

The Vine Committee

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Christmas is only twenty-five days away. If the Christmas issue of The Vine is to be out in time, I only have a very short time to collate relevant articles for that issue. I always thought that

The Vine could be used as

an evangelistic tool, to be handed out at Christmas to visitors who come but once a year. Filled with testimonies and evangelistic articles so that our guests will want to be our family members. Do you have a testimony of God's

grace and blessing in your life to share, perhaps God's protection during a holiday or an overseas assignment, a blessing received at work or at home, blessings of God's providence, eg. an unexpected result, healing, promotion, whatever. Learn to count your blessings.

I notice that many share their testimonies in Facebook so that the whole world may know. Do you put a link in Facebook to tell the world that you are from JCC? How will they know unless you put your testimonies in The Vine – a publication of Jurong Christian Church?

Are you preparing now for Christmas? Should you be preparing for Christ first coming or His second coming? There are so many disasters in the region that I wonder how the people affected can celebrate Christ first coming. They would probably prefer to look forward to Christ second coming to bring them home, to a place where *"there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain."* (Rev 21:4)

There is nothing much we can do for all the people in pain but to pray for them. However, where we can help, we do - LWM Flood Relief in Cambodia 2013.

Lutheran World Mission (LWM) deployed its first flood relief team on Oct 18 at the request of Kg Chhnang Province Disaster Committee. God was with

LWM during the relief effort to about 1,200 people in 2 villages - 45 mins and 1.5 hours by boat from Kg Chhnang town centre: Koh Keo village (176 Families) and Kam Pong Ri'Eang village (106 families)

Each family of the affected villages received a 20kg sack of rice (total 5700 kg) with cans of sardines and a tract that tells about the love of God. The event was well organized by the local community leaders and the distribution to representative of each family was carried out smoothly and effectively.

After the trip, the LWM team gathered together for a time of thanksgiving to God with many testimonies shared by the youths.

LWM will continue to monitor the flood situation to see if a second relief effort is necessary to other villages. Please remember to pray for those affected in Cambodia and elsewhere.

A colleague of mine just retired after twenty over years of service. Before he left, we gave him a rousing farewell party where about 5 crates of beer were consumed. Actually, that was a rather tame quantity of beer. After all that cheering and toasting, on the actual day of his leaving, it was a very quiet affair. He just walked out of the room and that was it. Before he left, he gave me an early Christmas present – a book written by his pastor, Joseph Prince. I am about half way through the book already. What I am trying to say here is how I wish I have the same opportunity to give to others books written by my pastor. Unfortunately, Lutheran pastors don't write books, articles or tracts.



So I ended up giving him a photo frame with some of the photos which I took of the party that night. Just a side note, I had to have steady hands to hold the camera, so no drinking for me.

Martin Cheah

SINGAPORE – THE “ANTIOCH” OF ASIA?

Here is some news which was brought to my knowledge¹:

- Singapore’s average wealth per adult is currently US\$282000 (5th in the world)



- The number of high-net -worth individuals in Singapore is expected to rise 58% by 2017.

- Assets under management across Singapore hit a record high of US\$1.29 trillion.



Wealth is flowing to Singapore like a high tide. These are some of the suggested reasons: A shift away from Switzerland, the strong Singdollar, economic growth and our attractive tax rates.

Of course, the economic and political push factors at work in other countries complement the pull factors Singapore possess in attracting to our shores a crowd of well-heeled people who come to invest their wealth, and also another crowd of wealth-deprived who come here plainly to seek livelihoods.

As wealth and people continue their shifts to Singapore, this little red dot increases its prominence as a congregating place. There are claims that Singapore is going to be (or has already become) the “Antioch” of Asia – where evangelism is at the doorstep.

Here is a brief explanation of what it means to be the “Antioch” of Asia:

- Antioch (a populous city of ancient Syria) was where Paul set off on his missionary journeys across the vast Roman Empire. It was

¹ <http://sbr.com.sg/financial-services/commentary/why-worlds-ultra-rich-are-flocking-singapore-right-now>

a rich commercial centre geographically well-located on the trade routes between East and West. Singapore, as “Antioch of Asia”, is therefore presumed to be able to accommodate an effective use of its similarly well-endowed geographical location and commercial setting as a staging ground for Christians to reach out to the world.

- Antioch was often regarded as the finest metropolis with a cosmopolitan composition and a benign climate. According to a study commissioned by Siemens a few years ago, Singapore is “Asia’s greenest metropolis”. Our cosmopolitan nature with many races rubbing shoulders with one another and a climate devoid of natural disasters are a good parallel to Antioch.

Many other parallels have been drawn to compare Singapore with Antioch, such as in the church’s multiethnic character and the spreading of the Christian message transcending cultures. Here in Singapore, and here in JCC, can you identify the multiethnic and multicultural mix of our worshippers?

Singapore is situated away from the earthquake belt, with the nearest tectonic fault line hundreds of kilometres away. As “a little red dot”, it is so well-shielded by land masses that tsunamis don’t reach our shores and typhoons don’t bother us. We are in a good climatic and geographic location. IT IS NOT OUR CHOICE. It is the way God blesses us. Ancient Antioch too was a blessed place ... BUT, instead of staying its God-given mission of reaching out – in and from a culturally dynamic staging ground to spread the love of Christ Jesus – the people of Antioch later woefully drifted off-course. One may say that there were the positive influences of the earlier strong and faithful leaders overcoming the rejections of many who were finally won over and united by the Truth of One Salvation in Jesus despite ethnic diversities; but then, negative influences continued to exist as crosswinds in a complex milieu with new generations of worshippers of fun, freedom and mammon wresting the initiatives away from weaker members of the church. In time, corruption and wickedness put paid to Antioch’s missionary progress and the city faded in prominence as great disasters visited. A blessed place became struck by warfare and earthquakes. Even the blessing of a great geographical location for trade was taken away when conquerors altered the original trade routes.

I remember coming across this question, “If a fly falls into holy water, does the fly become holy or the water become defiled?”

No, I don't believe in “holy water” or give a hoot to the tinge of sarcasm that some might see in the playful question. What I see is a reference to a touchy meeting of opposing influences – a positive inspiration towards achieving holiness contrasting with the counter-inducement to go the way of the world. The followers of Jesus were first called Christians in Antioch but, from the account in Acts 11:19-30, we know that spreading the good news about the Lord Jesus was never a cakewalk for the faithful in the Church. It was fraught with great challenges and perceivably there were believers who fell.

St. Ignatius of Antioch, who lived around the time (before or after) the Acts of the Apostles uttered:

“It is not that I want merely to be called a Christian, but to actually be one. Yes, if I prove to be one, then I can have the name...Come fire, cross, battling with wild beasts, wrenching of bones, mangling of limbs, crushing of my whole body, cruel tortures of the Devil--Only let me get to Jesus Christ!”

“Pray without ceasing on behalf of other men...For cannot he that falls rise again?”

Antioch was a blessed place, but a blessed place was still not utopia; there were dissensions within the Christian community (Acts 15:1-35; Gal. 2:11-15) and there were oppositions without. Actually, opposition to the Word of God is always to be expected, because people covet their own desires. The Bible itself says so, “People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God — having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people.” (2 Timothy 3:2-5)

Therefore, even if Singapore does become the modern-day “Antioch” of Asia, an outreach hub, Christians cannot afford to be doe-eyed oblivious to the undercurrents and crosswinds of opposing influences. We may be shielded from punishing climatic winds and physical Earth's violent quakes of wrath, but we ignore to our peril the tidal waves of materialism that rush

to our shores and the potential “underground eruption” (metaphorically) arising out of the build-up of pressures. In the absence of a utopian condition, will the sins of the mammon worshippers contaminate the morally upright and turn virtues into wickedness and corruption that feed back into a system in decline in an evil cycle? Perhaps we can have a hopeful outlook that great leaders are born when facing tough and encouraging challenges and, instead of an infelicitous degeneration, we have respectable progress as more lambs are gathered and they mature into rams and ewes ready to feed their spiritual growth back into shepherding new sheep in a virtuous cycle.

There is no fly falling into non-existent holy water. However, a contest of worldviews was real in ancient Antioch as it is going to be serious in a modern “Antioch” of Asia. Have no fear to grapple with the challenge with boldness, but also do so with thoughtfulness. Be prepared, not to rush in naked – “Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” (Eph 6:10-12)



“In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” (Eph 6:14-18)

JOHN LEE

JCCCK

The Jurong Christian Church Kindergarten had its graduation day on 26th October.

As one batch of “old students” leave us for primary schools next year, we shall be welcoming a new batch of little tots to fill the vacated places.



Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it. (Proverbs 22:6)



Year in and year out, the teaching and non-teaching staffs work hard to take care of these precious kids. Time passes by and the existing staff members will grow old and retire, but they will look back fondly with smiles in their faces and thoughts about how the kids would have grown up to be useful citizens and leaders of tomorrow in whatever places they will be called to serve.

Take a look at the long lines of eager parents on graduation day.

It is obvious that the parents are as excited as the staff and graduating kids on the important occasion. “Great opportunities to help others seldom come, but small ones surround us daily.” – Sally Koch



Everyone we reach out to and help is a priceless gift of God. We give thanks to God for his blessings of such opportunities (even if they are small ones).

May God continue to bless the faithful staff and church volunteers who are always ready to be a blessing to the parents and the kids.

JOHN LEE

An article from an Internet source.....

CATCHING FIRE by Jim Cymbala

Upon my return from a short, restful trip, I greeted the people of my congregation with something important on my heart.

“Brothers and sisters,” I began, “I really feel that I’ve heard from God about the future of our church. While I was away, I was calling out to God to help us—to help me—understand what He wants most from us. And I believe I’ve heard an answer.

“It’s not fancy or profound or spectacular. But I want to say to you today with all the seriousness I can muster: From this day on, the prayer meeting will be the barometer of our church. What happens on Tuesday night will be the gauge by which we will judge success or failure because that will be the measure by which God blesses us.

“If we call upon the Lord, He has promised in His Word to answer, to bring the unsaved to Himself, to pour out His Spirit among us. If we don’t call upon the Lord, He has promised nothing—nothing at all. It’s as simple as that. No matter what I preach or what we claim to believe in, the future will depend upon our times of prayer.

“This is the engine that will drive the church. Yes, I want you to keep coming on Sundays—but Tuesday night is what it’s really all about.”

A minister from Australia (or perhaps it was New Zealand) happened to be present that morning—a rare occurrence. After I introduced him and invited him to say a few words, he walked to the front and made just one comment:

“I heard what your pastor said. Here’s something to think about: You can tell how popular a church is by who comes on Sunday morning. You can tell how popular the pastor or evangelist is by who comes on Sunday night. But you can tell how popular Jesus is by who comes to the **prayer meeting**.”

And with that he walked off the platform. That was all. I never saw him again.

Stand up to your Boss

In last month's issue of The Vine, I referred to the story of Daniel's three friends in relation to standing up for Christ even if your life depended on it. It is highly unlikely that any of us may be placed in such a situation. However, in our jobs, we may sometimes have to stand up to the Boss especially when we are expected to do some things against our conscience or beliefs.

My dear friend, James Sum, used to share many interesting anecdotes in our CG. Once he shared about a wise salesman who bribed his customers to get their business. The boss, although he knew about the tactic, was very happy with the salesman's ability to improve the business. Then James asked, "What if it was the other way around. The salesman accepts bribes from people?"



Do we sometimes bend the rules, tell a white lie or two, alter the figures so that it hits the targets set, to please the Boss? Why? Your life is not on the line although your job may be.

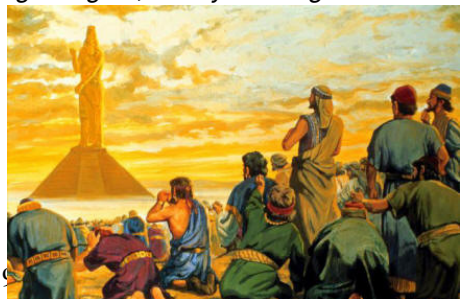
Daniel's three friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had to stand up to the Boss, King Nebuchadnezzar, when he wanted them to comply to his rules, which was against their beliefs. They refused and they were fired. However they were saved by God and eventually, they received a promotion instead.

If you are ever in such a situation, think about this story. I have included the full text of this story below for your edification.

Daniel Chapter 3

¹ King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, ninety feet high and nine feet wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.

² He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up. ³ So the



satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it.

THE TEST

⁴ Then the herald loudly proclaimed, "This is what you are commanded to do, O peoples, nations and men of every language: ⁵ As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. ⁶ Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace."

⁷ Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations and men of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

SERVING ONLY GOD

⁸ At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. ⁹ They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever! ¹⁰ You have issued a decree, O king, that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, ¹¹ and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. ¹² But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon--Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego--who pay no attention to you, O king. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up."



¹³ Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, ¹⁴ and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? ¹⁵

Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do

not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?"

ASSURANCE

¹⁶ *Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. ¹⁷ If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. ¹⁸ But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."*

FIRED FOR GOD

¹⁹ *Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual ²⁰ and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. ²¹ So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. ²² The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, ²³ and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.*



²⁴ *Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?" They replied, "Certainly, O king."*

²⁵ *He said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods."*

²⁶ *Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!"*

So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire,²⁷ and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.

²⁸ Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God.²⁹ Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way."

PROMOTED

³⁰ Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

Observation

In verse 16, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were very confident that God can save them from the fire. However they were not presumptuous. They also believed that God's will is best for them. Even if they were burnt to death, it will be according to God's will for them, not because He could not save them.

Sometimes when bad things happen to us, we must still trust that our Father in Heaven has everything under control. Only when we are on the other side of the problem will we be able to look back and see God's hand in all our steps.

So when we pray, we trust in God's power to bless but we must accept God's will for our life. Sometimes we pray so positively that we leave no room for God to exercise His Will. When we don't name it and claim it, is it lack of faith on our part when we pray that God's Will be done?

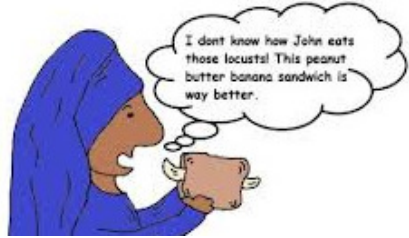
Thy Will be done on Earth.....

Martin Cheah

WHAT CAN WE EAT?

There are religions that forbid their followers from eating certain foods. We know, of course, that Muslims don't eat pork. In other words, pork is haraam (forbidden), not halal (permissible).

According to the Qu'ran, "Prohibited to you are dead animals, blood, the flesh of swine, and ... (Al-Ma'idah 5:3)² (*underlining mine*)



Orthodox Jews also do not eat pork. In other words, pork is not kosher; i.e., consuming pork is against Jewish dietary law. From where did the Jews derive their dietary law against pork? Here is what we can find in the Jewish Torah :

Vayikra – Leviticus

Chapter 11

1 And HaShem spoke unto Moses and to Aaron, saying unto them:

2 Speak unto the children of Israel, saying: These are the living things which ye may eat among all the beasts that are on the earth. 3 Whatsoever parteth the hoof, and is wholly cloven-footed, and cheweth the cud, among the beasts, that may ye eat. 4 Nevertheless these shall ye not eat of them that only chew the cud, or of them that only part the hoof: the camel, because he cheweth the cud but parteth not the hoof, he is unclean unto you. 5 And the rock-badger ... 6 And the hare ...

7 And the swine, because he parteth the hoof, and is cloven-footed, but cheweth not the cud, he is unclean unto you. 8 Of their flesh ye shall not eat, and their carcasses ye shall not touch; they are unclean unto you.

(<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Bible/Leviticus11.html>)

The Jewish Torah is the same as the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, which Christians also read.

The Church of the Seventh-day Adventists too discourage (or disapprove of) the eating of pork and other meats that are proscribed in Leviticus. Interestingly, the Muslims who abide by the Qu'ran, the Jews who stand by the Torah and those who profess the Christian faith and advocate the Old Testament "food regulation" have some similarity of views on a number of food prohibitions.

I know a small number of Christians within mainstream Christian denominations who have concerns about eating pork whether all the time or only during the

² <http://quran.com/5/3>

Lenten season of penitence, and they cite the following verses of New Testament Scripture to explain their dietary hesitation towards consuming the “unclean” swine:

- Matt. 8:31 (The connection between demons and swine)
- Matt. 7:6 (Swine being treated as contemptible)

In my humble opinion, the above Gospel verses might have been “overly interpreted” to disfavour swine as food. If there is a case to quote our Lord Jesus, then let me quote Jesus’ declaration that all foods are clean:

“Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, ‘Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them.’ After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. ‘Are you so dull?’ he asked. ‘Don’t you see that nothing that enters a person from the outside can defile them? For it doesn’t go into their heart but into their stomach, and then out of the body.’ (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.)” – Mark 7:14-19

Concerning food sacrificed to idols, Apostle Paul stated very clearly without equivocation:



“Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that ‘We all possess knowledge.’ But knowledge puffs up while love builds up. Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know. But whoever loves God is known

by God.

So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that ‘An idol is nothing at all in the world’ and that ‘There is no God but one.’ For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

But not everyone possesses this knowledge. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat sacrificial food they think of it as having been sacrificed to a god, and since their conscience is weak, it is

defiled. But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.” (1 Cor. 1-8)

How about consuming the blood of animals? This is much more sensitive than the issue regarding other foods because “blood is life” and the issue of life is surely not to be taken blithely. Christians who intensely oppose the eating of animal blood share a similar scrupulousness with the Jews and Muslims in heeding the stern warnings of Scripture. In the context of the Church, I shall refer to the Law of Moses:

Leviticus 17:10-12

¹⁰If any man of the house of Israel or of the strangers that sojourn among them eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people.

¹¹For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it for you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement, by reason of the life.

¹²Therefore I have said to the people of Israel, No person among you shall eat blood, neither shall any stranger who sojourns among you eat blood.

Deuteronomy 12:23-24

²³Only be sure that you do not eat the blood; for the blood is the life, and you shall not eat the life with the flesh.

²⁴You shall not eat it; you shall pour it out upon the earth like water.

This Law is strict indeed! However, there are Christian opinions that this does not apply in the Christian age. These opinions contend that in the OT time, blood offering was desired by God; but now, Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, has fulfilled the Law of Moses on blood sacrifice and so blood or animal sacrifice is no longer practised. Evaluate also the following arguments:

- The Old Covenant has been superseded by the New Covenant. Jesus is the high priest of the New Covenant (ref. subject heading of Heb.

8). The high priests of the Old Covenant did what they had to do. This is why Moses was warned to follow God's instruction. (v. 5) "But in fact the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, since the new covenant is established on better promises." (v. 6) The Old Covenant is obsolete. (v. 13) "How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!" (Heb. 9:14)

- Christians are not required to keep the (ceremonial and civil) Law of Moses³. This is not to say that the Law has been destroyed and we are free to sin; rather, the Law has been fulfilled by Jesus and all intents of the Law will still be accomplished (Matt. 5:17-18) in a different way – through Christ as we now live under grace (Rom. 6:14) and eschew sin by our love (instead of fear) as embodied in the Greatest Commandment and the Second Greatest Commandment on which all the Law and the Prophets now hang (Matt. 22:36-40) Clearly no one who relies on the Law is justified before God, because 'the righteous will live by faith.' (Gal. 3:11) Having been redeemed from under the Law by Jesus (Gal. 4:4-5), who then still want to be under the Law with its onerous provisions and penalties? (Gal. 4:21)

While arguments against the eating of animal blood mainly centre on the proscriptions in the OT, which are direct and unequivocal, the sticky debate between different groups is regarding whether we in the NT era are subject to them. I have no doubt about what the OT says, but I have not been able to find any source that can convincingly persuade me about the Law's applicability to the Church today. Be this as it may, my ears are still open to hear views and I cannot claim that my understanding of Scripture on this issue is final and will not undergo further maturing.

Meanwhile, it is an undeniable reality that there are differences of views and we have to bear with such differences in our social discourses and Christian fellowship. We can't wish the differences away by either challenging one view or acquiescing to another. If you are personally seriously concerned, you need to seek God for an answer with prayerful meditation on His Word. The outcome of your serious inquiry may be that you have the bonus of extending your understanding into other related issues. Apart from Leviticus and Deuteronomy, Gen. 9:4, 1 Tim

³ This is not referring to the Ten Commandments.

4:1-4, Acts 10:9-16 and the “answer” at <http://gospelplan.com/questions/Question-274.html> are worth a study.

If you subscribe to the idea that all foods are clean and are clear in conscience that this does not contradict our Lord (Mk 7:18-19), you should still not take liberty to disrespect the dietary reservations of your friends, be they Christians or non-Christians. So if a Muslim friend were to be your guest, you shall respectfully avoid serving him a haraam (forbidden) meal. If you are in the presence of a Christian who has an aversion towards certain foods, then you shall heed the sound advice of Apostle Paul while exercising your rights and applying your knowledge:

- *“Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. For if someone with a weak conscience sees you, with all your knowledge, eating in an idol’s temple, won’t that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols? So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall.” – 1 Cor. 8:9-13*
- *“Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.” – Rom. 14:13*

This advice of Paul is appropriate whether you eat everything or do not eat everything:

“Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarrelling over disputable matters. One person’s faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.” (Rom 14:1-4)

In giving the lecture to the Pharisees about “That Which Defiles” (Mark 7), our Lord did criticise them for the hypocritical ways in which they purveyed their ideas about following traditions. My takeaway from the Lord’s instruction is that

as Christians, we ought to focus right on the spiritual “cleanness” by our conduct, watchful of all these evils that come from inside (Mark 7:21-22), instead of getting ourselves and our relationships with one another overwrought over the physical things that go into our mouth and come out at the other end of the alimentary canal.

A tedious abidance by the Law without making distinctions between their elemental precepts (ceremonial, moral and judicial)⁴ with their current relevance would be tantamount to unreservedly undercutting the preponderant New Covenant of the Gospel that our Lord Jesus Christ has delivered to us. A distinction between Law and Gospel underpins the evangelical Lutheran doctrine:

- Apology of the Augsburg Confession (1531) – “All Scripture ought to be distributed into these two principal topics, the Law and the promises. For in some places it presents the Law, and in others the promise concerning Christ, namely, either when [in the Old Testament] it promises that Christ will come, and offers, for His sake, the remission of sins, justification, and life eternal, or when, in the Gospel [in the New Testament], Christ Himself, since He has appeared, promises the remission of sins, justification, and life eternal.”
- Formula of Concord (Article V) – “We believe, teach, and confess that the distinction between the Law and the Gospel is to be maintained in the Church with great diligence ...”

Martin Luther said in his sermon⁵:

“We will regard Moses as a teacher, but we will not regard him as our lawgiver - unless he agrees with both the New Testament and the natural law.”⁶

I am sharing my thoughts on this topic because the issue of what to eat and what not to eat will surface from time to time in interactions among Christians and also between them and their non-Christian friends at social or festive gatherings where

⁴ The traditional Reformed theology also agrees that this three-fold division of the Law is taught in the Word of God. (<http://www.christian.org.uk/wp-content/downloads/the-threefold-division-of-the-law.pdf>)

⁵ On Aug 27, 1525: <http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/LutherMoses.htm>

⁶ Martin Luther did not reject the moral law, which is in the Ten Commandments.

they cannot avoid being with one another in front of food. Sensitivity to each other is mutual as we seek God to find a resolution to the debates. Pray for one another for wisdom to meditate.



Shalom!

JOHN LEE

MORE QUOTATIONS OF MARTIN LUTHER

Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that a man could stake his life on it a thousand times.

Prayer is a strong wall and fortress of the church; it is a goodly Christian weapon.

I have held many things in my hands, and I have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God's hands, that I still possess.

All who call on God in true faith, earnestly from the heart, will certainly be heard, and will receive what they have asked and desired.

We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone.

If you want to change the world, pick up your pen and write.

You are not only responsible for what you say, but also for what you do not say.

WHEN IS JESUS CHRIST COMING AGAIN?

PAT ROBERTSON

Nobody can say with any degree of certainty when Jesus is coming again, because He said clearly that even the angels in heaven do not know that day (see Mark 13:32). No man knows that day, and the Son of God, when He was on the earth, did not know either. This knowledge, the Lord Jesus said, was strictly reserved for the Father.

We can see certain signs, or clues (see Matthew 24:3, Luke 21:7), that His coming is approaching. Jesus said there would be wars and rumors of wars, revolutions, widespread famine, disease, and earthquakes in many different places (see Matthew 24:6-7, Luke 21:10-11). There would be an increase of lawlessness and anarchy. The apostle Paul said, "That day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God" (II Thessalonians 2:3-4). Along with the "man of sin" will come what is called an apostasy, or a falling away. Many of the believing people will grow cold in their faith (see Matthew 24:12). There will be persecution of Christians and a time of general trouble.

I think all these things are happening with increasing frequency.

Another event that had to happen before Jesus could return was the re-establishment of the state of Israel. The original Israel disappeared from the globe hundreds of years ago. In 1948 a new state of Israel was established. The regathering of Jews to Israel is a clear sign, in both the Old and New Testaments, that our age is just about over. Jesus said, "Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Luke 21:24). On June 6, 1967, the Jews, for the first time since Jerusalem was captured by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C., took over control of the entire city of Jerusalem, thus signaling the approaching end of Gentile world power.

Jesus said, however, that the one major thing which would herald His coming would be the proclamation of the gospel. He said, "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14).

These are signs of the times. We are to hold ourselves always ready for our Lord's return. But nobody knows the day and hour when that will be.