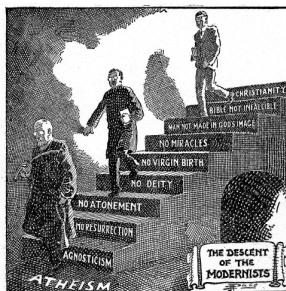


We hope to read his testimony about the trials and joys of being a first time grandfather.

Ronnie has promised to put pen to paper soon.

Cartoons can really make you laugh and think with just a few words.

Here are some samples off the Internet.



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"It says on your résumé that you were created in God's image. Very impressive."

# GARDENS BY THE BAY

<http://youtu.be/XZB4jKz3WKQ>



see story inside...

