

# “Here I (We) Stand!”

Imagine that you are a Christian burdened in your conscience by some truth that by conventional prudence is best kept in your heart to “keep the peace”. Would you really be at peace with the conviction hidden in your heart while the people around you are at peace with your tacit understanding to keep your belief to yourself?

## Martin Luther

Centuries ago, Martin Luther was confronted with the message from the church that doing good works – among other things, the purchase of indulgence – would earn oneself a path to salvation. That was a wrong teaching. As a monk subservient to the Pope, he could either keep silent or speak up. Despite the sensitivity of the matter – a major preaching of the church – he chose to speak up. Now, these words “**Here I stand!**” have been famously attributed to Martin Luther for his devotion to the scriptural truth when challenged at the Diet of Worms<sup>1</sup> against the popular misinformation that Christians were fed by the church then.



Because of one man – Martin Luther – who stood by his spiritual conscience, “Salvation by Grace through Faith in Christ Alone” is now validated in the church today. Imagine how the perpetuation of the distorted church preaching on good works would have continued to this day if Martin Luther, and anybody else, just kept silent in acquiescence to the status quo that the church authority found comfortable with for all pragmatic considerations.

Making his stand on the truth, Martin Luther was not being rebellious against authority. As Bishop Terry Kee said last year at the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary commemoration of the Reformation, it was not Martin Luther’s intention to rebel against the church. He was only seeking dialogue on the truth that was weighing on his conscience.

Unfortunately, the people whom Martin Luther had wished would step up to the plate to peaceably discuss his ideas of truth failed to deal with them with desirable equanimity and courage. Instead, the imperial councillors at the Diet of Worms were single-minded not to have a proper discourse on the truth issue but to cast Martin Luther as an outlaw. It is apparent that the imperial councillors had their subjective or popular considerations that hindered them from a fair disposal of the case against Martin Luther.

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<sup>1</sup> Diet (a formal assembly) of Worms (an imperial city of the Roman Empire)

In short, Martin Luther was courageous in making his stand on the truth he strongly believed in; but the imperial councillors were an absolute contrast.

### Nicodemus

Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin, a Jewish religious court which was a very powerful ruling body much akin to the modern-day supreme court of the land. He was also a person learned in the Hebrew Scriptures, being called a teacher of Israel. (John 3:10)



Nicodemus seeks Christ

Nicodemus was confronted with the truth about Jesus Christ, the Messiah. However, he didn't possess the courage like that of Martin Luther who would boldly declare "**Here I stand!**" on the truth that was in his heart. Instead of approaching Jesus openly in the day, he came out furtively at night to acknowledge Jesus as

Rabbi:

*"Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him." – John 3:2 (KJV)*

Even if Nicodemus' belief in Jesus was partial, he was not like other Jewish leaders who were adamantly antagonistic of the Messiah. If he simply revealed his "half-belief" in Jesus in broad daylight, he would most likely be excommunicated from the synagogue (John 12:42) like Martin Luther was to become excommunicated from the church for an honest conviction with the truth. However, despite Nicodemus' lack of courage, he later did pull up some guts to defend Jesus before his peers (John 7:51) and even openly assisted in Jesus' burial (John 19:39), bringing with him a large quantity (75 pounds) of expensive myrrh and aloes fit for a king.

The worthy point about Nicodemus was that despite his initial reservation about openly asserting his nascent belief in Jesus, the Rabbi, he did later courageously stand up to the belief in his heart.

### Peter, the Apostle

Unlike Nicodemus who was with incomplete faith in Jesus during a large part of the latter's ministry, Peter was someone who followed Jesus from very early and became one of Jesus' foremost disciples. His faith in Jesus was exposed to all and for good reason he was anticipated to be the Rock of the church.



Peter did not exactly say "**Here I stand!**" but he did use very

strong words to boast about the depth of his faith in Jesus, words that were much more forceful than the words that Martin Luther would use. These were what he declared strongly to Jesus, no less:

*“Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.” – Matt. 26:33*

*“Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” – Matt. 26:35*

What happened after the bold declarations of not falling away, and of dying for Jesus? So much bravado; but when directly challenged on his faith, he disowned Jesus 3 times before the rooster crowed! (John 18:15-27)

Good for Peter that after the resurrection of Jesus, he did live up to his status as “the Rock” of the early church, proclaiming the gospel confidently (Acts 2:14-41; 3:12-26; 4:8-21), performing miracles (Acts 3:1–11; 9:32–35, 38–42), as the first missionary to the Gentiles (Acts 10:1–45) and as a missionary to the Jews outside of Jerusalem (Acts 12:17).

### [Here we stand!](#)



When we are on spiritual high tide, we make confident declarations of our faith. When directly challenged on our faith, especially when we are on spiritual low tide, do we stick to the bold statement “**Here we stand!**” or shrivel away?

To be sure, no church that is manned by sinners is perfect. However, being imperfect means that there is always room to improve. As Christians, do we stay with a comfortable status quo or play active roles (whether as shepherd or sheep) as agents of positive change, keeping our focus (“**Here I stand!**”) on the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Or do we say “**Here I stand**” today (as a member of one church) and “**There I stand**” tomorrow (as a member of another church) with our theological convictions shifting as the wind blows?

If every Christian feels that “everything is fine, good enough, nothing much I can do, just go with the flow ...”, I am afraid that JCC may just become a Ju-rong Church Club where members just maintain their duties (of regular attendance, for example) to feel good and imbibe whatever there is instead of growing it as a church on the rise, a happening place set on firm spiritual grounds.

The truth in this statement that someone shared with me is retained even after replacing the word “life” with the word “church”:

*“So much in ~~life~~ **church** depends on our attitude. The way we choose to see things and respond to others makes all the difference.”*

It is sad that from time to time we heard church scandals around the world. These scandals (compromise with morals and ethics, financial faults, etc.) did not just come out of the blue overnight but developed out of an attitudinal indifference to bits and pieces of wrong practices that accumulated into a big mess over many years. Even if we are fortunate to see few of such big-mess happenings in our locale, it is still unglorifying to God and not conducive to our outreach efforts when pre-Christians hearing the scandals become averse to us due to misperceptions of the church messages.



Martin Luther, Nicodemus and Apostle Peter were not super-human – just ordinary humans who had their shortcomings, yet having the right attitude of “**Here I stand!**” at the crucial moments that made an impact on the church to God’s glory!

We don’t need to aspire for major acts like the impressive works of the great church fathers. While cumulative little bits of attitudinal indifference may lead to an unglorifying testimony for Christ, it is also cumulative little bits of right attitudes in our Christian service (whether as shepherd or sheep) that will lead to a vibrant spiritually happening church. We may just be small cogs in the wheel, but any single missing or non-performing cog may just break the wheel apart.

This month we celebrate another anniversary of the Reformation. May each of us say with conviction “**Here I stand!**” in faith, in understanding of Scripture and in awareness of our important place in the wheel that drives the church.

*John Lee*