

These days, the intensity and frequency of natural disasters is increasing in diverse places all around us, but knowing that these all happen under the mighty hand of God, we need not be frightened.

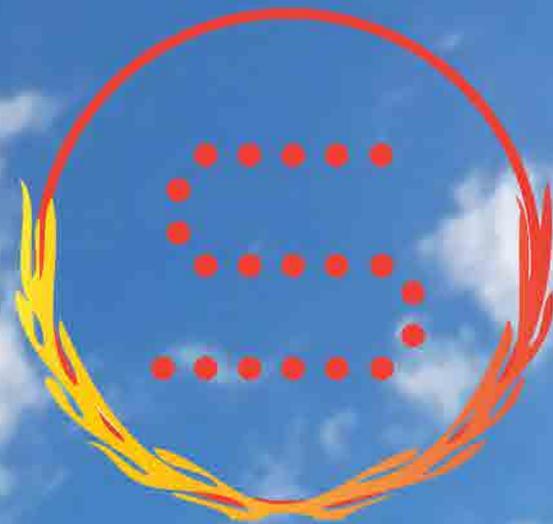
- Lisa Ong | *The Great Flood*

Worship and church life, quality family time, and spiritual activities must be top priority, and the time necessary for these things must be guarded jealously.

- Rev. Joshua Engelsma | *Family Pressures*

Just as it impossible to wage war in the world without defining and naming the enemy against which some country is opposed, it is equally impossible to engage in the practice of Reformed polemics without naming names.

- Rev. Nathan Langerak | *Reformed Polemics for the Reformed Believer*



**salt shakers**  
joel 3:16 matthew 5:16

Issue 48 | Mar 2018

But ye are  
a chosen generation,  
a royal priesthood,  
an *holy nation*,  
a peculiar people;  
that ye should shew forth the praises of him  
who hath called you  
out of darkness  
into his *marvelous light*.

1 PETER 2:9

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## WELCOME TO THE 48TH ISSUE OF SALT SHAKERS!

Dear readers,

What a blessing it is to read! It is taken as a given today that nearly all of us are by God's grace, able to read and read widely. However, this was certainly not always the case. It could even be described as a fairly recent development. For one, education was not always so widespread and thorough, and still remains patchy in some lands. Even if one was able to read, however, not everything was permitted. Infamously, Roman Catholic councils (for example, Toulouse in AD1229, Tarragona in AD1234) made owning the Bible or translations of it a serious crime for the laity. William Tyndale was burned to death in AD 1536 for translating the Bible into English. Today, however, we enjoy few prohibitions – and we may read the Scriptures and good, edifying literature without the fear of soldiers and policemen at the door. As the time of the antichrist comes daily nearer, will this freedom continue? We do not know. But do we thank God often enough for the gift of reading today? Let us encourage each other to be good stewards of this precious privilege!

More than just a good practice, reading is vital for us as a church. If one were to rely solely on the minister to bring us two chapters of the Bible a week, even if the preaching systematically covered each of its 1189 chapters, it would take nearly twelve years to go through Scripture just once. That is not nearly enough for the Christian to *know* God's Word. We must be people of the Word, who know our Scriptures – much of it by heart – people who are able to discuss and delve deeply into it. With us spending a good amount of time throughout the week in the Word and in good Christian literature, our church is protected from ignorance of the counsel of God, and ignorance of how He wants us to live our lives. Today, it is common to have a conversation with other professing Christians on the most basic tenets of Christianity, only to hear them declare, "We cannot know these things; they are too difficult, too complex, too controversial" – even though they are so clearly revealed in Scripture that even the children can understand!

So let us pray for grace, and be active in avoiding the problem of Hosea 4:6: *My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee...* The word "deceive" appears no less than thirty-eight times in the New Testament. We are easy prey to be deceived, when we love not the truth and when we are wilfully ignorant. Reading! It is more than merely a good thing – it is a matter of our spiritual survival. If you are reading this magazine – you are, by the grace of God, contributing to the strength of the church. Keep it up! Fervently encourage your friends and family to do the same. Do not overlook the importance of mutual encouragement and accountability, for it takes spiritual discipline to put away our busyness and our smartphones and make time for reading.

In this issue as always, the committee has worked hard to bring us many edifying articles that dig deeply into the Word and the precious Reformed truths. Some are written by ministers, but many also by our own members who have taken great care to meditate on Scripture and bring you its insights. The issue also includes not just one, but two excellent book reviews! I believe this demonstrates that our members care about reading, and are reading. Salt Shakers today can only be sustained (humanly speaking) in a church that has a positive reading culture. By the grace of God, may this reading culture be strengthened, and long continue! Let us not take it for granted that it will, however. Satan hates a reading church, for a church that is informed of the truth is one that is difficult to deceive. He will use all the tools at his disposal to undermine reading, and then the time will swiftly come when they will no longer endure sound doctrine.

Therefore, dear readers – be readers! – And remember to pass the salt!

Pro Rege,

Lee Yang

# THE NECESSITY OF REFORMING THE CHURCH

## BY JOHN CALVIN

>>Aaron Lim



Aaron Lim is a member of CERC and is the editor of Salt Shakers.

Calvin's treatise on *The Necessity of Reforming the Church* is a plea to Emperor Charles V to hear the cause of the Reformation. Calvin pleads that their cause is right and just, because it is based on the word of God. Their cause is necessary, because Rome has become thoroughly corrupt in her doctrine, worship, and institutional life. The reformers are fighting on behalf of God so that "religion might be purged from these defilements, the doctrine of godliness restored to its integrity, and the church raised out of its calamitous" condition (39).

Reformation in the church is absolutely necessary because it relates to the pure worship of God. Reformation returns the doctrine, preaching, sacraments, and government of the church back to the biblical pattern, so that God may be worshipped aright. Calvin points out that the "whole form of divine worship in general use in the present day is nothing but mere corruption" (23). Rome has thoroughly corrupted the true worship of God by her false doctrines, wicked human traditions, and vain superstitious. Calvin therefore justifies the reformation and insists that the "uniform characteristics of a

well-ordered church are the preaching of sound doctrine, and the pure administration of the sacraments" (127).

In setting forth the principles of worship, Calvin is a polemicist. Very logically, he sets forth the errors of the Romish church, his rejection of them on the basis of scripture and the ancient church, and then proceeds to establish the positive principles. Reformation in the church of Jesus Christ is not only a rejection of false doctrines and corruptions, but also a positive development and increased understanding in the truth.

First, Calvin rejects all kinds of things that are not approved by the word of God. God "disapproves of all modes of worship not expressly sanctioned by his word" (18). Calvin remarks that when the word of God is absent, "divine truth lay buried under this vast and dense cloud of darkness; when religion was sullied by so many impious superstitions; when by horrid blasphemies the worship of God was corrupted, and his glory laid prostrate" (38). Heresies and schisms "arise when a return is not made to the origin of truth, when neither the Head is regarded, nor the doctrine of the heavenly Master preserved" (132).

Second, true worship must never be based on our own opinions or emotions. Calvin wisely recognizes the foolishness of the depraved sinner, even though he may be a child of God. He writes that "such is our folly, that when we are left at liberty, all we are

able to do is to go astray" (16). So we must "reject all human devices which are at variance with his command" (17). God "rejects and even abominates everything relating to his worship that is devised by human reason" (49). He is displeased when men, "overleaping the boundaries of his word, run riot in their own inventions" (96). God's authority is established in worship when "we do not follow our own pleasure, but depend entirely on his sovereignty" (17).

Third, Calvin rejects worship that is not sincere, or one that does not flow out of true faith. God condemns and prohibits "all fictitious worship" (17). Rome is guilty of grave hypocrisy in her worship of God, especially in her many ceremonies. She has invented "an immense number of ceremonies", whereby "men are vainly occupied with numbers of them that are both frivolous and useless" (22). These ceremonies mock God by causing men to think that "they have fulfilled their duty as admirably as if these ceremonies included in them the whole essence of piety and divine worship" (22). By "means of external ceremonies, like specious masks, we hide the inward malice of the heart" (51). God therefore "rejects, condemns, abominates all fictitious worship, and employs his word as a bridle to keep us in unqualified obedience" (23).

Fourth, human tradition must pale in comparison to the word of God in worship. Calvin rebukes the traditions of Rome for enslaving the Christian's conscience. These traditions "had

either been tyrannically imposed to hold consciences in bondage, or were more subservient to superstition than to bondage” (77). Although Calvin does not reject traditions which keep the church functioning decently and in good order, he recommends that we must “look to the injunctions of him who alone is entitled to prescribe” (17).

So important is the glory of God in worship that Calvin grounds true worship in the being of God. First, he writes that the chief foundation of worship is “to acknowledge him to be, as he is, the only source of all virtue, justice, holiness, wisdom, truth, power, goodness, mercy, life, and salvation” (16). Those who worship him must desire to “ascribe and render to him the glory of all that is good, to seek all things in him alone, and in every want have recourse to him alone” (16). In our worship, “we manifest for him the reverence due to his greatness and excellency” (16).

Second, because God’s will alone determines His worship, His word prescribes what may be allowed in worship. The word of God is the only authoritative rule for worship. The word alone “discriminates between his true worship and that which is false and vitiated” (23), since God “must be worshipped in spirit and in truth” (17). True doctrine “regulates the due worship of God, and points out the ground on which the consciences of men must rest their hope of salvation” (15). True doctrine maintains proper worship in the church, since “the word of God furnishes a standard...for every thing” (35). When reforming the worship of the church, the reformers sought “to read the scriptures, in laboring diligently to make them better understood, and in happily throwing

light on certain points of doctrine of the highest practical importance” (40).

Third, the administration of the sacraments is an important part of worship. Calvin contends that in the Romish church, “seven sacraments were received without any distinction, though Christ appointed two only, the others resting merely on human authority” (29). The “two which Christ instituted were fearfully corrupted” (29). That is because the Romish church “fasten[s] upon the sign instead of the thing signified by it” (31). God’s people must come by faith to participate in these two sacraments. Only by faith “they may inwardly discern the thing which is visibly represented: that is, the spiritual food by which alone their souls are nourished unto life eternal” (70). Furthermore, the preaching of the word must always be accompanied with the sacraments, because “there is no use in the sacraments unless the thing which the sign visibly represents is explained in accordance with the word of God” (31).

Fourth, proper church government must be exercised because the office-bearers watch over the worship of the church. It must be a “spiritual government which Christ recommended” (33). Calvin writes that in condemning the papacy and the hierarchical form of church government, they have restored the pastoral office, “both according to the apostolic rule, and the practice of the primitive church, by insisting that everyone who rules in the church shall also teach” (71). Those who are elected must be “in the presence of the people, before the eyes of all, that he may be approved as fit and worthy by the testimony of all” (73). None “are to be continued in the office but those who are diligent in performing its

duties” (71). No man “is a true pastor of the church who does not perform the office of teaching” (33). Teaching is so important in the worship of the Reformed church that Calvin is able to say: “none of our churches is seen without the ordinary preaching of the word” (71).

Fifth, true worship must be simple. It must be devoid of all kinds of “frivolous performances altogether alien from the command of Christ” (33). We must in no respect detract “from the spiritual worship of God” (46). Worship is simple because “God requires us to worship him in a spiritual manner” (41).

True prayer is an important part of worship. Calvin writes that “by discarding the intercession of the saints, we have brought men back to Christ, that they might learn both to invoke the Father in his name, and trust in him as Mediator” (51). The child of God must pray first “with firm and solid confidence”, and then secondly, “with understanding also” (51). He must not be muttering “over confused prayer in an unknown tongue” (51). Prayers “proceeding from true faith obtains favor with God” (55). The design of true prayer is to “make God the conscious witness of our necessities, and as it were to pour out our hearts before him” (56).

The worshipper himself must be a regenerated child of God, offering sincere praise and worship to God. God “looks to the faith and truth of the heart” (47). Men must worship God “neither in a frigid nor a careless manner” (41). “True and sincere worship”, Calvin asserts, is “taught by the Holy Spirit throughout the scriptures” (16). Only a believing child of God will humble

himself before God in worship, and “by this self-abasement we are trained to obedience and devotedness to his will, so that his fear reign in our hearts, and regulates all the actions of our lives” (16).

When true worship is restored, the

child of God receives the blessed fruit of assurance. He is able to rest in Christ “with firm and solid confidence, feeling assured that Christ is so completely his own, that he possesses in him righteousness and life” (25). Calvin’s treatise is powerfully polemical in establishing not only the cause of

the reformation, but also the biblical principles of worship. The regulative principle, held fast by Calvin and the reformers, is a legacy left to us, the children of the reformation. We will be faithful to maintain it, so that “the pure and legitimate worship of God” (13) is upheld in our churches.

## SCRIPTURE’S COVENANT YOUTH (XI): DAVID

>>Prof. Herman Hanko



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David was anointed by Samuel to be king over Israel even though he was still a youth. In Old Testament times, God gave His Holy Spirit to those whom He anointed as prophets, priests or kings. So David also possessed the Spirit from the time he was anointed in Bethlehem by Samuel.

David knew therefore, that he was now Israel’s king and that Saul no longer possessed the right to rule as king. He must often have wondered why God

did not give him the kingdom if he was to be king, and the temptation must have been present with him from time to time to seize the kingdom by force. But he never attempted this and was on the contrary, ready to wait for God to give him the kingdom, even though many years elapsed before God made him king; he was then a grown man and the captain of a sizable force of strong and valiant men who had come to join him in his exile.

One of the outstanding features of this period of David’s life was his willingness to wait for God to give him the kingdom. Anyone who knew he was anointed to be the legitimate king in a nation would do all he could to assume that position. By being anointed, David had every right to claim the throne; and, after all, to be a king over a large nation was a temptation not easily resisted. When David therefore wrote in some of his songs given us in the Psalms, he knew what it meant to wait upon his God (Ps. 27:14). He waited for years and years as he grew from a young boy to an adult. He even waited when he had the chance to kill King Saul and was advised to do this by his companions. He refused for as he said, he would not dare to do anything

harmful to the Lord’s anointed.

How often is it not true of us when we anticipate something good, or when God delays giving what we think we need or have coming to us. We are eager and God seems so slow to do what He promised. How necessary it is for us simply to wait upon Jehovah. Especially when we are in danger and we are frightened and cry to God for help, but He does not seem to hear us. We take matters into our own hands to acquire what we want. And that is why in the same Psalm and the same verse in which David urges us to wait on Jehovah, he also tells us: Be of good courage, and He will strengthen thine heart. But wait on Jehovah!

It is not this of which I choose to write in this article. The real important characteristic of David’s life that can teach us many things is found in the history of David’s battle with Goliath. You may read the whole incident in 1 Samuel 17. It is a well-known story, but it is interesting and important enough to be read again.

While we are particularly moved by David’s courage in going to meet Goliath armed only with a sling, and

while his victory in the confrontation is exciting to read, I am, in this article more interested in David's discussion with Saul. You may find that in 1 Samuel 17:31-39. More particularly, verses 34-36, in which is described David's protection of his sheep by killing a lion and a bear. Why did David tell Saul of this incident in his life as a youth?

Let us be clear on the circumstances. David had been sent by Jesse, his father, to inquire into the welfare of his brothers who were in the army of Saul in a battle with the Philistines. There was no fighting at the moment of David's arrival in the camp. This lull in the battle was due to the presence of a giant, Goliath by name. We are not told the height, armor and strength of the Philistine, but we are informed of a family of giants in the nation of the Philistines who were all mighty men around nine feet tall, stronger than oxen with weapons of such size that an ordinary man could hardly lift them, but who were killed by David's warriors. Goliath was sent out of the Philistine's camp every day to taunt the army of Israel and the God whom they served. It was Saul's responsibility to go out to fight the giant, but Saul cowered in his tent. Nor was there another soldier in the whole army who dared to challenge Goliath.

Except David. A young man; without armour; without weapons; He was not only willing, but was eager and confident of victory over this monstrosity of a soldier called Goliath (verse 46).

But what made him so confident that seemed to border on reckless foolhardiness? He was urged not to go by war-hardened soldiers. He was offered armour and more dangerous

weapons than a mere slingshot. Was he stupidly foolish? Was he a daredevil willing to try any hazard? Was he embarrassed by Israel's refusal to go to fight this giant? Was it the promise of a princess to be his wife that moved him?

None of these. The giant was mocking Israel's God and it was Jehovah's people that Goliath despised for their cowardliness (verse 43).

That was always the issue in Israel: Was Israel's God the only true God? Or were the idols of the heathen superior to Jehovah? The cowardliness of Saul and his army indicated that they did not have faith in God's promises or His superiority over the gods of the heathen. They did not believe that God would care for His church no matter what the strength of Israel's opponents might be.

And that brings us to David's story of his victory over a lion and a bear that had come to destroy his father's sheep.

Once again: Why did he tell Saul of this incident in his life? Was it mere boasting on David's part? Was it intended to prove to Saul that he was very strong?

None of these was the reason.

David told Saul of these exploits because they were proof to David that he, as Israel's king, possessed the Holy Spirit of God. There was no way that David could have killed both a lion and a bear with his own strength as a youth. He realized that when Samuel anointed him, he was Israel's true king. Saul had really been deposed and was only hanging on to his role as king because he wanted to pass it on to his son. Yet he showed that he was not fit

to be king, for he was the one who had to go out to fight Goliath, or at least inspire his troops by his own example that he was truly their king. But instead of daring to fight the giant, he let a mere "stripling" go instead while he cowered in his tent.

But David knew he was king even though he had to wait for God to open the way. As king, it was his responsibility to lead the hosts of Israel by his courage and faith in God.

Whatever the "odds" may have been – and they were strongly in favour of Goliath – David knew that he represented the cause of God as Israel's king, and was ready to show that he desired to do so. He was absolutely confident of victory (verse 47) for God would not allow His name to be blasphemed, and David represented that great name "Jehovah", the one true God who bore that name.

David was a type of Christ who is the Captain of our salvation and who has crushed the head of Satan and all his vast hosts of demons for us. He leads us (and all the church) from victory to victory. He fights against all the enemies of the church and destroys them: Satan, the world that hates the church, and our own depraved natures. From an earthly point of view, the enemy is overwhelmingly stronger. Our foes number in the billions and they have Satan and his millions of demons on their side. The church is a hut in a garden of cucumbers, a very small remnant, a besieged city, and a little flock surrounded by ravening wolves from whose snarling mouths drips the saliva of the anticipation of devouring the sheep.

The text forces on us the question: Do

we have the courage of David? After all we too possess the Holy Spirit and are kings (Lord's Day 12); we represent the cause of God in the world. What do we do? Shrink back in fear? Talk nice to wicked men to gain their favour? Join them in their evil activities? We find it easy to do so when they are not threatening us. But what about those countless times when they mock our God, twist His truth into their own

notions? Poke fun of His great glory and majesty? Do we remain silent? Does it not bother us to hear our God slandered? And what about the times they threaten us? With loss of our jobs? With imprisoning us? With killing us? What then?

May God give us men (and women – who often are more courageous than the men [see the history of Deborah

and Barak]) who are so enthralled with the power and faithfulness of the God that has saved them that they will die for the honour of His name. May our God give us the courage of David, the courage of thousands of martyrs whose blood is spilled on the pages of history; the courage to “love not our lives unto death”. Faith is the victory that overcomes the world.

## ARE UNBELIEVERS IN GOD'S IMAGE? (VI)

>>Rev. Angus Stewart



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We answer the question, “Are unbelievers in God’s image?” with a firm negative! After five articles in which we have treated this issue both biblically and theologically, we now come to the Reformed confessions, first, our *Three Forms of Unity* and, second, the *Westminster Standards*. In the next instalment, we shall consider other Reformed creeds.

### Three Forms of Unity

The first of the *Three Forms of Unity* historically is the *Belgic Confession* (1561). Article 14 defines the *imago dei* in terms of moral and spiritual qualities,

and treats it in connection with man’s creation and the Fall:

We believe that God created man out of the dust of the earth, and made and formed him *after His own image and likeness, good, righteous, and holy*, capable in all things to will, agreeably to the will of God. But being in honour, he understood it not, neither knew his excellency, but willfully subjected himself to sin, and consequently to death, and the curse, giving ear to the words of the devil. For the commandment of life, which he had received, he transgressed; and by sin separated himself from God, who was his true life, having corrupted his whole nature; whereby he made himself liable to corporal and spiritual death. And being thus become wicked, perverse, and corrupt in all his ways, he hath lost all his excellent gifts, which he had received from God, and only retained a few remains thereof, which, however, are sufficient to leave man without

excuse; for all the light which is in us is changed into darkness, as the Scriptures teach us, saying: The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not, where St. John calleth men darkness.

Two years later our *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563) was written. It defines the divine image in terms of righteousness, holiness and the knowledge of God, and teaches that man became “wicked and perverse” through the Fall (cf. Q. & A. 7):

Q. 6. Did God then create man so wicked and perverse?

A. By no means; but God created man good, and *after His own image, in true righteousness and holiness*, that he might rightly know God his Creator, heartily love Him, and live with Him in eternal happiness to glorify and praise Him.

The only other reference to the *imago* in the first two of the *Three Forms of*

*Unity* is the *Heidelberg Catechism's* later reference to it as the image of *Christ*, in connection with sanctification and good works:

Q. 86. Since then we are delivered from our misery merely of grace, through Christ, without any merit of ours, why must we still do good works?

A. Because Christ, having redeemed and delivered us by His blood, also renews us by His Holy Spirit *after His own image*; that so we may testify by the whole of our conduct our gratitude to God for His blessings, and that He may be praised by us; also, that every one may be assured in himself of his faith by the fruits thereof; and that by our godly conversation others may be gained to Christ.

Finally, we come to the *Canons of Dordt* (1618-1619). This creed also defines the divine likeness in terms of the familiar trio, which were lost at the Fall: knowledge, righteousness and holiness. It does so in terms of man's "faculties": his "understanding," "heart and will," and "affections," which, together with his body, constitute the "whole man."

Man was *originally* formed *after the image of God*. His understanding was adorned with a true and saving *knowledge* of his Creator and of spiritual things; his heart and will were *upright*; all his affections pure; and the whole man was *holy*. But, revolting from God by the instigation of the devil and abusing the freedom of his own will, he forfeited these excellent gifts, and on the contrary entailed on himself blindness of

mind, horrible darkness, vanity, and perverseness of judgment, became wicked, rebellious, and obdurate in heart and will, and impure in his affections (III/IV:1).

Immediately after this, the *Canons* state, "Man after the fall begat children in his own likeness. A corrupt stock produced a corrupt offspring" (III/IV:2). Fallen mankind has children in its own corrupt image and not in the divine likeness!

A later article in the *Canons of Dordt*, reflecting on the teaching regarding the *imago dei* above, speaks of it in terms of "spiritual gifts," "good qualities" and "virtues":

[The Synod rejects the errors of those] Who teach that the *spiritual gifts*, or the *good qualities* and *virtues*, such as goodness, *holiness, righteousness*, could not belong to the will of man when he was first created, and that these, therefore, could not have been separated therefrom in the fall (III/IV:R:2).

To conclude, there is not a word in our *Three Forms of Unity* about the alleged "broader sense" of the image of God, which defines it, for example, in terms of man's rationality or continued existence after death, though man's rationality and possession of a soul is, of course, part of his humanity. Moreover, everything in our official creeds fits perfectly with our teaching regarding the divine likeness.

### Westminster Standards

Moving from these continental European Reformed creeds, we come to

the *Westminster Standards* (1646-1647) produced by British Presbyterianism. All three of these documents speak of the *imago dei* in connection with man's creation, and as consisting in knowledge, righteousness and holiness, explicitly citing in their footnotes the two classic proof texts: Ephesians 4:24 ("And that ye put on the *new man*, which after God is *created* in *righteousness* and true *holiness*") and Colossians 3:10 ("And have put on the *new man*, which is *renewed* in *knowledge* after the *image of him that created him*").

After God had made all other creatures, he created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, endued with *knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, after his own image*; having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfil it: and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject unto change. Beside this law written in their hearts, they received a command, not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; which while they kept, they were happy in their communion with God, and had dominion over the creatures (*Westminster Confession* 4:2).

Q. How did God create man?

A. After God had made all other creatures, he created man male and female; formed the body of the man out of the dust of the ground, and the woman of the rib of the man, endued them with living, reasonable and immortal souls; made them *after his own image, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness* (*Westminster Larger*

*Catechism*, Q. & A. 17).

Q. How did God create man?

A. God created man male and female, *after his own image, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness*, with dominion over the creatures (*Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Q. & A. 10).

The remaining two references to the divine likeness in the *Westminster*

*Standards* speak of it in connection with the believer's sanctification (*Westminster Larger Catechism*, Q. & A. 75; *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Q. & A. 35), as does *Heidelberg Catechism*, Q. & A. 86, quoted earlier.

In short, all three documents in the *Westminster Standards* (the *Westminster Confession*, the *Westminster Larger Catechism* and the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*) define and explain the image of God in the same way as the

*Three Forms of Unity*. Nothing that they teach conflicts with our view that unbelievers are not in God's image. Everything they say sweetly accords with our doctrine that only those men, women and children who are in covenant communion with God in Jesus Christ are His likeness, image and glory!

Next time, we shall turn to other Reformed creeds on the *imago dei*, DV.

## HOLINESS AS YOUNG ADULTS (I)

>>Wee Gim Theng



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Dear young people, as serious young Christian adults who love the Lord, I am quite sure you are desirous to live a holy Christian life, pleasing to Him. Since Elder Lee Kong Wee in his previous article 'Holiness: A conscious Choice' had already addressed what holiness is and what it means to live a holy life, I shall not repeat what had been written. However, before we examine the challenges young adults face in living a holy life unto the Lord, it would be good for us to understand the reason and the motivation for one to live such a life.

The reason and the motivation to live a holy life is primarily from the admonition given by the Apostle Peter in 1 Pet 1:15 and 16, "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy". 1 Pet 1:16 is a quotation from the book of Leviticus (Lev. 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:7), thus emphasizing the important and fundamental calling of God's people to be holy, in both the old and the new dispensations. The people of God of all ages are called to holy living! You and I must desire to live a holy life because it is God who has called us to live such a life. And God who has called us to be holy is Himself holy! Isaiah 6 gives us a glimpse of God's glory and holiness. Even the seraphims had to cover their faces with their wings and cried, "Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory." (Isa. 6:2 and 3). Immediately, the prophet Isaiah reacted with the exclamation acknowledging his sinfulness: "Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone;

because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts." (Isa. 6:5).

The Apostle Peter exhorts us, as pilgrims and strangers on our journey of life, to live with the hope for the glorious fulfillment of the perfect salvation to be revealed at the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are to gird up the loins of our mind as obedient children, not fashioning ourselves according to the former lusts in our ignorance but be holy in all manner of conversation (1 Pet. 1:13-14). We should, therefore, have the mindset of pilgrims and strangers living on this earth making our way to the eternal home reserved for us. Our permanent home is in heaven where our holy God dwells. We are to be obedient children, obeying God as a child ought his/her father, to flee from the former lusts we once indulged in or were enslaved to and be holy like our Father in heaven. Our

pilgrimage is really to prepare us to be a holy people fit for heaven, though we will never attain perfect holiness on this side of the grave. Hence living a holy life is NOT an option but an expected obligation for all Christians!

The whole of our life must be characterized by holiness not only in our outward day-to-day living but also inwardly, in our hearts and minds. In principle, as regenerated Christians, we are a holy people since our sins have been forgiven and our guilt purged through the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, by the imputation of His righteousness on us. We are, as what the Apostle Peter says in 1 Pet 2:9 and 10, “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy”. This is what we are by the grace of God, chosen of God to live in covenant fellowship with Him. A people of His possession, called to offer spiritual sacrifices of thanksgiving and to show forth the praises of Him who has called us out our darkness into the marvelous light of His Kingdom. We were once not a people, but now a people of God. We were once without mercy but have now obtained mercy in His Son Jesus Christ. Let us then, with the small beginning of this new obedience, strive to live a life of holiness

as unto the Lord, not as a basis of our salvation, but as fruits of gratitude and of a new life.

While we recognize that we have been called out to be a special people sanctified by God and consecrated for holy use, we are nevertheless encumbered with the reality of the ever present depraved nature clinging to us. We continue to fall into sin each and every day. We struggle daily in the body of this death and acknowledge with the Apostle Paul in Rom. 7:19, “For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do”. However, we are not only faced with the enemy within, we have to deal with the temptations posed by the world, its lusts and its philosophy as well as the prowling and roaring lion, the Evil One. Such are the challenges we have to deal with as God’s people in this world. Young Christian adults are not spared. In fact, young Christian adults will have a more difficult calling to live a holy life as wickedness abounds more and more as the coming of our Lord draws near.

The immediate challenge for young Christian adults in this life is how to rein in the youthful exuberance that you have and have victory over the three-fold enemy of self, the world and Satan; and at the same time fulfill the obligation of holy living. As young adults you have boundless energy and youthful ideals. The question is how can you direct your youthful energy

and ideals to the service of God, as unto holiness and not be made used of by the three-fold enemy? How can young adults properly make use of the time and opportunities presented to them each day for the glory of God, for the edification of His Church, for the furtherance of His Kingdom and for the preparation of their souls for the life to come? How can one balance one’s studies/work, social life, social and family obligations, church calling, service, etc. with the important calling to be holy in every aspect of one’s life? There are no easy answers as we grapple with the sins that often beset us.

In the next article, the Lord willing, we shall examine the challenges faced by young Christian adults in this day and age. We shall list out the difficulties faced by young adults as they grapple with living a life of holiness unto God in the cyber world of internet, social media, gaming, eCommerce, etc. Topics such as pressures young Christian adults face to conform to the worldly lifestyle, how financial independence affect their outlook and service to the Lord, challenges in working life and living as young singles adults and married couples shall be examined in the light of scripture.

## LIFE IN THE SEMINARY

>> Josiah Tan



*Josiah Tan* is a member of CERC and is currently studying in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary.

The *Salt Shakers* Committee asked me to write an article on the life of a seminarian. As such, I hope to give the readers a brief sketch of the life of a seminarian, of what activities go on inside and outside the classroom. Along with that I will make some brief points of personal reflection. Because I have only completed my first year, by the grace of God, I can only give a limited perspective of a freshman.

### A brief sketch of our timetable

In the winter, most mornings I wake up to are cold and literally freezing. The worst was -15 degrees Celsius. The first class begins at 7:50 a.m. with opening prayer. Most mornings begin with “Prof. Cammenga’s brew”, a robust dark roast cup of Hebrew grammar (Expect heart palpitations and migraines at the beginning). Each class period is sufficiently long at 55 minutes.

At 9:40 a.m., after two class periods, we have devotions together with all the professors and students. Each seminary student takes a turn to lead the devotions each week. Once a week, the seminary invites a pastor from one

of the PR churches to give a chapel speech. Its theme often relates to the ministry.

After that we have coffee time for 10-15 minutes. During coffee time, the professors and students engage in “table talks”. Some things discussed are pointed application of God’s Word just made at chapel, discussions of various doctrinal and spiritual issues, denominational news and news from the broader church world, sharing personal or family struggles, and cracking of jokes (the Americans call it “giving each other a hard time”). Coffee time in seminary is like dinner time at home – serious at times and lighthearted at times. The professors, although deeply respected by all the seminary students, are like spiritual fathers to us.

After another two intense class periods, we all have lunch together, followed by a brief time of ping-pong in the basement. Following that, the students disperse all over the seminary’s library to study. The seminary closes at 5:00 p.m., and we head home to spend time with our families and eat dinner.

### What I have been studying in the past year

Some courses I had the privilege of taking were Dogmatics, Homiletics (how to preach), Catechetics (how to conduct catechism), Church History, Hermeneutics (how to study the Bible), and Greek and Hebrew as earlier mentioned. Each course is exciting, as every lesson points us to the glory

of God and the cross of Jesus Christ. I will give a short summary and the key applications I took away from each course.

Church History, taught by Prof. Dykstra, is broken down into four main periods – ancient, medieval, reformation, and modern. We learn about the unfolding of God’s plan of salvation of the church across time. We are constantly baffled by the mighty hand of God in gathering, defending, and preserving the church through the ages. The trials the church faces today, as trying as they are, must be seen by a child of God in perspective of the 2000 years of church history after the time of the apostles. What issue do we face today that has not in some form been faced by the church in the past? Church history is vital for us to learn not only of the many mistakes we weak man have made, but it is vital because it enlarges our confidence in our faithful God, who has kept His bride throughout the ages.

Dogmatics, taught by Prof. Cammenga, is broken down into six parts. Like church history, we take one semester to cover each part. We study doctrines about God, man, Christ, salvation, the Church, and the last things. The truths of Scripture are so clear, but man in his depravity, together with the father of lies, has sought to twist Scriptures. Personally, I empathize with Prof. Cammenga, for having studied and knowing firsthand the violent attacks against God’s truth, he has the difficult and heavy calling of teaching us novice students about the complex and

deceitful lies of Satan. Like a veteran soldier who is well acquainted with the spiritual battle, Prof. Cammenga tries to impress us with the importance of knowing our God rightly. Although we students can, for the most part, grasp the beauty of the Reformed faith, I personally struggle to understand the depths of his strong warning against heresy. I believe that the reason for this is that I am young and inexperienced in the battles fought by the elders and pastors of the church.

In the last semester, as part of Homiletics, I had to write and deliver one sermon before Prof. Gritters and the student body. If IPPT in our national service pushes one's physical limit and the rigours of the Singapore education system push one's intellectual limits, personally, making a sermon pushed one's spiritual limit. The whole exercise kept my knees on the ground. The preaching of God's Word is simply the preaching of God's Word. To think and speak the words of Christ and to understand the Word of God intellectually and spiritually with the goal to say "thus saith the Lord" is humanly impossible. Not a point can be understood and made without the Spirit's work on the exegete. Among all the courses in seminary, both writing and delivering a sermon is the most challenging, yet also the most spiritually rewarding. God has used Prof. Gritters to patiently instruct us students in this. The repeated emphasis is this: if we cannot see Jesus Christ and the cross as central to the passage, we have no business preaching it.

### Outside the classroom

Apart from classroom activities, we also have student club. This is where the seminary students will select a

topic of their choice, prepare readings and discussion questions, and have a meeting on that topic at one of the three professor's homes. The three professors will share their spiritual insights and experience on the particular topic. Here, students and professors are given another way to sharpen each other spiritually.

Apart from the intense studying, the seminary students also invite each other to their homes for meals, fellowship, and games. Watching the fourth-year seminary students compete in Bible quizzes is high quality Reformed entertainment. At one dinner Huiqi and I were invited to, Seminarian Kortus took out a large container of Nerf guns. Shooting styrofoam rolls at each other is an effective way of keeping one's mind off the pending dogmatics research paper.

Along the student study tables in the library, many informal discussions take place. In these conversations, we students learn how to be spiritually accountable to each other. Many of the upperclassmen have taken the time to teach me many profitable things, both spiritual matters and practical matters of living in the U.S. One important lesson I learned from them is to set aside time to spend with my wife and child. Students always face the danger of being consumed by the seminary work at the neglect of the closest neighbours God has placed in our lives.

### Is seminary hard?

One common question I get from friends about studying in the seminary is, "Is it hard?" I too asked that question before I began seminary. Before I entered seminary, I had always held the professors and seminary students on a

high pedestal, seeing them as belonging to another worldly spiritual plane and as having an unattainable work ethic. So when I entered the seminary, I kept asking them how they got to where they were in their spiritual-mindedness and discipline. I thought maybe since I was in the seminary I would learn the "secret". But the students and professors gave me with their words and personal lives the answer I had already known since a child: the Scriptures. For it is only through the Word of God that the Spirit works in our hearts. In other words, the covenant and communion with God is the secret (Ps. 25:14). For we must not only read the Scriptures, but meditate on it, dwell on it, pray over it, apply it to every part of our lives. The short answer to the question "Is seminary hard?" is yes, it is: blood, sweat, and tears. But every seminary student will despair if you think in the slightest that they on their own accord sustain themselves in the course by their own grit and ability. Students enter the seminary with the same weak flesh that we all share. They continue in their school life daily to mortify that old man of sin. They draw all strength from God by the means of studying the Scriptures and constant prayer. Any gift that they have is given by God of grace, with the sole purpose to bring our focus on God, our overflowing source of all good. Is seminary hard? No, it is impossible. But God makes the impossible possible. Seminary or not, God supernaturally opens each of our eyes to His Word, and Jesus Christ apprehends our hearts to flee sin and run into His arms. Let us continue to study His Word together by His Spirit!

## A LETTER TO MY UNFORGIVING SELF (II)

>>Marcus Wee



Marcus Wee is a member of CERC.

Unforgiving self, let us continue our meditation on forgiveness. In the last letter, we saw that having been forgiven by God, you are to forgive your neighbour *even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you* (Eph. 4:32). We saw that some of your excuses for being unforgiving cannot stand up to the model of God's forgiveness for you – unconditional, not based on what you did, but what Christ did; initiating, by approaching you first; embracing, by drawing you to Himself. Self, let us continue our reflection in this letter by examining two more of your excuses in light of God's forgiveness of you. Next, we consider how you can grow in your forgiveness of others, and finally, some practical ways of forgiving your neighbour.

### My Feeble Excuses for Being Unforgiving, Examined (Continued)

"What she did to me was so spiteful; even though she has already apologised, I'm going to be cold and distant towards her for a while, to let her realise how much she hurt me."

You don't actually *say* that, do you, self? You soothe your conscience by telling yourself that you'll forgive eventually.

You make this excuse sound a lot better by focusing on the immense difficulty you face to forgive. Yet what makes it difficult for you to forgive? Is it not pride, that sin which thoroughly infects you? Is it not an excessive love of self, that values your own feelings so highly that any infringement against them is deserving of tenfold retribution? You know, self, even in those very moments when you justify being cold to your neighbour, that you illicitly harbour an unforgiving spirit.

Let's see how God forgives you, self, so that you may also learn to forgive others in the same manner. What is God's response each time you turn to Him in sorrow after sinning against Him? A cold, dismissive wave of the hand? No! As the loving father who embraced his wayward son and restored him to sonship, God forgives you the moment you turn to Him in repentance (Luke 15:20-24). How often have you crawled to the throne of grace and experienced God's forgiveness as you began to confess your sins before Him? Having experienced such forgiveness, self, you may not withhold forgiveness from your repentant neighbour.

"I will forgive him, but I'll never forget what he did towards me."

Self, perhaps you think that it's impossible to ever forget how your neighbour has hurt you. At the same time, you also know that God forgives you by forgetting your sins, as He says in Isaiah 43:25: "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for

mine own sake, and *will not remember thy sins*" (emphasis mine). There are a couple of things that you need to know about forgiving and forgetting, self.

First, forgiving by forgetting does not involve having no memory of the neighbour's sin. When God Himself forgives, He does not simply lose the knowledge that we have ever committed sins. After all, He is omniscient, and will judge us out of the books where all our deeds are recorded (Rev. 20:12). Furthermore, when Joseph forgave his brothers, he said, "I am Joseph your brother, *whom ye sold into Egypt*" (Gen 45:4b, emphasis mine). Joseph evidently remembered that his brothers had sold him into slavery – how could he ever forget that? – yet this was compatible with his forgiving them.

Second, if forgiving by forgetting does not involve wiping your memory, it *does* involve wiping clean your brother's slate against you. God removes our transgressions from us as far as east from west (Ps. 103:12), so that there is none to be found on our slate (Jer. 50:20). He counts all our sins on the person of Christ, and none remains on our account. Likewise, when Joseph brought up his brothers' infractions, he did so with no bitterness in his heart, desiring that his brothers come to live with him in prosperous Egypt. He had wiped their slates clean.

Self, you need to emulate God in forgiving and forgetting. You may have a physical memory of your neighbour's sin against you, accompanied by hurt, but this memory must be void

of bitterness. And when this memory flares up, tempting you to spitefully remind your neighbour of his sin, bite that poisonous tongue of yours. Also, pray to God for strength not to let this memory fester within you as a grudge that you hold against your neighbour.

### **Growing to Forgive My Neighbour**

Self, we have tackled two more of your greatest excuses about being unforgiving, by considering God's forgiveness of you – immediate and forgetting. Now let's explore how you can grow in your ability to forgive your neighbour.

#### **1. Growing to Appreciate God's Forgiveness of Me**

Self, you need to grow in your appreciation of God's forgiveness of you. Oh, you know intellectually that you are totally depraved and that God sent His only begotten Son to die for you. Yet if you truly appreciated how much God has forgiven you, you would be willing to forgive your neighbour. If you knew that you have been forgiven of ten thousand talents (an unpayable debt!), then you wouldn't be casting your neighbour in prison for the hundred pence he owes you. Self, keep growing to appreciate God's forgiveness of you. Meditate often on how horrendous each sin that you have committed is, how you repeatedly and wilfully sin, and how, despite your numerous sins, God still bestows His forgiveness on you. As you grow in awareness of how horrible your sins are and how much God has forgiven you, then you will grow in your capacity to forgive your neighbour, by recognising how small in comparison your neighbour's sins are towards you.

#### **2. Growing to Appreciate God's Forgiveness of My Neighbour**

Self, what are you saying when you refuse to forgive a fellow believer? That your neighbour is "worthy" of God's forgiveness, but not yours? That God made a mistake in His wise counsel of electing your neighbour unto salvation and forgiving her sins, and that you know better than Him, to withhold forgiveness? You probably don't mean it, but you sure act that way by your thoughts and actions! Self, grow to appreciate your neighbour as a sibling in Christ who has been forgiven by God, and you will find yourself growing in your capacity to forgive your neighbour.

#### **3. Growing in My Dependence on God**

Self, perhaps you are utterly exhausted from wrestling to forgive your neighbour and have thought more than once, "It is impossible for me to forgive him!" There is a ring of truth in that statement. If forgiveness were dependent on you, it would indeed be impossible. Yet you are not alone in this struggle. Self, you need to depend on God, the source of all forgiveness, by whose grace you are empowered to forgive your neighbour. Do you earnestly wrestle with God, that He may grant you the strength to forgive?

### **Practical Ways to Forgive My Neighbour**

Self, let us now consider some practical ways in which you can forgive your neighbour. These considerations apply especially when you have a long-standing difficulty in forgiving your neighbour.

#### **1. Thinking the Best of My Neighbour**

Perhaps you are embroiled in a bitter, long-drawn conflict where many hurtful words have been exchanged on both sides. New events only seem to exacerbate the existing issues. When you learn that the neighbour did this or said that, your immediate tendency is to flare up in indignation, and you begin adding to the mountain of grudge that you already hold, making it that much more difficult to forgive your neighbour.

Self, even while working to wipe clean your neighbour's slate of a past wrong, do not continue to needlessly pile on fresh wrongs! How often do you hear a piece of news about your neighbour and immediately jump to an evil conclusion about her? Without knowing the full picture, how often do you fill in the gaps with your preconceived notions about your neighbour ("Oh, I knew she was like that")? With only external information about the neighbour, how often do you assign a motive to what he did? Oh the deceitfulness of your heart, self!

Self, do not perpetuate your unforgiving tendencies by adding sin to sin. Instead, with a charity that "believeth all things" (1 Cor. 13:7), you must think the best of your neighbour. If you are not in a position to clarify what the neighbour did, assign the best possible motive to her action. Keep your mind focused on things which are true and praiseworthy (Phil. 4:8), which will help you resist the downward spiral of evil thoughts.

#### **2. Focusing on My Part to Play**

It's always easier to focus on what the neighbour did wrongly, isn't it, self? You have on hand a long list of what he did,

while what you did is easily forgotten or minimised. After all, you were provoked into doing what you did. Or what you did pales in comparison to what he did. Really, self? Who made you a judge over this matter? What business do you have deciding that your neighbour has sinned more grievously than you have? Yes, your neighbour has sinned greatly against you. Yet it is likely that you too have some part to play in this conflict, however great or small. Focus instead on that, self. Focus on how you have wronged your neighbour and are in need of his forgiveness. Set aside your pride and approach him to apologise. Do not make your apology conditional on whether he too apologises. Yes, you have a responsibility to ensure his repentance for sin; however, be more concerned about your own sin in the conflict. After that is settled, you can then bring up the sin of the brother, and not in a manner that excuses your own.

#### Seeking Forgiveness for My Unforgiving Spirit

Self, continue working on becoming more forgiving and seeking strength from God to forgive. While you do

that, however, do not be too easy on yourself. No matter the difficulty you face in this process, no matter the pain you experience, this fact remains: your unforgiving spirit is a sin which you choose to cling on to, and even continue to nurse with your thoughts and actions. You, self, need forgiveness for your unforgiving spirit. You need forgiveness, from God first of all, and also from your neighbour. Make sure not only to pray for strength to forgive; pray also for forgiveness for being unforgiving.

Self, consider what you are doing by perpetuating an unforgiving spirit: you are claiming that your sin of being unforgiving is less serious than the neighbour's sin, whatever he did. You are presuming to take issue with your neighbour's sin, while permitting and justifying your own. Does that sound familiar? Self, you are trying to take the mote out of your neighbour's eye, while there is a beam lodged in your own (Matt. 7:3)! Do not do that, self. Do not be a beam-eyed mote-remover, but recognise the beam which is in your own eye before you presume to remove the mote in your neighbour's.

#### Conclusion

Self, it is difficult to snap out of this cycle of an unforgiving spirit, for however long it has gripped you. As we saw, it is even impossible to do so on your own. Yet praise be to God, who empowers you to forgive by forgiving you, sending His only begotten Son to die on the cross for your sins. From the One who said of his murderers while hanging on the cross, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34), you have new life to break free of the chains of an unforgiving spirit, and nurture a forgiving spirit towards your neighbour. May the grace of our forgiving God be with you!

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## BOOK REVIEW: LITTLE WHITE FARMHOUSE IN IOWA

>>Emily Lanning

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This book was written by Carol Brands, a Protestant Reformed mother and grandmother in the state of Minnesota. It is a biography of Katherine Kroontje, whom Carol met when Katherine was an elderly woman. It tells of the story of Katherine's first ten years and the many experiences she had as a child. This book is one of three books that Carol Brands wrote telling about the

life of Katherine.

Susie Kroontje gave birth to Katherine in the middle of a stormy night during the Great Depression in the United States, when families were very poor. The book traces the time Katherine swallowed kerosene as a toddler to the time a blizzard swept through the United States when she was ten years

old. We read about the times when Katherine's family visited her Uncle Will and Aunt Ann to bring them food in the nearby state of North Dakota during the Great Depression.

In chapter nine, we read of how Katherine and her older brother Willie went to school in North Dakota during the time they were visiting their uncle and aunt. It was a one-room schoolhouse that was painted a light beige colour and had a wide porch in the front. Katherine kept the four books for each of her subjects: arithmetic, writing, phonics, and music. I thought it was very interesting to learn about what subjects they had in 1935, though we still have the same subjects today!

Katherine's family was very hard-working as they tended cows on the farm, got water at the pump, grew their own crops, cleared the table, and dried dishes. This is a good model for us to follow in our own work. It teaches us that we must work hard in the callings that God has set before us.

Throughout the book, we read of how Katherine's family often read the Bible, followed by prayer. Devotions always made Katherine feel secure, as she knew that God's blessings were always upon her on that day. Katherine often prayed short prayers on her own as well, to thank God or to ask Him for patience and calmness. This is a good example of how we must often pray little prayers to God, whether it is asking Him for

forgiveness of sins, calmness, patience, joyfulness in a time of sorrow, or thanksgiving.

Even though there are many differences in culture between living on a farm in the United States in the 1930s and living in Singapore today, I still recommend this book to you. This is a very enjoyable book for children to read, but adults would also enjoy getting a glimpse of a godly family that lived in Iowa. This book is available on Amazon.com for those who would be interested in reading it!

## THE GREAT FLOOD

>> Lisa Ong



Lisa Ong is a member of CERC.

2017 saw increasing incidences of natural disasters – a volcano waiting to erupt in Bali, forest fires in Southern California, tropical storms in the Philippines... It might be tempting to dismiss these phenomena as climate change, or even put away newspapers to avoid further despair, but as Christians, we should not. While the world reacts in horror and fear, Christians can find comfort in these disasters. Let us put on our spiritual lenses and seek to

understand them in light of the Bible.

The first and greatest natural disaster recorded in the history of mankind is the Great Flood in Genesis 6-9. Its scale of destruction is unparalleled, and only eight souls, seven of each clean beast, and two of each unclean beast survived. With the Flood, God set a precedent of how His people should view and respond to such happenings (Matt. 24:37-39).

### *God is sovereign*

From the account of the Flood, it is stark that God directed the whole event, as He does with the entire world since its inception. From who would be saved and otherwise be destroyed, what Noah had to do to build the ark, how the wicked were destroyed by the

furious water, to when it was the right time for Noah to leave the ark and so on, God was in full control.

These days, the intensity and frequency of natural disasters is increasing in diverse places all around us, but knowing that these all happen under the mighty hand of God, we need not be frightened. Furthermore, God has forewarned us that these will happen in Revelation 6 and Matthew 24. We are not at the mercy of chance, or a geoscientific process that we have to try desperately to prevent.

We might wonder why a sovereign God allows such calamity to befall the world in our day. The beautiful creation is torn apart – animals perish, men, even His beloved people, succumb to earthquakes and floods. How could

a God of love and peace allow such unpleasantness? We then have to remember that God is a just God.

### *God is just*

Being just, God cannot stand sin and has to punish man for sin. In Genesis 6:5-7, we learn that the Flood was executed out of judgment against the wickedness of the people, who were consumed in fleshly lusts and thought evil continually. As such, the Flood was sent to purge the wicked from the face of the earth.

Unlike the Flood which was sent specifically to destroy the wicked, the natural disasters in our present time occur due to a corrupted world. Just like how man was tainted with sin, the creation is inherently corrupted and no longer perfect. Extreme weather conditions, drought, volcanic eruptions and others all lie on a spectrum of natural dangers that cause much pain and risk to life, which would not have existed in the perfect creation before the fall.

While the natural world was ruined after the fall, this state was exacerbated by Man's actions. Sinful man no longer used his dominion over the creation to serve God, but himself. We think of forest logging for profits at the expense of the ecosystem and the resultant floods due to rising river beds, burning inefficient fuel sources that is easier on the pocket, but emits more carbon into the atmosphere, causing global warming and rising sea levels. The catastrophes are God's judgment on the corrupt world.

It is no wonder that the whole creation and the people of God wait for our redemption from corruption (Rom. 8:21-23). How can God's people find comfort while we have to endure this?

### *God loves His elect*

In God's mercy, He will remember and redeem His people, like He did with His servant Noah. In His sovereignty, He had chosen to save Noah and effected his salvation from the Flood. In His justice, He sent Christ to die and wash away Noah's and our sins.

Why are Christians not immune from the fury of disasters? Even when Christians jointly suffer with unbelievers such ill, we know that what is to them a savour of death unto death is to us a savour of life unto life. We take comfort that our earthly suffering and death is not a punishment from God as our sins are covered by Jesus's blood. Furthermore, just like how<sup>1</sup> the high waters of the Flood lifted the ark nearer towards heaven, we rejoice at going to a better place, where we have communion with God forever. In the same vein, all the disasters, diseases, pain and struggles, are all part of a corrupt world. However, God uses these for the good of those who love Him.

### *What is our response then and what does God require of us?*

First, we have to beware of spiritual complacency. We, like the sons of God in Noah's day, are not immune from spiritual apostasy and adulteration. If we are attracted to things of this world, let us remember that the things

of the world are temporal, and will be destroyed by fire in the last day (2 Pet. 3:6-7); only the Word of God and our soul will go beyond the grave.

Second, we have to maintain a lively faith in God. Noah's faith in God is a great example of the extent to which we should place our faith in God – it cost him his reputation. He was likely ostracized and mocked by people for preparing for a deluge when there was not a drop of rain since creation. This faith was borne out of a close walk and obedience to God. Do we often find ourselves an unpopular minority in our faith? Let us remember that God's approval is our goal, not man's (Gal. 1:10).

Third, we have to live out our faith in full obedience to God. When Noah entered the ark, he was forsaking his worldly possessions for God's cause. He had to bear with the confinement in and inconveniences of the ark, in order to be preserved for a new world. So let us remember Christ's command for us to deny ourselves in sufferings, and devote ourselves to the service of His Kingdom.

The world that we live in is becoming more and more like the world before the Flood. Let us learn from Noah, to walk with God and obey His commands, that we may find grace in the eyes of the Lord in final judgment.

(Endnotes)

<sup>1</sup> Matthew Henry Commentary on Genesis 7:18.

## THE PRESSURE OF BUSYNESS ON THE COVENANT FAMILY

>> Rev. Joshua Engelsma



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There are evil forces at work in the world today. These powerful forces are bent on the destruction of that which is so beautiful and precious, to God and us: the covenant home.

The forces of evil are the great, spiritual triumvirate of the devil, the unbelieving world, and our own sinful natures. The prince of darkness, together with his hellish hordes, has the covenant family in his crosshairs. He wants nothing more than to see marriages explode and families leveled. The wicked world, open ally of the devil, is also intent on the destruction of the Christian home. And then there is your and my old man, the enemy behind the lines. Without intending, the sins we commit against one another in the home work to weaken our relationships and can lead to their destruction.

These enemies are so interested in the destruction of the home because it too is a powerful force in the world, a power in the hands of God that stands in the service of the advancement of His kingdom of light. Weaken and destroy

the covenant home and you weaken the church.

The covenant family faces attacks from every side. The list of pressures that are placed on the family could go on and on for many pages. This list certainly would have to include such things as the pressure of being earthly-minded, the pressure of world-conformity, and for some even the pressure of persecution.

I want to focus in this article on just one of those pressures. This is a pressure that is easy to overlook or minimize. And yet it is a deceptively destructive pressure that eats away at the foundation of our homes.

That pressure is busyness.

### ***Busyness: A Reality***

Busyness is a reality for a family. In fact, some might wonder if you open the thesaurus and search for the word “family” you will find the word “busyness” there. And I trust that this is true not just in North America, but also in Singapore and in other parts of the world.

There is busyness for the newly-married couple. They do not have children yet, but they live a hectic, fast-paced life. The husband works long hours at his office job over here, while the wife works long hours in a clinic over there. Sometimes one works days, while the other is on the night shift. They are like the proverbial two ships passing in the night. They rarely see one another, and

when they do they are so tired that they can barely keep their eyes open.

If possible, this busyness increases with the addition of children into the home. Feeling the burden to provide for his growing family, the husband works even longer hours. Perhaps he also serves on the board for the school association. Or he serves on some committee of the church. Or he serves in the special office of deacon or elder. Many nights he comes home from work, wolfs down a quick supper, throws together a quick report, and flies off to his meeting, and does not return home until late into the night. The mother also is extremely busy as she does the important work of caring for her children in the home. She rises with them before the sun is up, and she is up with them long after the sun has gone down. Her day is filled with dishes and laundry and dirty diapers. She is out to the grocery store and the doctor’s office and the clothes department. Because of the lack of a Christian school, some might also have the enormous responsibility of running a homeschool.

It seems unimaginable, but the busyness multiplies as the children get older. Not only do you have the busy schedules of dad and mom, but now you add in the busy schedules of teenagers and young adults. They are gone for university studies, for work, for time with friends, for sporting events, for music lessons, and the list goes on and on. Rare is the night when the family is all together at home.

Busyness is a reality.

### ***Busyness: An Anomaly***

From a certain point of view, the busyness of our families is an anomaly. I say this because we have so many things that make our life easier than ever. Consider all the advances in technology that make our lives easier. Instead of keeping food in an ice chest, we have refrigerators and freezers that store months' worth of food. Instead of lighting a fire to cook our food, we can use ovens and microwaves to have it ready instantly. Instead of growing our own food, we can get all we need at the grocery store or the restaurant. Instead of hitching up a horse and buggy to travel somewhere, we can hop in the car or grab public transportation and get wherever we would like with great ease. Instead of writing a letter, we can send a text message or fire off an email in seconds. These things were inconceivable just a few generations ago. Our life is so much easier because of these advancements.

And yet, our lives are so much more hectic than the lives of previous generations. Their lives were so much simpler, and things moved at such a slower pace. Why is this?

The culprit for this busyness is, strangely, the very technologies that make our life so much easier. Advances in transportation make it possible for husbands to work far from home and for children to participate in so many activities outside of the home. Advances in technology make it possible for us to take our work home with us at night and to have so many distracting pings and dings coming from smartphones, laptops, and tablets.

In some ways these things make life easier, but in other ways they make life so much busier.

### ***Busyness: The Consequences***

Perhaps you're wondering, "Is busyness really that big of a problem?" The answer is, "Yes, it is a problem!"

Understand that busyness is not inherently wrong. There is nothing sinful about being busy. In fact, we are called to be busy and diligent in serving God and His church and doing the work He has called us to perform.

But busyness can have damaging consequences in our homes and families when we handle it in the wrong way.

Busyness can have consequences on a marriage. Husband and wife can be so busy that they hardly have any time for each other. This fundamental relationship gets pushed to the sidelines because they are busy doing all sorts of other things. What can happen is that when the children grow up and move out, husband and wife realize they hardly know each other any more.

Busyness can have consequences on children. Many parents think they are helping their children by working long hours so that they can buy them nice things, but what they don't stop to realize is that they are withholding from their children the one they need most of all: their time and attention. Too easily parents sin against their children by not being home with them enough and giving them enough undistracted attention. Children are also hurt when parents deal with their busyness by lazy parenting. Because they feel like they're too busy to discipline properly, the parents either resort to impatient

yelling and screaming or to not disciplining at all.

Busyness can have the consequence of pushing spiritual activities out of our lives. In many homes there is no time of family worship because family members are all off doing their own thing. And when they do manage to gather together, the family worship consists of a quick reading of a few verses of the Bible, no discussion regarding what was read, and then a hasty prayer, after which the whole family scatters. Everyone is too busy with other things ever to sit down, crack open a book, and read something beneficial, and too busy to attend a Bible study. The level of our busyness is often inversely related to the level of our involvement in spiritual activities.

### ***Busyness: The Counter***

What are we to do about this?

We might be tempted to throw up our hands in despair. We might be thinking, "Yes, busyness is a problem, but what can we possibly do to avoid it?"

On the one hand, we do have to reckon with the fact that having a family is going to be busy. There is simply no avoiding it: at times our homes are going to be hectic.

On the other hand, we can minimize some of the busyness in our lives. This is only possible when we radically and rigorously reorder the priorities in our lives. Things of first importance must come first in our lives. Worship and church life, quality family time, and spiritual activities must be top priority, and the time necessary for these things must be guarded jealously. The other

important things in our lives are then ordered around our top priorities, and things of lesser importance may need to be cut out entirely. This may seem like a radical measure, but we should

be ready to do so for the sake of the well-being and strength of our families.

Finally, recognizing the difficulties we face, we need the encouragement to

look to God for the grace and wisdom to serve him faithfully in our covenant homes. “Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it...” (Ps. 127:1).

## REFORMED POLEMICS FOR THE REFORMED BELIEVER (II)

>> Rev. Nathan Langerak



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Polemics is the church's warfare on behalf of the truth and against the lies that Satan raises against the truth. Polemics is a Reformed calling. This calling is explicitly commanded in Scripture: contend earnestly for the faith. In carrying out this calling the church is faithful to her king, Jesus Christ, who is a warring Christ. He came to crush the head of the Serpent and all his seed. He speaks of his own resolve to carry on polemics and his purpose with those polemics in Psalm 101:8, “I will early destroy all the wicked of the land; that I may cut off all wicked doers from the city of the LORD”. Polemics by the church is the work of Christ who carries on this warfare in and through His church. Since Christ is a warring Christ, the church must be a warring church.

The calling of the whole church, of her officebearers, especially of the professors of theology, and of every

believer, is to *do* polemics. Doing polemics the church earnestly contends for the truth of the Word of God against all heresies that militate against it. The word of God curses the deceitful refusal of those who bear the sword of the Lord, His Word, to wield it in spiritual warfare against God's enemies, lies, false doctrine, and heresy. This behaviour is akin to the disgraceful behaviour of the soldier who is armed for warfare, but stays on the back lines and never engages the enemy. Doing polemics is also contrasted with the deceitful practice of those who cover their refusal to do polemics with a vain show of polemics by means of many words and definitions about polemics without ever actually engaging in this hard, painful, and bloody spiritual warfare. The difference between merely talking about polemics and the practice of polemics is as big a difference as merely writing about warfare at the military academy at West Point and actually engaging in warfare on the beaches of Normandy. The Reformed believer may not deceitfully keep back his sword in the day of battle, but neither must he merely talk about polemics without actually engaging in the practice. Reformed polemics is not only a Reformed calling, but a Reformed practice.

This necessary practice of polemics involves especially confronting the

precise error that threatens the truth of the gospel at that moment. Martin Luther, the greatest polemicist since the Apostle Paul, wrote about this reality: “If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battlefield besides, is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point”. That should be the motto of every Reformed believer in his polemics. The believer practices precision in spiritual warfare. That precision serves not only the destruction of the precise form of the lie that threatens the church, but also serves the development of that specific doctrine under threat so that by means of that precise polemics the truth is brought to a higher state of development. Such controversy always takes places under the sovereign direction of the Lord who will not only have the lie defeated but the faith of the church established more and more.

The practice of polemics practically, then, involves naming names. Just as it impossible to wage war in the world without defining and naming the enemy against which some country is opposed, it is equally impossible to engage in the

practice of Reformed polemics without naming names. The Reformed believer in his polemics is not only opposed to false ideas and heresies, but also to those that teach and promote them. The purpose of naming names is so that others may be warned and that those who teach those false doctrines may have opportunity to repent of their errors, or at the very least that they may be warned that they oppose the truth of Christ and the Reformed believer freed from their blood in the day of Christ. Luther explained his great zeal for polemics as in part motivated by this consideration: “I will do my part faithfully so that none may be able to cast on me the blame for their lack of faith and their ignorance of the truth when we appear before the judgment seat of Christ”.

Since in warfare it is necessary to know one’s enemy it is necessary that the Reformed church and believer in the practice of polemics also know their enemy. This knowledge of the enemy is not merely a general recognition and acknowledgement that they fight with Satan, but also includes knowledge of the tactics of this enemy. One word more than any other describes his tactics: deception.

Belonging to his deception involves the fact that Satan rarely comes against the church nakedly revealed as the Great Red Dragon. He came in the garden as a subtle serpent. He came to Jesus under the form of his dear disciple Peter who casually took him aside to whisper in his ear that he need not go to the cross. He comes yet today under the form of articulate, winsome, learned, and popular men. This reality is the point of the Apostle in his warning to the church in Ephesians 6:12. Speaking of the “wiles of the devil”, he explains, “For we

wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places*”. The church in her warfare fights against flesh and blood. The errors, lies, and false doctrines come through the instrumentality of men. The faces of men are the faces of the threat. This can lead the church to believe that she fights only with men. But the church must ever keep in mind that standing behind those men and motivating them is Satan, the inveterate enemy of God, Christ, the church, and all that is good. Whether those men serve Satan wittingly or unwittingly makes no difference as to the fact of the church’s warfare with Satan. In all her warfare she in fact wars not with flesh and blood—men—but “against principalities, against power, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places*”. The real enemy always is the spiritual forces of the Prince of Darkness grim.

Martin Luther constantly reminded his readers of this fact. After he badly abused the Swiss Reformers Oecolampadius and Zwingli in the controversy over the Lord’s Supper, in the course of which he accused them of everything from villainy to blasphemy, he wrote, “God knows, with these crude illustrations I do not wish to offend Zwingli, and especially not Oecolampadius, to whom God has given many gifts beyond so many others. Indeed, I am heartily sorry for the man. I aim such words not at them but only upon the arrogant, mocking devil who has so deceived and mislead them”. He added later, “This spirit is not good, and means no good through these fanatics, although I think the preachers against whom I write have no malice in mind.

But dear God, they are not their own masters; the spirit has blinded and taken them prisoner. Therefore they are not to be trusted”. He was alive to the reality that he did not fight with flesh and blood, but spiritual wickedness in high places and that his real opponent was always Satan’s minions, sometimes Luther felt Satan personally. The reason that the church must recognize the enemy as being principally Satan is so that the church never attempts to fight that enemy in her own strength, but that she “take... the whole armour of God” (Eph. 6:13).

Involved in the practice of polemics is church’s resolve to defeat the enemy by spiritual means: prayer, faith, the word of God, and the rest of the spiritual weapons with which Christ arms his church. She is forbidden in her spiritual warfare to use carnal weapons of man’s philosophy, man’s rhetoric, or man’s tactics. The word of God is her weapon. By means of the careful study, explanation, and application of that word to the controversy the lie is defeated on the field of battle.

Besides the recognition that Satan comes behind men, the church must also recognize that the men that Satan uses are deceptive with all the arts of the prince of deception. So speaking of false teachers Paul warns the church of “the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Eph. 4:14). The purpose of false teachers is to deceive and to entrap the believer and church in the lie. The methods that they use are “sleight” and “cunning craftiness”. The word “sleight” refers to playing cards or dice. The false teacher is a like a card shark who is adept at fooling his audience with his tricks. In this he is cunning

and crafty. He plays hocus pocus with the word and truth of God. By this means he entraps with the lie.

In the same passage the Apostle also speaks of the defence of the church against such cunning craftiness, “speaking the truth in love”. Whatever else speaking the truth in love means, it means principally this, that all the church’s speaking of the truth proceed out of a love for that truth and be spoken with the love of that truth in mind. The goal of the church in her polemics may not merely be formal victory in an argument, to overcome an opponent, or to show the logic of her arguments in contrast to the fallacies of the opponent, but the goal must be the victory of the truth. The goal must be that the truth stands out clearly and victoriously over the lie in order that the truth be esteemed and glorified as the word of God. Belonging to this is especially the church’s zeal for the glory and name of God and Jesus Christ. The *sine qua non*, then, of the church’s polemics is her love of the truth. That love of the truth is the esteem of the truth as precious and dear to her. It is also her firm resolve to keep communion with that truth as all costs, including the loss of her earthly friendships, standing, and ultimately of her own earthly life. In this love for the truth she speaks it, confessing with her mouth what is in her heart. Through this speaking the love of the truth is also strengthened by her continual acquaintance with the truth through the pure preaching of that truth. Loving the truth as precious and dear she defends it with all her might. Loving the truth, she hates the lie and wills its defeat.

Adding to the deceptiveness of the false teachers is that as Satan’s ministers they are able to transform themselves in

ministers of Christ. Scripture speaks of this reality in 2 Corinthians 11:13-15, “For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works”. They do not come telling the church that they are speaking a lie, but they proclaim that they are speaking the truth, that they are only interested in the holiness of the church, or that they are jealous for the purity of Christ’s bride. Belonging to this aspect of the deceptiveness of the false teacher is the fact that the false teacher is almost always one of the most pleasant and likeable person the believer will ever meet. All of this serves the purpose to disarm the believer and to deceive the church.

Further, the church may not be ignorant of the object of Satan in his warfare. This object is summarized admirably by the Belgic Confession in Article 12, “The devils and evil spirits are so depraved that they are enemies of God and every good thing, to the utmost of their power, as murderers, watching to ruin the church and every member thereof, and by their wicked stratagems to destroy all”. Satan’s object is nothing less than the total destruction of God’s church. In short the warfare of the church is *total war*. This warfare cannot be waged by half-measures, or half-heartedly, but requires an equal determination on the part of the church not merely to defeat the lie, but to destroy it. It is this for which the Lord taught the church to pray in the second petition of the Lord’s prayer according to the Heidelberg Catechism Lord’s Day 48, “Destroy the works of

the devil and all violence which would exalt itself against thee; and also, all wicked counsels devised against thy holy Word”. Praying for that, she must be zealous in that purpose and work of Christ and do polemics wherever the battle rages.

To do polemics requires that the Reformed believer be engaged. He must first all be engaged in the battle with sin in his own heart and life. The fervent prayer of the believer who will do polemics in the church must daily be what the Heidelberg Catechism teaches in Lord’s Day 52, “do thou therefore preserve and strengthen us by the power of thy Holy Spirit, that we may not be overcome in this spiritual warfare, but constantly and strenuously may resist our foes, till at last we obtain a complete victory”. Daily the believer must put off the old man and put on the new man, a kind of personal polemics.

Second, the believer must be engaged in the church. This involves his knowledge of the issues that currently face the church, especially at the broader assemblies. When the agendas for the assemblies come out, then it is perfectly proper and good for believers in the pew to ask for them in order know what is on the agendas, to discuss the agendas, and to follow the deliberations of the items on the agendas on the floor of the assemblies. The agendas are not private documents, but public as are the discussions on the floor of the church meetings that follow from them. The broader assemblies must encourage this engagement by the believer by treating as little in closed session as possible and only where absolutely necessary. The believer has the right and the duty in his capacity in the office of believer to know and to follow these developments in the church. One example of this

engagement of the believer in the happenings at the church assemblies is found regularly on the pages of the *Standard Bearer* magazine where by long standing precedent the editor of that magazine previews for the people of God the content of that year's synodical agenda. Another example is that many societies in the churches have the practice of discussing the agendas of upcoming classical or synodical meetings. When the acts and announcements of the decisions of the assemblies are distributed, then, the engaged believer reads this carefully and judges it spiritually according to

the word of God. All this belongs to the necessary engagement of the believer in the life and struggles of the church of God.

Third, this engagement of the believer extends to the believer's knowledge of the current issues that characterize the broader church world in which the Reformed believer finds himself. More than likely one or more of these issues will also confront his church sooner or later. It has to be one the most naïve and dangerous responses to controversy in the broader church world to think or say that this is not a threat to us. Such

a response almost guarantees that the church will face that exact threat in some form if for no other reason than her near suicidal lack of preparation and engagement with that issue.

Such an engaged believer is the believer that will also be prepared spiritually and intellectually to engage in polemics. Churches full of such believers will also be polemical churches engaged actively in the warfare of Christ their king. Being engaged they will not only talk about polemics, but do it for the glory God and the defence of the truth they love.

## REJOICING AND WEeping TOGETHER (II): INTRODUCTION

>> Lim Yang Zhi



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The church is family. As every earthly family and its members experience joys and sorrows, so the church and its members experience joys and sorrows. Previously, we considered *what* our attitude ought to be towards these joys and sorrows. Our hearts must have the attitude of love towards one another, expressed in the way of rejoicing and weeping with one another.

How are we to rejoice and weep with one another?

The points that follow are more of suggestions than imperatives for us to

consider and discuss in our fellowship.

The first two suggestions consider what our initial responses towards our joyful brother or grieving sister should be.

### 1. Explicit Joy

Towards our brethren who rejoice: respond to their joy with joy! Do not give a dull response to a brother or sister that exuberates with joy. It may be hard for us to imagine what such a response looks like; but the LORD gives us illustrations of a joyful response, starting with himself. Recall that the LORD calls our attention to His face, that it shines upon us in grace and is lifted up as the expression of peace (Num. 6:25-26). Simply by the look of God's face, we know His thoughts of love, joy, and peace towards us. So also, by a warm smile or a gentle gaze, we express the same thoughts to our brethren.

Not only facially, but also verbally, we can rejoice with our brother. Think now of John, the apostle of love, who wrote that he had "no greater joy than to hear that [his] children walk in the truth" (3 John 4). A colloquial way to read the verse is: "I am extremely happy to hear that all of you believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ and live in thankfulness for that gospel." Simple phrases such as, "That's good to hear" and "Thank God!" go a long way to tell our brethren that we rejoice with them in the joys the LORD has given them.

If the LORD's own countenance and the apostles' words are insufficient illustrations, then consider the covenant mother that smiles to her infant; or to the covenant father that exclaims "That's wonderful!" when his child rambles along about his Sunday in church. The infant that sees his mother's cheer and the child that hears his father's enthusiasm knows

immediately that his mother and father are happy with them.

## 2. Don't Be Quick to Criticise

Towards the grieving sister (or brother), there is one thing we can consider. *Don't criticise first.* That is, when our fellow saint approaches us with a certain sorrow or trouble, do not be *quick* to criticise that the person is spiritually weak, carnal, impatient, doubtful, etc., so that he or she is merely murmuring about what the LORD has given them. If the first thing we always say is, "Brother/Sister, you are wrong..." more often than not, we turn the brother or sister away from the help and comfort we may bring to them. They will think, "All he ever does is criticise!" Of course, criticism is not our only intent, but it is the impression given.

While there may be a particular weakness involved that affects our brethren spiritually, we must not be so quick to focus in on that weakness. The circumstances our brethren face—the stresses of work, the financial strains of the home, the sicknesses of the body—are often the trigger to their sorrows. Patiently listen for the details of those circumstances. Ask questions to draw out the troubles of the heart. Knowing these circumstances, we can shape our advice to address both the weakness and the proper way to respond to those circumstances that affect our brethren.

## 3. Maintaining Confidentiality

The third suggestion considers a specific yet common situation. The brother tells you of a financial crisis he is facing; or a sister tells you of a conflict with another person in the church. You do not know what to say; however, only you know about it. The brother (sister)

has told no one else. What may you do?

Confidentiality must be maintained. Solomon's counsel is the principle to follow: "He that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter" (Pro. 11:13b). The aggrieved person has told you *only*. He or she (probably) does not want others to know. In other words, the person trusts that you will keep it a secret. Even if the brother or sister has not explicitly told you to keep it a secret, we fall on the safer side to assume that it is *not* meant to be told.

Furthermore, the nature of our tongue is poisonous; it is full of deadly poison (James. 3:8). If anything, the Bible's diagnosis of our tongues should have us think twice of breaking a secret.

There are serious consequences when confidentiality is broken. The brother who has confided with us will not trust us. The sister will not share anything else about the matter, even when the matter becomes spiritually harmful to her. The brother or sister, though sinking into spiritual destruction, will not tell you anything.

Especially when the trouble causes great spiritual hurt to our brethren, we must be wary of these consequences. The growing trouble of spousal abuse is a real example, of which Prof. Engelsma writes:

Lack of confidentiality is a grave weakness of consistories in the matter of abuse as in other serious, sensitive matters. That elders or the pastor divulge[s] consistorial matters, especially those of a sensitive nature involving sin and suffering of members of the congregation, to other members of the church, including their

wives, is destructive of the pastoral work of Christ by means of the consistory and harmful to the abused woman. The abused woman will not turn to the minister or to the elders for the help she needs. The gossip of the consistory hinders the work of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

Though other matters may not bear a severity equal to spousal abuse, dealing with these matters uses the same principle: Keep it confidential. Between office-bearers and their wives, as Prof. Engelsma implies, there must be a mutual understanding that certain matters may not be disclosed; likewise for husbands who do not hold office and their wives; and likewise for friends who hold a closer bond. For the sake of the weeping saint, do not have the secret broken.

Is there room to ask others for advice for secret matters? Yes; but we need not share the details with others from whom we ask for counsel. And if the matter deems it necessary for details to be shared, they ought to be shared *with the person's consent*. Scripture's principle does not change.

But if the person would not have us utter a word about the matter, even for advice, what then?

## 4. Pray

Make it a point to call upon the LORD for what our brethren need. As we pray, the LORD will grant to us wisdom to counsel and advice the grieving saint according to his Word. As Solomon received wisdom through prayer (2 Chron. 1:11), so we will receive wisdom by the same means.

Prayer towards our brethren that rejoice

<sup>1</sup> "Questions and Answers Regarding the Speech on Spousal (Wife) Abuse" by Prof. David J. Engelsma (<https://www.drop-box.com/s/9q7q3na0p1p08yd/abuse%20-%20questions%20and%20answers%20-%202017.docx?dl=0>). Accessed 24 January 2018.

should not be neglected either. Our example is Paul, who always thanked the Lord when the New Testament saints experienced the spiritual joys of salvation (Eph. 1:16; 1 Thess. 1:3). By such prayers, the LORD will enable us to rejoice with our brethren to a greater extent.

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“Practice makes perfect”, by God’s grace. Conscious effort must be placed into practising the proper way of

rejoicing and sorrowing with others. As sinful creatures, we habitually practise indifference, over-criticism, gossiping, and worldly-wisdom; but, graciously, God has given us Christ’s Spirit to sympathise, bridle the tongue, and speak wisely according to the Word.

At the same time, if practice makes perfect, practice needs to start from the home. If we want to practice it in the MPH on Sunday mornings, we have to first practice it in the living

room of our flats. We cannot expect ourselves to be sympathetic, faithful secret-bearers, and wise, if we behave coldly, unfaithfully, and foolishly at home towards our spouse (or parents) and children (or siblings).

More on the home next time, DV.

## CALLED TO BE SAINTS

>> Daisy Lim



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Dear brethren in Christ, our Christian life is a calling, a high calling of God. As we walk our earthly lives, we must continually press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:14).

During my daily devotions, as I meditate on the Word of God, I am intrigued by the constant occurrence of the words “called” and “calling”, revealing that in all of our Christian walk of life, our sovereign God is continually working out all circumstances of our lives, preparing and sanctifying us, until He leads us to His eternal kingdom and glory.

In this article, I would like to share my musings and understanding of our Christian calling.

Calling of election (2 Pet. 1:10)

We are Christians in the first place because it is God who has called us before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). From eternity, God foreknew and predestinated us; in due time, He called and justified us; and in eternity, we shall be glorified by Him (Rom. 8:28-30). What a wonder!

Called out of darkness into His marvellous light (1 Pet. 2:9)

Without Christ, we were in bondage to sin, Satan, and self. We were children of disobedience, under the wrath and condemnation of God. We were inclined to the lust of our eyes, the lust of our flesh, and the pride of life. But, praise to be to God, through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, He redeems us out of our slavery and adopts us as His covenant children. He gives us the dominion over sin by the power of His Holy Spirit, who dwells within us. We can begin to live the new spiritual life, walking in His light. We learn more and more to walk in truth, in love, in wisdom – walking in His Spirit at all times.

Called to fellowship with God in Christ (1 Cor. 1:9)

What a privilege! We, earthly beings, can have the privilege to commune with our living God! We can partake of Him. He dwells in us and we in Him. He is our bread of life, our living water, our light in this world, our good shepherd, our resurrection and our life (John 4-15). We abide in Him when His words abide in us. If we keep His commandments, we abide in His love. We can pray to Him without ceasing. We commit all our ways and cares of life to Him. We delight ourselves in Him.

Called to walk worthy (Eph. 4:1)

As a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, and a peculiar people of God, we need to walk worthy of His calling moment by moment, day by day. To do so, we pray that God will strengthen us with might by His Spirit in the inner man. We pray that we will be filled with all His fulness. God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power

that works in us (Eph. 3:16-20). We are sustained by faith, love, and hope. Faith is the victory that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4). Love is the bond of perfection (Col. 3:14). Knowing the hope of His calling and the glory of His inheritance in the saints should motivate us to walk worthy of Him in all aspects of our life.

Called to holiness (1 Thess. 4:7)

We are exhorted to be holy, even as our God is holy (1 Pet. 1:16). We are to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (2 Cor. 7:1). To be holy is to turn away from all unrighteousness and sin and to be wholly consecrated and devoted to God. We count ourselves as being dead to sin and alive unto God. We yield the members of our body as instruments of righteousness unto God. We are not under the law, but under grace. Therefore we yield our members servants to righteousness unto holiness (Rom. 6:13-19). We abound in our love towards God and towards one another. We conform to the image of our Lord Jesus Christ to reflect our God of truth,

righteousness, and holiness.

Called to press toward the mark of His high calling (Phil. 3:14)

The Christian life is a life of trials, afflictions, sufferings, and all kinds of pressures. The world under Satan hates Christ because their lives are full of darkness, while Christ is the light and exposes the darkness. Satan knows that his time is short and is determined to flood the world with temptations of wealth, honour, pleasures, etc. When Christians do not love the world and the kingdom of Satan, Satan seeks to tempt and persecute her in various forms. Thus, as God's people, we are to endure hardness as soldiers of the cross (2 Tim. 2:3). We are to fight the good fight of faith (2 Tim. 4:7). We are to resist the devil, and he will flee from us (James 4:7). The Word of God is the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17). Greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4). In this world we shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, Christ has overcome the world (John 16:33).

Called to His kingdom and glory (1

Thess. 2:12)

What great glory! We must reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed (Rom. 8:18). The world shall pass away, but only those who abide by the will of God will abide forever (1 John 2:17). God has prepared for His people an everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:11). In His kingdom, God shall create a new heaven and a new earth. There shall be no more death, sorrow, or pain. We are the bride of our Lord Jesus Christ. He shall dwell with His people forever (Rev. 21).

Wherefore, my holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, let us consider our Great Apostle and High Priest, our Lord Jesus Christ (Heb. 3:1). Let us walk in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for the coming of the day of God (2 Pet. 3:11-12). Let us build up ourselves on our most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, and keep ourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life (Jude 20-21).

## RIDDLE OF THE ISSUE

A CREATURE SO LOWLY, MOVING SO SLOWLY,  
DUST IS MY MEAT, YET IS IT SWEET.  
THE PRINCE WHO HAS POWER WITH GOD AND WITH MEN  
IS LIKENED TO ME, AS VILE AS I AM.  
FEAR NOT WHAT MAN MAY DO UNTO YOU;  
LIKE SO MUCH FLEECE THEY SHALL BE CONSUMED.  
PREPARED BY GOD TO DEVOUR AND REND  
THAT SOME MAY REPENT, AND OTHERS BE DAMNED.  
FIND ME IN A DESOLATE PLACE,  
WHERE I WILL LIVE BEYOND TIME'S DAYS..

*Hint: Who was said to have power with God and men? What did God say when He said He would help him and Israel? (Answer to last issue's riddle: Samuel)*



# News from the Churches

## Singapore

Rev. Arie den Hartog and his wife, Sherry, have been in Singapore since January 25 and will be among us for about five months. We thank God for Rev. den Hartog's faithful ministry in CERC thus far, and are thankful for the opportunity we have to renew friendships with him and his wife once again. Apart from the regular preaching on Sundays, Rev. den Hartog is also teaching catechism classes at the secondary school level, as well as leading the pre-confession class and speaking at this year's annual church camp in June.

From the update of Session's second meeting this year, we find that CERC's formal request to the PRCA for a minister-on-loan has been approved for Synod in June 2018. We have also been updated regarding the progress of the work in Kolkata – "the pre-confession classes are well received and progressing, and the saints are looking forward to the institution of the church."

We thank God for the safe delivery of Lydia, infant daughter of Deacon Cornelius Boon and his wife, Jemima Joy. Lydia was born on February 23. Let us remember their family in prayer as they seek to raise this child in the fear of the Lord.

We rejoice with Jia Chin & Millie, as well as with our former Salt Shakers committee members Yang Zhi & Nicole, as the Lord joined these two couples in holy matrimony on January 20 and March 3 respectively. We thank God for these marriages and are reminded of our blessed relationship to our Bridegroom, Jesus Christ. We pray God's blessings upon them as they now journey through life as covenant husbands and wives.

## Philippines

The Classis meeting of the PRCP was held on Monday, February 26 in Maranatha PRC, with Rev. Cory Griess and Deacon Joel Van Egdome representing the Foreign Mission Committee and Doon PRCA as delegates. Rev. Griess and Joel Van Egdome, along with his wife Michelle, visited the Philippines from February 15-27.

## USA

Pastor-elect Dave Noorman, who provided pulpit supply for CERC Singapore in January, sustained his classical exam on February 28 at Hudsonville PRC. He will be ordained and installed as the new pastor of Southwest PRC at a special worship service on Wednesday, March 7. We remember him and his wife Carisa in our prayers as they take up their labours in Southwest.



At Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve for CERC's New Year's Day church outing



Dave & Carisa Noorman joined the fun!



Trying out Singapore sports - chapteh



We rejoice with Cornelius & Jemima Joy upon the birth of their daughter, Lydia, on February 23



Chinese New Year fellowship at Melina's home



The Den Hartogs also opened their home for Chinese New Year visitations

**Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church**

We are a Reformed Church that holds to the doctrines of the Reformation as they are expressed in the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dordt.

Place of Worship  
11, Jalan Mesin #04-00  
Standard Industrial Building  
Singapore 368813

Time of Worship  
Morning Service:  
9:30am to 11:00am  
Afternoon Service:  
2:00pm to 3:00pm

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