



The Vine

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Pastor's Word

Dear Brothers & Sisters,

Joyous greetings in the name of our risen Lord Jesus Christ!

Our Lord's ministry before His crucifixion was to preach the Good News (which included healing the sick and delivering the oppressed), teach the Scriptures to the crowds and His disciples, and send His disciples to do the same ministry that He did. Our risen Lord's message to you and me is the same: "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." (John 20:21) This is the purpose of Jurong Christian Church: to win, to build and to equip for ministry - including the ministry of witnessing.

We have many ministries of nurture, e.g. care groups, Discipleship Training Programme, Sunday School, Boys' Brigade and Girls' Brigade. We have ministries to equip you for ministries too, in the Discipleship Training Programme, the Adult Bible Class, the Bethel Series, the Boys' Brigade and Girls' Brigade. All these ministries are good and necessary for the growth of the Church.

They cater to each age group from children to adults. I believe that at least one of these programmes caters to your own spiritual growth. I know the majority of our brothers and sisters are participating in these programmes and I want to encourage you to continue taking advantage of the programmes by being fully involved.

My concern is for those who are less active. Besides coming to the Sunday Worship Service, are you growing in one of these nurture or equipping programmes? I hope you do, for your own sake and out of love for our Lord because it is His will for you to grow spiritually. This year the goal of Jurong Christian Church is for everyone to be Witnessing Christians. We are all called to be witnesses. If you live a life pleasing to God, that's what disciples are learning to be - like Jesus who lived to do God's will, then you are witnessing by your life. One more step is necessary - to witness by our words. And you can learn to share your faith with your friends and colleagues. Just use your life as an example, because that's the most powerful witness. Read the story of the Samaritan woman: "Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony..." (Jn 4:39). God wants to use you too. Just tell your story as the Holy Spirit inspires you, that God has done something wonderful in your life and

He can do something about their problems and needs too.

The Mission and Evangelism Committee has planned some training to further equipped you to be more effective in witnessing. We are also planning to go house-to-house tracting. The Taman Jurong neighbourhood is our God-given area where the gospel must be proclaimed. Who will preach the gospel to them if we don't? How will you give an account to God if you don't go? The Lord is sending you out. So, go! Jesus is going with you! (Mt 28:20b).

Our theological students, Martin Yee and Anthony Loh, will graduate in mid-May. It will be an occasion for us to rejoice together with them for completing their theological education. It is a time of triumph for them and their families who share their four years of preparation for full-time ministry. More often than not, the time of preparation were times of testing of their faith to trust

in God to provide for the needs and to adjust to their different status as full-time servants of the Lord.

It is also a triumph for us at Jurong Christian Church to be able to complete the four years of financial and prayer support for them. Your faithfulness has enabled God's servants to be equipped for greater works

in His Kingdom. I am confident that Martin and Anthony will contribute to the growth of the Church in many ways. Nevertheless, we need to give them time to develop their ministry, to find their 'niche' in the vast area of full-time service. In fact, it will take three years for one to begin refining his ministry and settle down into the Church as a full-

time worker. So, please give them time to live up to whatever expectations the church has for them as full-time workers. And the best way to do that is to give your fullest cooperation so that they can fulfil their duties. What they need now is lots of mercy and encouragement. It is always very much easier for someone to criticize the work or the ministry. But how many are willing to do something about it? God has called everyone in the Church to serve Him by doing the work of ministry.

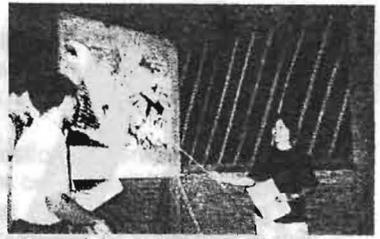
Not just the full-time workers. By His grace, let us grow into the ministries that He has called each one of us.

May the grace of our Lord inspire you to witness.

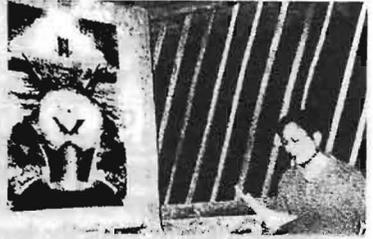
Pastor Fredric Lee

“As the
Father has
sent me,
I am
sending
you.”

(John 20:21)



Teaching Session by
Christina & Yew Moi



MISSION TRIP TO MENGCUO VILLAGE



Ahka boys



Pastor Li in
the kitchen

Mingguo Mission

I felt so good visiting Mengguo village. It was not the excitement of going to a new place, for I had been there before. Instead, I felt good for being able to show our love and care for an underprivileged community; even more so since they are our brothers and sisters-in-Christ. I felt the love of God for the Ahkas, that universal love of God that crosses geographical, racial, language and cultural boundaries. It touched my heart to see how Christians from all over the world could help one another in His ministries. As I reflect on this, I must thank God for the ministry that He has given to JCC, allowing us to participate in His redemptive plan and giving us an opportunity to lay up for ourselves treasures in Heaven.

The final day before we left Mengguo, the team went up to the water source. It is 6km away from the village, and to get there, one has to travel up and down slopes. It took the villagers two months to lay the pipes; one person from each family working daily. The team was very glad, and we saw for ourselves how the project had benefited these families. Despite the distance, water pressure is good and there is a continuous flow of water even in the dry season. Pastor Li told us that for the past 6 months, the pipe has only burst twice. There is a maintenance team of three persons, one from each family to trace the problem each time the water stops flowing.

19 Mar
The team return to Singapore.

by
YOCK MENG

Right now I should share some of the prayer needs:

1 Drug abuse is one of the main concerns in this area. Many students studying in Ban Hin Teak or Hwei Mok take drugs. Also, ecstasy has penetrated the place much faster than our missionaries. Pray for the Christians to stand firm and not be influenced.

2 Pray for Sompong and PornSak. They have just finished their primary school education and intend to further their studies in Chiang Rai. They have expressed the desire to become evangelists. Pray for them that the Holy Spirit will continue to work in their hearts.

3 Pray for the women, many of whom suffer from backache, possibly due to their work in the field.

4 Pray for the men, that God will give them a desire to come to the Church for worship.

5 Pray for Pastor Li Jian Ping, as he is still living alone. His marriage with an Akha lady was called off as he found that she lacked the heart for God. Pray that God will find him a suitable companion.

6 Continue to pray for the remaining 16 non-Christian families to come to know Christ.

7 Pray for Pastor Li Jian Ping that he will continue to be steadfast in this difficult ministry.

1 To Sponsor Sompong's and PornSak's secondary school education in Chiang Rai. The commitment is three years. (The DTP has taken the initiative to sponsor these two children. Praise God!)

2 Mengguo's Church has only 10 copies of the Thai Bible and Hymn Books (The Akha Christians do not own Bibles themselves). There is a need for another 10 copies of the Bible and Hymn Books. Approach the Missions and Evangelism Committee, if you would like to sponsor one or two Bibles for the Church.

3 Continue to pray for Pastor Li and the Christians in Mengguo Village.

What we
can do:

The Church's Heartbeat

This Thailand mission trip is an eye-opener for me. Winning souls for Christ is not an easy task, especially in a group of people who have high regards for their culture and religious beliefs. When Pastor Li Jian Ping began his ministry in Mengguo Village about eight years ago, he had difficulty persuading the villagers to worship Christ, instead of idols. Rather than being anxious of almost everything (including water supply), they should put their faith in God.

* began his missionary work in the village,
* the villagers felt threatened because he
* was introducing a new religious ideol-
* ogy. They were afraid that once they
* become Christians, they would lose their
* cultural heritage and identity. There-
* fore, Pastor Li had to be sensitive in
* implementing changes. He had to assure
* the people that Christianity, while get-
* ting rid of some bad habits, does not
* affect much of their culture other than
* the religious aspect.

“Winning souls for Christ is not an easy task... I encourage everyone to go since mission is the heartbeat of the church.”

Anyway, Pastor Li persevered. He found strength in God and continued to do God's work in this Ahka village. Now, more than half of the population has embraced Christianity. Pastor Li is still working among the remaining non-believers, having gained their respect. I am sure that in due time, even the witch doctor will become a follower of Christ.

* The Ahka people live in a hilly
* terrain. Its slopes are steep and bare
* due to over-cultivation. The soil is not
* fertile and water is scarce. The Ahkas
* have to work very hard in order to earn
* enough to survive. As such they are
* poor and unable to support their chil-
* dren's education. Apart from doing
* church work, Pastor Li and CNEC ad-
* minister and seek finance to send 44
* children for primary education. To date,
* they have only managed to secure spon-
* sorship for 25 children. With the lim-
* ited financial resources, and the plan to
* send all the 44 children to school, Pas-

Participating in this mission trip has helped me to understand missionary work in a different environment and culture. Pastor Li told me that when he

tor Li has to reduce expenditure for each child. Two boys have graduated from primary education. Our church, in particular the Discipleship Training Programme ministry, will sponsor them for a 3-year secondary education. There is a great need for funds to send the children to school.

I was impressed by the water piping project that our church sponsored. The water source is from two springs located about six kilometres away. After going through the hilly terrain, the actual pipe length could be twice the distance estimated. The villagers toiled for 2 months to complete this project, which supplies sufficient water to the whole village. Not only do the Christian families benefit from the water supply, the non-Christian ones also draw water from tanks filled with the piped water. This water project demonstrates how community work can be used to reach out to non-believers.

Missionary work is a long-term commitment not only for missionaries, but also for the sponsoring church or organisation. Since the Church sponsors social projects, it must ensure that the injection of funds is not viewed as hand-outs. With hand-outs, the people will crave for more, and there is no end to it. As a community becomes affluent, the temptation to get more wealth can affect its spiritual well-being. In Mengguo Village, Pastor Li is concerned that as villagers go to cities to seek employment, they may be so engrossed in earning more money that their Christian walk affected. He urged us to pray for him.

I enjoyed this trip very much and would encourage everyone to go on such trips since mission is the heartbeat of the church.

by
CHONG YEW MOI

Mengguo
Mission

The Heart For Missions

This is my first mission trip and it has been an enriching experience. Each time as I looked out through my room window in Pastor Li Jian Ping's house or stood outside the little Church or travelled along the winding roads, I could see the range of mountains before me. My mind recalled the biography of J.O. Fraser. He was a missionary who went trip are nothing compare to those who obeyed the call to preach the gospel and serve the people who live in conditions much less comfortable than that of the cities.

Nevertheless, this experience reinforces in me many lessons - to have a heart for people and missions, to live simply and guard against materialism, invest in things that count for eternity, and be grateful for the many things I enjoy in Singapore.

by
WONG MUI

The Great Commission

Why go on a mission trip? To Mengguo Village? It is so far away and expensive. Even if I were to go on a mission trip, I would prefer Sengoi because it is cheaper, closer to Singapore, and the weather is comparatively more conducive. Plainly put, I was not keen at all to go to Mengguo Village initially. Still, after much persuasion from Yew Moi, I signed up. Half-heartedly. Only during Yock Meng's preparatory sessions did I begin to feel excited.

Upon arrival at Chiang Rai, my impression about the place changed totally. Contrary to my perception, the place is fairly well developed with adequate lighting and clean roads. In fact, there are cinemas and supermarkets too.

At Mengguo Village, I was in charge of organising games for the children. With the help of Pastor Li Jian Ping, I organised the 40 children into four groups with ages ranging from three to 19. To my surprise, in the course of playing games, the players got along with each other very well despite the age gaps. They were well-disciplined, with the older ones instructing and guiding the younger ones.

In another village near Mengguo, there is this man by the name of Ah Ka. He takes care of the Student Service Centre that houses the 70 Ahka children. This Centre, with its classroom and a dormitory, accommodates children from the Ahka villages which do not have schools. They will stay at the Centre throughout the school term and only return home during the school holidays. Ah Ka and his wife cook for these children and Ah Ka teaches them Bible Knowledge, even though he does not have theological qualifications. When he encounters difficulties in the Bible studies, he will travel to Mengguo Village and ask Pastor Li for help. The Student Service Centre is supported financially by a German Christian who came to know of the needs of these children. Ah Ka told us that he is willing to take care of the Student Service Centre because poverty had denied him a formal education when he was young. He wants the children to have the opportunity to receive a formal education.

In Mengguo Village, some women came to us for prayers. They wanted to pray for healing. They were suffering from backache, chest pain and blurred vision. We prayed for them and they believed that God would answer our prayers.

Throughout the mission trip, we enjoyed eating the local food which was cheap and delicious. At the end of the trip, I had so many pleasant experiences to reminisce that I actually looked forward to my next mission trip. Now, I no longer ask myself about the benefits of a mission expedition.

With prayer and determination, God will provide the finance, time and take care of our work and family commitments, just so we can be used to fulfil His great commission.

by
LIM SEK HOONG

M
ngguo
ission

(continued from March issue of the Vine)

Group Dynamics Grid (Diagram)

Definition from "How to Head Small Groups" by Neal McBride"

Let us look at the small group dynamics diagram to examine the way the elements of small group dynamics relate to one another graphically and use it as a tool to evaluate our groups.

Task vs. Relationship

Small groups are either primarily task oriented or relationship oriented. On the side of relationships, we hope to develop an atmosphere of caring, sharing, having an opportunity for expression of love and concern. The overall effectiveness of building relationships depends on every member. Any group would have some emphasis on building relationships. The interaction between believers is not only commanded by the Scriptures but also is healthy and have healing qualities.

On the other side is the emphasis on fulfilling the task. The task can vary from simply studying the Scriptures together to contacting every house in a neighbourhood in an evangelistic effort. Every group has some task to accomplish, even if it is not stated. Most committees and planning groups are task oriented, eg. planning retreats, Church Anniversary dinners and social involvement projects like old folks home groups, tuition to students. But, they also build some relationships within that group.

Focus on God or People

There is another way of looking at small group

relationships. Groups may focus primarily on people-to-people involvement. Or they may emphasise a people-to-God relationship. In other words, the focus might be different, depending on the type of group that is desired. A group that focuses more exclusively on people will be geared either in the direction of greater fellowship, caring, and sharing with one another or in the area of service to one another. Thus, a practical task that is directed toward another person may be in the area of social involvement like cleaning old folks home, visiting and bringing food to the sick. In such cases, relationships may be strengthened, although relationship building is not the primary goal. Nevertheless, it is a people-to-people focus.

On the other side is a focus on God. While it may seem to indicate worship, that is only one part of the focus. Certainly, the relational aspect of focusing on God included adoration and worship. However, if we are learning from God - that is, studying the Scriptures together to find out about Him - we are able to discern that God has tasks for us to do and we need to find out what they are. This process is also part of focusing on God.



In examining the distinctions between a focus on God and a focus on people and relationship vs. task group, we can see that these are interrelated. They form a diagram that can be used as a tool for evaluating the groups. We can see where the different elements of our small groups

rest on this diagram. In doing so, we will understand why certain elements of small group dynamics are more important than others, depending on the type of group it is.

Let us look at the different events that groups may schedule on a regular basis in order to see how they relate to the small group ministries diagram. The first, and perhaps the

most common event, is fellowship - talking with one another, caring for one another, just simply sharing our lives with one another. Identifying where this event is on the diagram is not difficult; it is on the side of focusing on people, towards relationships. This group is not unbalanced; people are exercising an appropriate function for that particular group.

Another event that occurs in small groups is service. This could be as simple as providing a meal for someone who is sick and has no one else at home. The focus is to help another person, but relationship building is not in the forefront. Again, it is not improper for a group to have this kind of focus as long as it is discerned ahead of time as being a purpose of that group.

Most small groups in the Christian community do some kind of Bible study. In some groups that focus primarily on tasks, the Bible study may be a brief devotional. But even groups that emphasize Bible study may be task focused with the aim of gaining insight. Although it may have a result of focusing on people, the focus is primarily on God. What has God said to us? How can I be godly? The task may be finding out what else I must know about God in order to live more in the light of His goodness. This kind of emphasis on Bible study - discerning what God wants - is primarily task oriented and focusing on God.

Another emphasis that we see in some groups is worship. It is not difficult to see that worship emphasizes focusing on God, particularly our personal relationship with God. To have a relationship with God requires us to spend time in addressing Him and in giving thanks to Him. Groups that have this emphasis as part of their overall experience will be focusing on God and on relationships.

Elements of Small Group Dynamics and the Diagram

Starting with acceptance. If we are trying to build a group that is accepting of one another, it is not difficult to see that the focus is on relationships. We need not accept another person in order to work alongside him to accomplish a task. However, if we are to build a relationship with another person, there must be some recognition of the value of that person and acceptance of his background, gifts and abilities.

Even his peculiar mannerisms must be accepted. This fact is not only true in focusing on people, but also in focusing on God Himself. God had chosen through Christ to accept us, allowing us to respond in a humble attitude of worship toward God. Worshipping God is an acceptance of God. The salvation that we enjoy is God's acceptance of us.



On the other hand, if we look at the purposes that need to be established for the group, we lean toward the idea of task. Even if the purpose is to provide fellowship like church outings, the purpose in and of itself is a task that needs to be accomplished. Every group needs to have an understandable set of purposes. The purpose, of course, can be focused on people - either in what we will do for people or with them. Or the focus can be on God - what we will do in response to God's desires or what we will discern of God. In either case, the purpose is a task that needs to be accomplished. To have a stated goal of spending one hour in Bible study each week is to say we want to focus on God to learn about him and how we are to respond. But it is a Godward focus even though there is a task to be accomplished.

If we look at people's backgrounds and how

they relate to a small group, we most often find that we are focusing on how people relate to one another. Whether they relate well often depends on their backgrounds. The same is true in relating to God. There are a number of people who have difficulty relating to God because their own fathers fell desperately short of what God intended a father to be. Thus, when they think of God as father, their backgrounds does not enable them to see the fatherly relationship and will seriously affect their worship.

On the other side of the diagram are standards and procedures. They address how we go about the task that we are to accomplish. The emphasis is on how to, rather than on to whom. Thus we have certain procedures we follow when we study the Bible and focus on God. We also follow certain procedures when we look at how we relate to one another and how we care about and share with each other.

In addition, we may also need to develop a sense of unity called cohesion. Groups that are knit together enjoy brotherly love and affection. They may be bound together just with a common purpose, but the relationship is built because of this cohesion.

Cohesion is that vague concept that says we are not just a group of disparate (cannot be computed in quality/different/unlike) individuals, but we are vitally linked to one another. Cohesion relates to the individual's relationship with either another person or with God Himself. God has taken the initiative to make us one with Him. It goes beyond the idea of acceptance to the additional step of being linked in a familial relationship with God.

Another important aspect of group dynamics is the area of structure. Structure is concerned most of all with providing limits to both protect and enhance the group. Structure allows the group to carry out its

tasks within defined limits. Thus it is most concerned with the tasks at hand.

There are two additional aspects placed on the diagram. The first is the area of communication. Communication as used here focuses on people to people interaction. The way people gain a sense of understanding is through communication, be it verbal or non-verbal. Whether the group is going to get on with the task, or be knit in close relationship with one another, communication is vital and it is placed on the people end.

The opposite side is what we call revelation. It is concerned with the interaction between a holy God and a fallen human race. If there is no communication from God that is revelation, then there is no way we can respond to Him. Thus any focusing on God depends on revelation. This element distinguishes the Christian small group from all others. Revelation from God is acknowledged as essential for life just as communication between people is essential for our lives. Even our worship depends on God's revelation to us. He shows us Himself, and we respond accordingly to that revelation. This is not to say that we don't communicate with God. We do. But it is always in response to revelation from God.

When viewed as a whole, the small group dynamics diagram is complete. We will see that whether a group focuses in relationships or tasks, or whether it is primarily geared toward relating to God or people, small group dynamics contribute to the overall well-being of the group.

Using the Diagram

The type of group we seek to establish highlights the relative importance of these elements of small group dynamics. If, according to its purpose, a small group wants to focus on building relationships - that is - fellowship, sharing and caring - it is not

difficult to see that the most important aspects of small group dynamics are the development of acceptance, understanding of backgrounds, and the development of cohesion among the group members. Of course, vitally linked to these group dynamics are good communication patterns. Of lesser importance are standards and procedures, a defined purpose, and structures. Again, this is not to say that these areas aren't important. Rather, it is more important for a group focusing on friendliness, sharing, and caring, and concern for one another to major on the small group dynamics pieces that are on the relationship side of the diagram.

Likewise, if a group is gathered round a task of organising a retreat, determining methods, standards, a stated goal, and a structure within which they will reach that stated goal is of utmost importance. Acceptance of one another, a discerning of people's backgrounds, and a sense of cohesion is not nearly as important. At any given time within a group's



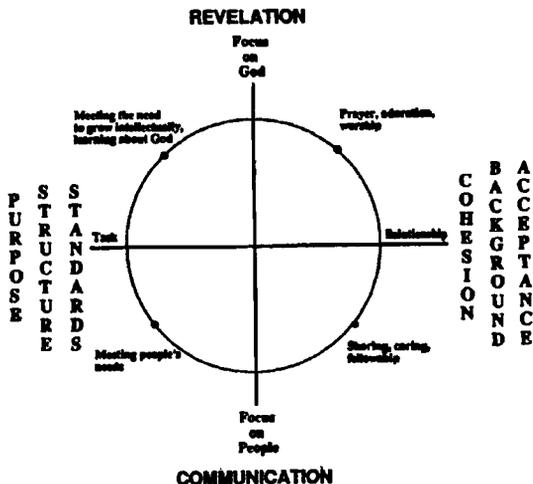
life or a group meeting, leaders should be able to discern where that group resides on the diagram. Most groups jump around. At one point in an evening there will be a tremendous focus on personal relationship, at another point there is worship. At another point there is a sense of discerning, what God has to say to them, and at another point they talk about how they can practically care for an area of need that exists within the group or the community.

Submitted by Khoo Teng Choon

**THE WORLD IS FULL OF WILLING PEOPLE:
SOME WILLING TO WORK, THE REST
WILLING TO LET THEM.**

HOW DYNAMIC IS YOUR SMALL GROUP?

SMALL GROUP DYNAMICS GRID



Don't let "Well done" on your tombstone mean you were cremated!

Divorce and remarriage is not an option for Christians

Martin Yee

Introduction

This article contains my own views. The LCMS as far as I am aware of does not have an official view stated in the constitution concerning divorce and remarriage.

Divorces have in recent years become an increasingly familiar problem affecting many marriages. The Prince and Princess of Wales, Charles and Diana were officially divorced on Aug. 29, 1996 after a stormy 15-year marriage, in which both confessed to be involved in adultery, and this has been the focus of much media attention. In Singapore divorce is on the rise up from 1,721 in 1980 to 3,772 in 1994 (Straits Times, 30 Mar 96). In America, a whopping 1.2 million marriages were dissolved by the court in 1994, tripling the 1960 figure (Straits Times, 28 May 96). In America it has become "easier to break the marriage contract than to sack an employee".

The divorce problem in USA

The divorce problem in USA was exacerbated by the no-fault divorce legislation passed in many states which in effect allow a spouse to

leave a marriage at any time for any reason. However in recent months there is increasing concern and call to repeal this no-fault divorce law.

This is prompted by research which showed that children of divorced parents (i.e. in single parent families) were likely to drop out of school, become pregnant as teenagers, abuse drugs and break the law etc. These were supported in statistics and research report of social scientist Nicholas Zill in 1993 (Straits Times, 28 May 96).



The divorce problem in

Singapore

In 1993 out of the 2,602 divorce cases, 744 cited unreasonable behavior, 142 cited desertion, 113 cited adultery, 1602 cited living apart and 1 case of other reason, for divorce. In Jan to Aug. of 1994 AWARE counselors handled 309 cases of marital problems, and 151 cases involved adultery. Some of the underlying causes of such marital troubles include conflict, unrealised or unrealistic expectations, in-law problems and career changes (Straits Times, 27 Nov. 95).

The marriage

Matthew 19:1-12: *1 When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went to the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. 2 Large crowds followed him, and he cured them there. 3 Some Pharisees came to him, and to test him they asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?" 4 He answered, "Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' 5 and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? 6 So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." 7 They said to him, "Why then did Moses command us to give a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her?" 8 He said to them, "It was because you were so hard-hearted that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. 9 And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery." 10 His disciples said to him, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry." 11 But he said to them, "Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only those to whom it is given. 12 For there are eunuchs who have been so from*



birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can."

From our Lord Jesus Christ (Mat 19:4-6) we learn that 3 key elements of a marriage are:

1. "leave father and mother",
2. "cleave to one's spouse" and
3. "be one flesh".

The first two items reflect two parts of the same process - making a commitment or pledging allegiance to one's spouse. It is a permanent and committed faithfulness to a vow, a calling, a person and a relationship. The third element "become one flesh": focuses on the sexual union of marriage but also incorporates every aspect of intimacy and interdependence which rendered the married couple a unified entity at the deepest levels of interpersonal communion.

Marriage is thus seen as two-fold: a commitment of one's fundamental allegiance and an interpersonal relationship culminating in sexual intimacy.

The marriage is also described as a "covenant" in the bible. Divorce is said to be breaking a covenant. Proverbs 2:17 said "...the wife who is adulterous has ignored her covenant before God". Also in Malachi 2:14 we read "...the LORD is acting as witness against men

who were unfaithful to his wife by covenant". Hebrews 13:4 admonished us saying "Let marriage be held in honor by all and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled; for God will judge fornicators and adulterers". Marriage is thus considered holy and adultery is forbidden.



School of Hillel however taught saying: A man may divorce his wife if she find no favor in his eyes e.g. in spoiling his dish. In another words the School of Shammai emphasized "indecenty",

the Hillel school emphasized "anything displeasing to him" in their interpretations of Deut. 24:1.

Divorce and remarriage

The texts in the Bible commonly perceived to be relating to divorce and remarriage are perhaps Genesis 1:27, 2:24; Deut 24: 1-4; Matt 5:31-32, 19:1-12; Mark 10:1-2; Luke 16:18; Rom 7:1-3; and 1 Corinthians 7. The passages in Genesis and Deuteronomy do not actually address Christian divorce and remarriage except for their being quoted by Christ in his teaching on the issue; the teachings and reinterpretations of our Lord Jesus in the New Testament will necessarily override any interpretations of the Old Testament Law.

In the passage of Matthew 19:1-12, some Pharisees came to Jesus to try to trap Him by asking "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?". This tricky question has an interesting historical context to it. In those days there were 2 schools of Rabbi (teachers) called Shammai and Hillel. The School of Shammai taught saying: A man may not divorce his wife unless he has found unchastity/ indecenty in her. The

Jesus in His reply did not address grounds for divorces. Instead he countered their question with another question, "Have you not read.. that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together let men not separate" Matt 19:4-6. What Jesus is saying is that because all marriages are divinely made unions, they ought not be dissolved.



The Pharisees then countered with another question, "Why then did Moses command one to give her a certificate of dismissal and divorce her?" Matt 19:7. Jesus' counter-response was, "Because of your hard-heartedness Moses permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so" Matt 19:8. God has graciously accommodated Himself to their rebellious

desire in the time of Moses. But by saying "in the beginning it was not so," Jesus insisted that God did not originally intend hard-heartedness to

be an excuse for divorce. Hardness of heart is used 8 out of 9 times in the New Testament to describe the unsaved. In the New Covenant therefore, Christian cannot appeal to hard-heartedness as ground for divorce.

In Matt 19:9 (cf. Matt 5:32), Jesus climatically said, "but I say to you that whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual sin, and marries another woman, commits adultery." The term sexual sin (Greek *porneia*) refers to incest, adultery, homosexuals, prostitution, molestation, indecent exposure etc. The parallel passages in Mark 10:1-2 and Luke 16:18 does not contain the exception clause "except for sexual sin" at all. They are clear cut prohibitions of divorce with remarriage to follow. In the Matthew's passage, divorce appears to be permitted on sexual offence, but Jesus in narrowing the exception definition scope compared to that in Deuteronomy 24, actually heightened the prohibition. Divorce and remarriage are equated with adultery (Greek *moicheia*) This is reflected in the concern that that the disciples have, that this teaching is excessively strict, saying, "if this is the situation between a husband and his wife, it is better not to marry." Matt 19:10. In reply Jesus stated the necessity for this teaching in the context of salvation "...to whom it is given" Matt 19:11. Jesus insisted that this demand is not excessive compared to others, natural, man-made or self made (Matt 19:12a). Jesus then reinforced the necessity of this teaching for salvation "the one who can accept this should accept it" (Matt 19:12b. In its context therefore,

Jesus focused more on the permanence on marriage (Matt 19:4-6) rather than on the grounds for divorce.

On the question of remarriage, in my opinion it is only possible when one of the spouse has died according to Romans 7:1-3; 1 Cor 7:39, only in this case the spouse is no longer bound to the marriage. There are certainly no other grounds for it.

Concerning Christians and unbelievers 1 Corinthians 7: 10-16

1 Cor 7:10-16: 10 *To the married I give this command—not I but the Lord—that the wife should not separate from her husband 11 (but if she does separate, let her remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife. 12 To the rest I say—I and not the Lord—that if any believer has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. 13 And if any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. 14 For the unbelieving husband is made holy through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy through her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. 15 But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not enslaved. It is to peace that God has called you. 16 Wife, for all you know, you might save your husband. Husband, for all you know, you might save your wife."*

In this passage Paul did not address the case for remarriage in this passage at all. If one wants to seek some guidance for the issue of remarriage one cannot find it here. In 7:10-11 Paul explicitly prohibits divorce or separation for partners who are both Christian, recalling that this is the command of the Lord himself not I, but the Lord"(7:10). On the other hand Paul did not raise this prohibition norm to law; if separation still happen, such a person is not to be ostracized from the church community. However remarriage is strictly prohibited (7:11). If a Christian is deserted by his/her Christian partner, he /she is still bound to the marriage.

The real point of the passage 7:12-16 is when the married man/woman is a new believer and the spouse is not, let the new believer consider the spouse as sanctified i.e. set apart for the Gospel/evangelism, and let him or her live a godly life that their spouse may see Christ in their life and be saved. The believer must never initiate or pursue separation or divorce (7:12-13). Christians are forbidden to separate from or divorce their non-Christian partner. If however the unbeliever chose to separate, then the believer is not enslaved to maintain the marriage bond, the believer can let them leave, there is no need to pursue the partner (7:15). Separation is thus inevitable in this case (7:15). However there is no indication here that the Christian is no longer bound to the marriage, this separation is only to be a change in status, not



change of partners, remarriage is not discussed at all in this passage. For Paul a married person is bound to his/her marriage until death breaks the bond (1 Corinthian 7:39).

Martin Luther's view of marriage and divorce

Luther held a very high view of marriage. He taught that it is instituted by God and that marriage by nature is of such a kind that it drives, impels and forces men to the most inward, highest spiritual state, to faith. When Jesus spoke on the issue, according to Luther, he was not legislating the issue, but warning against a casual use of the divorces laws. Luther rejected the Roman Catholic sacramental view of the marriage bond, emphasizing the civil aspects instead of the ecclesiastical.

Conclusion

God designed marriage to be permanent. The sexual sins of a partner does not destroy a marriage uniquely, restoration is possible. Divorce and remarriage are never required by Jesus even in such circumstances. Deuteronomy 24:1-4 did not institute grounds for divorce. The passage simply acknowledged divorce as taking place, and not necessarily with divine approval. Divorce is only not prohibited by the Mosaic Law, but never approved. Jesus teach that people who are divorced are "hard-hearted" which is often a description of the unsaved. Salvation in Christ entails fidelity in marriage and permanence of marriage bond. There should be no compromise by the

Church of God especially in this times where morality is on the slide and divorce rates climbing. Couples in the church who are contemplating divorce should receive appropriate



love thee for better or worse... till death do us part"literally. May God be merciful to us.

This article was entitled "Presentation of My View of Divorce and Remarriage to my Church Council" in its original form as an SBC student paper by Martin Yee.

pastoral counseling with the aim of restoration. In extreme cases example in cases of adultery or desertion by a partner only separation can be considered after all restoration efforts has been exhausted. Disciplinary action with the aim of restoration should be taken against those who are stubborn, who divorced despite the counsel to do otherwise. Such action may include excommunication with the view to restore the person in remorse and repentance. It is also recognised that there are legal technicalities to be overcome in separation. That the Woman's Charter in Singapore also allows divorce to be filed by either partner after 3 years of separation must be taken into consideration.

I believe also that the church should not perform any rites of blessing even on a low key basis for those who are divorced and then remarried with a different partner. The pastor and church leaders should not attend the wedding dinner or reception so as not to be seen as giving any kind of humane support which may serve to encourage others to follow suit. The church should make a strong stand on the permanence of marriage and the inviolability of the marriage vow |

THE CHURCH TODAY

The church at the end of the 20th century has "rearranged" God's household in at least four ways:

1. There is a deeper commitment to tradition than to Scripture. "We have always done it that way," echoes through the halls of tradition-bound churches.
2. Many churches care about being successful by the world's standard than about modeling New Testament values. So we attend motivational seminars on how to market and promote church growth.
3. The church is larger than ever but more confused and uncertain. "Preach the Word at home and abroad." This used to be the church's top priority.
4. We are polarized by labels rather than unified by love. The worldwide church of Jesus Christ comprise of a variety of denominations and independent churches. But too often, we fail to love one another as He has loved us.

extracted from EXCELLENCE IN MINISTRY by Charles Swindoll.

Easter Sunday, 30 March 1997.
Jurong Christian Church welcomed 17 new members, 15 by Baptism and 2 by Transfer. We also witnessed the confirmation of sisters, Mindy and Stephanie Yeo.



We would like to extend our welcome to :

1. the Hor family, parents Willie and Florence and children, Vanessa, Kelvin and Terence;
2. the Toh family, parents Soon Kok and Susan and daughter, Rachel;
3. the Lee family, parents Richard and Margaret and children, Marcus, Melvyn and Rachel;

and also the following individuals:

1. Isaiah Chong (Wong Mui's son);
2. Hartley Humphrey Muze;
3. Kong Chak Mun; and
4. Tan Hock Leong.



EASTER SUNDAY BAPTISM SERVICE

30 MARCH 1997



There were musical presentations by the Sunday School as well as the Choir. In all, it was a beautiful day to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord.



SUNDAY SCHOOL CHOIR