

"...Youth is a period when searching for life's meaning and purpose is at its height. I searched for it everywhere: in friendships, relationships, books, and careers..." - **Somewhere Over the Rainbow**



# salt shakers

joel 3:16 matthew 5:16

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"...Perhaps your joy is in the parties and get-togethers with family and friends...only to be disappointed because someone could not or did not want to come, or someone said the wrong thing or looked the wrong way..." - **The True Joy of Christmas**

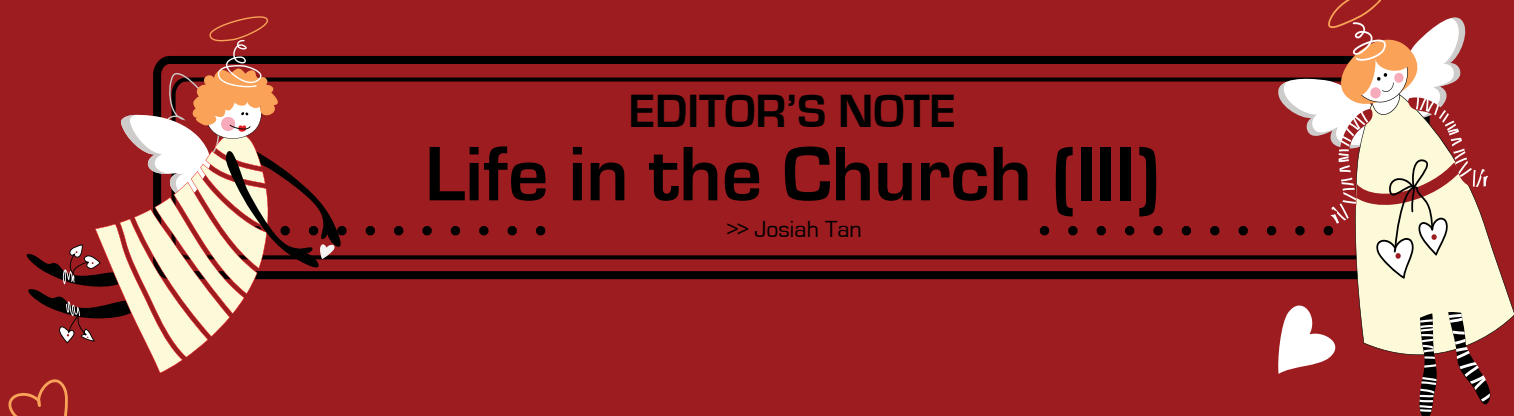
'Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.' Eph 4:3

"...He is king in the home, and she is queen. He is prophet in the home, and she is prophetess. He is priest in the home, and she is priestess..." - **How a Wife must Treat Her Husband**

"...Godless entertainment. Pleasure-madness. Our world is full of it. Our society lives for such entertainment and, indeed, worships it..." - **Weaning Ourselves Off Godless Entertainment**



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## EDITOR'S NOTE

# Life in the Church (III)

>> Josiah Tan

In the final part of this series, let us look at some of the commands in the Divine Word of God to dwell in unity!

**Eph 4:3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**

Before we talk about the word “endeavouring”, this unity is first of all established by Christ, with His own blood and death! So, we are solemnly commanded to keep that unity. “Endeavouring” means keeping the unity of the church with great eagerness, earnestness and diligence! In a sense, we have to strive hard for closer unity in the church for the devil is furious and mad against the work of Christ and presses hard to destroy the church. He sometimes does it by dividing and turning members

against each other. Therefore saints, endeavour to keep the unity!

Let us look at another text:

1Co 12:25-26 That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

If the command to dwell in unity is not at the forefront of our minds, we become very susceptible to strife and envy. There can even arise from our own hearts ungracious and unforgiving spirits in the church. The old man of sin is with us, and although in principle that old man is cut off by the work of Christ, we are still very prone to hate

God and man, to stir hurting divisions within the church. We have to keep the unity of the body of Christ in the foreground of our minds and pray for peace in Zion.

The church now faces a fierce assault by the wicked world led by their commander, the father of lies. Zion is besieged. Our church was almost fatally wounded by the heresy that spat on the doctrine of the unbreakable bond of marriage, and intimately related, the precious doctrine of the Covenant. But on the other hand, if we let petty disagreements that have nothing to do with the Gospel and glory of Christ stir in us an evil eye towards our brethren and draw grievous lines of divisions in the Church, we are actually compromising Zion's spiritual defences! We all need to be reminded not to allow such schisms in the church. Looking on a brethren with an evil eye can lead one to a very slippery slope that causes him to distance himself from the rest of the sheep fold and even the preaching. The smooth pathway of mediocre or lukewarm Christianity now has a justification – my brother is imperfect. No, we need to forgive with lowliness of mind.

**Php 2:3 Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.**

Let us have lowliness of mind. There is great weakness in the church. I just have to look in the mirror and there I see the chief of sinners. Before I judge another for weakness, I have to look at my own life; and by knowing that I am a great sinner with sin blacker than black, I can then, by God's grace, effectively rip out the tumour of pride latched onto my heart. We must do this because it is quite impossible to do anything glorifying to God, even encouraging a brother to leave his sin, if we do not come face to face with the fact that we are spiritual prostitutes and murderers. Lowliness of mind is not being the church's resident policeman or a self-proclaimed watchman and expert of reading men's hearts and intentions. It is reflecting and pulling out beam after beam from our eye, and then as the chief of sinners, carefully helping our brother remove the mote from his eye.

While we are on this earth, God demands of us, by the

law, to be sinless, flawless and perfect in every way in this life – but we utterly fail. Yet God, who is infinite in mercy and grace, forgave us in Christ. To be unforgiving and to scoff at others in the church because they have not hearts of gold and less than pure intentions, would be to be like that wicked servant who was forgiven all but dealt unlovingly and unmercifully with his fellow brother who owed him almost nothing. Truly, we must esteem others better than ourselves, exhort one to greater holiness and not separate and divide the body of Christ.

Come, all who swear allegiance to the Sword of the Spirit. If you like me have looked on a brother in Christ with strife and envy, let us quickly go to the cross together. Let us meet at the cross, and pray.

In preparation for the coming Lord's Supper celebration, when, God willing, Pastor Lanning is with us, let us examine our lives. We can ask ourselves, “Have I forgotten the blessedness of the communion of the saints or have I neglected church life and the preaching of the Word of God? Have I diligently, earnestly, and deliberately strove to keep the unity of the church?” Then, let us say at the Lord's table with a heart full of conviction, “I believe in the communion of the saints”.

**Let us confess “that every one must know it to be his duty, readily and cheerfully to employ his gifts, for the advantage and salvation of other members.” (The Heidelberg Catechism, Question and Answer 55)**

Beloved CK and CKS, take on humility, lowliness of the mind, and meekness. Defend the Faith. Salute the brethren and may the love of Christ characterise our hearts and conduct.

For more Biblical references to the truth of dwelling in unity, please see the following texts: 1 Peter 4:7-10; 3:8-11; 1:22, Phil 2:1-4, Acts 2:41-47, Matt 25:33-46, James 1:27, Hebrews 13:1-3, Mark 3:31-35, Prov 31, Eph 4:29-32.



## Somewhere Over the Rainbow

>> Bernadette Mary Umali

I cannot remember how old I was the first time I saw a rainbow, but what I can remember is how awestruck I was when I beheld it up in the sky. It was so beautiful and my eyes could not help but gaze in wonder and amazement until it was gone. Satisfied, yet waiting and longing for another chance. Nothing has changed. It was beautiful then; and it still is now. "What is that beautiful sight up in the sky, Papa?" I asked. "A rainbow", he answered. "And what is a rainbow?" I probed further. Papa's next answer introduced me to the wonderful creative works of God, the Word of God, and the Covenant promise of God.

Years have gone by and I have already outgrown my childish fascination with rainbows (so I think). It just occurs naturally – nothing extraordinary, so why bother to take time to look or stare at it again? After a downpour or shower, it will always be there, and before long, it will be lost in the horizon – an environmental routine.

In school, I learnt the scientific explanation of what a rainbow is. It is an optical, meteorological phenomenon that is caused by the reflection of light in water droplets resulting in a spectrum of light of seven colours appearing in the sky. I even memorised its mnemonic "R-O-Y-G-B-I-V" for easy recollection. And that was it. One day, I realised that I had "lost" the significance behind the appearance of a rainbow – the truth of God's promise my Dad told me about during my inquisitive childhood days.

Then came my introduction to the Reformed faith. Here, I was immersed in the beauty, light, truth and grace of God's Word. Youth is a period when searching for life's meaning and purpose is at its height. I searched for it everywhere: in friendships, relationships, books, and careers. I tried to look for it "somewhere over the rainbow", and God in His providence led me to His church. There, I found the truth and purpose of my existence, that is, to be in fellowship with God's people in Christ, in His church.

And the rainbow? Now I know, now I believe, now I remember. Its message is clear once again. Beyond the beautiful and harmonious colours stand God's eternal promise of comfort and hope, and His promise of the gracious preservation of His people in the church amidst many tribulations in life, just like the case of Noah's ark. Gen. 9:13-15 "I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud: And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh."

So every time we see that beautiful arc of colours after rainfall or showers, may God remind us of His Covenant promise, as in the days of Noah. The ark – the church, is God's prepared refuge, and we will not be afraid.

Matthew 6:25-32 "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things."

Trusting God is the summary of a Christian's life. Both the reasons why we trust God and the outcomes of trusting Him are applications of what we learn from the Bible.

### Why do we trust God?

Trusting God is the application of the belief that God is sovereign. It proceeds naturally from the knowledge that God is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the Potter of the clay of our lives, and we are the flower that withers and the shadow that flees. Put an omnipotent being alongside fallible man, and Psalter 383 sums it up appropriately:

"Ere into being I was bro't,

Thy eye did see, and in Thy tho't  
My life in all its perfect plan  
Was ordered ere my days began."

Trusting God comes from examples we have in Scripture on how He provided through miraculous ways. Understanding that God is sovereign through each part of our lives helps us understand that through the simplest provisions, God is teaching us to trust Him. Elijah being fed by ravens, Job being sustained through sickness and grief, Paul the missionary who spread the word of God despite threats of persecution. As the Lord's Prayer implies, our daily bread and each breath is only through God's provision. Without Him, we would simply not exist.

### Practical Applications

#### Childlike trust

In the medical world, the idea of a foetus in a mother's womb most aptly depicts the complete dependence we have on God. Oxygen, water and nutrients are completely provided for during the gestational period and even as infants increase in independence, the childlike trust that what their parents do is in their best interests should be like our complete dependence and trust in God.

#### Academia

God does not promise us that we will always do well in tests, but through academic life, God teaches us the values of discipline, hard work and learning under authority. He provides us with teachers and facilities that make it convenient to study; and we ought to be thankful for these. From young, I learnt to pray that God would give me the grade that is best for my Christian walk with Him. As He alone knew when I needed to be humbled and when I needed to be affirmed, I

prayed that He would give me the grade that would be best for me spiritually. After getting my grades, I always find it beneficial to reflect on how my academic life has interfered with my spiritual walk.

### In sickness and in death

During my stay in India for one month in Christian Medical College, Vellore where I worked with the paediatric oncology department for children with cancer, there was always the difficult moment when the diagnosis of cancer had to be broken to the family. A doctor shared with me how she had sleepless nights thinking about how to break the news to the family of a 7-year-old patient who had a relapse of stage 4 leukaemia. She eventually wrote down what she wanted to tell the family and the answers to the questions they might ask in anticipation that she may be lost for words. In the end, during the meeting with the family, the mother of the child said in simple Tamil, "Doctor, thank you for helping us. We are not afraid, we trust in God." Despite coming from the outskirts of rural India, simple trust answered so many difficult questions.

### Difficulties

1. We fail to acknowledge that God's sovereign will is best for us despite God's promises in the Bible. We like to think that our plans are the best, and we fail to keep our steps in line with what God has planned for us.

2. We put our trust in people who we like, in our possessions, and in ourselves because we live by sight and not by faith. Many of our non-Christian peers probably live that way throughout life and we can get subtly influenced. We put time into saving money for big cars or grand holidays at the expense of family time and service in the church, which often

## TRUSTING GOD

>> Julia Ong

God does not promise us that we will always do well in tests, but through academic life, God teaches us the values of discipline, hard work and learning under authority.

have intangible benefits. Perhaps it is the lust of the flesh and the eyes and the pride of life, which have to be denied before we can trust Him completely. Psalm 20:5-7 writes, “We will rejoice in thy salvation, and in the name of our God we will set up our banners: the Lord fulfill all thy petitions. Now know I that the Lord saveth his anointed; he will

hear him from his holy heaven with the saving strength of his right hand. Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God.”

### **The Comforting Reward**

It is comforting that God is faithful, and we should actually still be full of praises in the moments that He does

not give us what we want, as painful as it seems then. For instance, a career choice which we deem very attractive, or a partner who we think will be our spouse. Because He promises us, no good thing will He withhold from them who walk uprightly (Psalm 84:11) and all things work together for good to them who love Him, to them who are the called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).

dispensational – although many deny it.

### **Reformed and Calvinistic**

Some churches that claim to be Calvinistic use the term Reformed in their name because they identify Reformed with Calvinism. Apart from the question of whether all the churches who call themselves Reformed are truly Calvinistic, to equate the two is a mistake. To be Calvinistic is not necessarily the same as being Reformed. There are many churches in the world that claim to be and perhaps are Calvinistic, but they are not Reformed.

I am well aware of the dictum (taken from Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet): “A rose by any other name would smell as sweet,” and we are never going to persuade churches that call themselves Reformed to change their names. But we ought to be aware of the meaning of the term nonetheless. We ought to be aware of the meaning of the term historically so that we can judge whether we are truly Reformed.

### **Reformed and Presbyterian**

Historically, there is even a difference between Reformed and Presbyterian. This is said not as a play on words; and it is surely not said simply to exalt Reformed above Presbyterian. God in his infinite wisdom divided the Reformation into different branches. There is the Lutheran branch composed of those churches that more or less hold to the views of Martin Luther – especially his erroneous view of the presence of Christ in the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper. While Calvin did not disagree on any doctrines Luther taught, other than the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper, Philip Melancthon, Luther’s co-worker, introduced what we would call Arminianism into

Luther’s theology. This Arminianism became creedal with the adoption of the major Lutheran Confessions, The Augsburg Confession and the Formula of Concord. These confessions are not Reformed; they are not even Calvinistic.

Presbyterianism is emphatically Calvinistic. That is, the creedal basis for Presbyterianism, The Westminster Confession of Faith is a Calvinistic creed. Whether all Presbyterians are faithful to their creeds is quite another question. Surely those who have introduced into Presbyterianism the well-meant and gracious gospel offer are neither faithful to their creed nor faithful to Calvinism. Yet Presbyterianism and the Reformed faith are different. We will mention here some of those differences.

1. The two have a different creedal basis. Presbyterians have The Westminster Confessions; the Reformed have The Belgic Confession, The Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort.

2. While all these confessions agree in their emphasis on sovereign grace, they differ in important respects and emphases.

3. The difference in emphases is due to the reason why they were written. The Westminster Confession was written at the call of England’s Parliament to serve as a confessional basis for a national church. By a “national church” I mean a church that is promoted by the government in the entire land. It thus has the government’s favour (in distinction from other churches), is the one religion approved and promoted by the government, and is the church that is responsible for the spiritual welfare of all the citizens of the realm.

The Belgic Confession was written to defend the Reformed faith in the

Lowlands during a period of terrible persecution by the Roman Catholic church. The author himself was martyred.

The Heidelberg Catechism was written to instruct the children of believers in the truths of the Reformed faith.

The Canons of Dordrecht were written to make clear the teaching of Scripture over and against Arminianism.

4. The Westminster Confessions teaches the covenant of works, which is the basis for a conditional covenant, later taught by most Presbyterians throughout the world. The Reformed creeds do not teach a covenant of works, but rather emphasize an unconditional covenant. But this doctrine of whether God’s covenant is conditional or unconditional became a major question in the development of Reformed theology.

5. The Westminster Confession of Faith included an article that probably ought not be in a doctrinal confession. But it was inserted because the creed was the basis for a national church where divorce and remarriage were fairly common. I refer to the article in the confession that permits divorce and remarriage under certain circumstances.

The result of these two sets of creeds is two separate traditions in the line of the development of the Calvin Reformation. While they are in basic agreement on the truths of sovereign grace, they differ from each other in some respects. To call Presbyterians Reformed, therefore, is not historically accurate, but rather uses the term “Reformed” in a broad sense as referring to all who hold to the truths of sovereign grace.

In our discussion, without criticism of those churches that are faithful to

## WHAT IS REFORMED?

>> Prof. Hanko

I have finished discussing the implications of holding to a wrong view of divorce and remarriage, and I decided to write on the subject found above. It was not my original idea; I had really made up my mind to write on some general rules for interpreting and understanding the Old Testament Scriptures. But I changed my mind on that. The main reason was, the subject of Old Testament interpretation is one that requires a series of articles in which each article follows more closely from the last, rather than the once-every-two-months publication that Salt Shakers allows. The subject above will not necessarily demand that the articles be published close together.

I am nearly finished with the articles in the young people’s forum on Independentism vs. Corporate Responsibility. So I will discuss this matter of Old Testament interpretation with the young people in the forum, the Lord willing.

I need to say some things by way of introduction, for the term “Reformed” has several different

meanings. It is part of the name of your own church: Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church. And nothing that I have to say in these articles is intended to cast doubt on whether CERC is truly a Reformed Church. It is truly Reformed, something for which I personally am very, very thankful. It is not necessarily true that a church is Reformed even though it carries the word “Reformed” in its name. The term, as it has been historically used goes much deeper than a mere name.

But, it is good to know what the term really means and why CERC includes the word “Reformed” in its name. And it will help us hold to our calling to be and remain Reformed.

### **The name Reformed Comes From the Reformation**

In a very general way, those who use the term “Reformed” in the name of their church mean by it that they are spiritually and theologically children of the Reformation. They trace their spiritual roots to the great work of the Reformation. In the 16th century

God performed that great work that freed the church of Christ from the slavery of Roman Catholicism. He did this great work through such men as Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin and John Knox.

To trace one’s spiritual roots back to the Reformation means, quite obviously, to hold to the doctrines for which the reformers fought. They did so on the grounds that the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church was a corruption of the truth and that it was their desire to return the church to the truth.

But the name “Reformed” is added today to churches that do not hold to all the doctrines for which the Reformation fought. A case in point is those churches that call themselves “Reformed Baptist.” They give another meaning to the term “Reformed.” All the reformers without exception held to infant baptism and the doctrine of the covenant on which baptism is based. In actual fact, the Reformed Baptists are not reformed, but have become

the Westminster Confessions, I am limiting myself to those churches which are historically Reformed. They are to be found on the continent

of Europe – in distinction from Presbyterianism, which was found in the British Isles. Both however, spread to America, Australia and

other parts of the world.

And so, we are going to have, what may be called, a lesson in church history.

## Why I love Singing the Psalms: Psalter 83

>> Nicole Wong

Psalter 83 is a versification of Psalm 32, which is a Psalm written when David experienced the blessedness of forgiveness after his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah the Hittite. What a blessing that is, to be completely forgiven after committing and harbouring sins for such a long period of time! How blessed it is for us also to be able to sing of the experience of forgiveness!

Psalm 32 is a psalm of maschil. The word “maschil” has the idea of instruction. In other words, this means that Psalm 32 is a teaching psalm. When we sing this psalter number, we are teaching and reminding ourselves and each other of this blessed truth of forgiveness, like what is said in Col 3:16. The Psalms teach us the doctrines of the Word of God experientially. In the context of this Psalm, God not only tells us in His Word that He does not tolerate sin yet He is merciful and forgives, but we also experience this very truth in our lives. The doctrines we hold to are experienced in our lives as children of God.

*How blest is he whose trespass*

*Hath freely been forgiv'n,*

*Whose sin is wholly covered*

*Before the sight of heav'n*

*Blest he to whom Jehovah*

*Imputeth not his sin,*

*Who hath a guileless spirit,*

*Whose heart is true within*

David praises God because He experienced a wonderful blessing. To be blessed is to have God's effectual Word of favour on us. God's people are always blessed, because blessings come from Him alone. It does not depend on us. Even though David experienced misery for his sins, he was still blessed. He did lose his joy of salvation, but he did not lose his salvation. What a comfort for us to know that we are, like David was, always blessed! This blessedness leads to happiness, because happiness is the conscious experience of God's blessings.

What can be a more wonderful blessing than the forgiveness of sin? The forgiveness of sin is the secret to true happiness. Those who are truly happy people are those whose sins have been forgiven and are justified (Belgic Confession Article 23). Nothing on this earth can be compared to being able to stand before God in Christ, without our sins. Since God blesses those whose sins are forgiven, this means that

God does not bless those whose sins are not forgiven. As such, we have to learn not to envy the so-called “happy” and “contented” of this world. What happiness do they have if they are not the object of God's blessings and whose sins are not forgiven?

Forgiveness is such a great blessing because of what sin is. In this psalm, sin is described in 4 ways. Sin is first described as trespass or transgression, which has the idea of breaking the law and rebelling. Sin is next described as “sin”, which has the idea of missing the mark. A sinner deliberately misses the target, which is the glory of God, and instead, aims at a different target, which is serving the devil. Sin is also described as iniquity. This has the idea of perverseness and crookedness. This perverseness is entirely opposed to God's Law which is straight. Lastly, sin is described as guile, which has the idea of being liable to punishment. Sin is so horrid that no one term can fully capture its horror.

However, forgiveness is so wonderful it is described in 3 ways! God through David tells us that our sins are forgiven. This has the idea of carrying the burden away. We no

longer have to carry the burden of our sins and our guilt. Also, God tells us that our sins are covered. This has the idea of blotting out the stain. God no longer sees in us the stain of our sins with a view of punishing us. Lastly, God tells us that He does not impute our sins. This means He does not reckon the debt that we owe to Him. What a wonder that is! What is even more amazing is that when we read the Psalm closely, we notice that David is completely passive in his salvation. David's, and ours alike, trespass IS forgiven, his sin IS wholly covered and has not his sins imputed through the complete work of Christ alone!

*While I kept guilty silence*

*My strength was spent with grief,*

*Thy hand was heavy on me,*

*My soul found no relief;*

*But when I owned my trespass,*

*My sin hid not from Thee,*

*When I confessed transgression, Then  
Thou forgavest me.*

However, before David experienced the forgiveness of sins, he suffered under God's heavy hand. God chastised David because He would not have David walk in the way of sin of “keeping guilty silence” after violating the 6th and 7th commandments. The experience of chastisement is so painful and terrible that David is teaching and warning us of the consequence of his impenitence. Let us not think that we as children of God can walk in any way that we please and disregard the command to live a humble and repentant life.

God's hand came upon David in his impenitence. There are 2 effects of God's heavy hand mentioned in this psalm. Firstly, his “bones waxed old” (Psa 32:3). David was tormented

in his soul. He felt oppressed and experienced unending guilt for his sin. Secondly, his “moisture is turn unto the drought of summer” (Psa 32:4). The heat of God's wrath and displeasure was drying up all his joy and peace. He did not experience the fellowship of God. This caused David to “(roar) all the day long” (Psa 32:3). However, this roaring did not bring David any relief. Likewise for us, experiencing distress over our sins and their consequences does not and will not bring us relief. The only way of relief is the confession of sin!

Even though David's chastisement was painful, it is a great testimony of God's faithfulness and a great comfort to us. If God were to just leave David on his own, David would have perished in his own sin. It is the same for us. By nature we are so prone to wander and would even willingly walk into the way of destruction if not for God graciously coming to us with the rod of correction. God will beat us with that rod until we come to repentance. Also, the more we stay in our sin, the heavier God's blows will come upon us. We see this in history in the lives of the prodigal son and Jonah. God brings His children to their knees to bring them back to Him. He also preserves the worst rod for the most stubborn and impenitent sinner. For David, he lost the assurance of his salvation (Psa 51:11-12). God refused to display His love for him in the way He used to so he would see that God would not tolerate his impenitence. We know that our faithful God does the same to us. What a loving Father we have – He does not let us continue in our sins, but would apply the rod and his heavy hand on us harder and harder until we cry out to Him for mercy!

The effect of David's chastisement

is the confession of sin (Psa 32:5). David's confession was full, frank and free. When he confessed his sin, he experienced the immediate, free and gracious forgiveness of God. There is mercy in Jehovah God because of Christ's work on the cross. Let us remember to humbly submit to God's heavy hand upon us and be ready always to turn from our sinful ways.

*So let the godly seek Thee*

*In times when Thou art near;*

*No whelming floods shall reach them,*

*Nor cause their hearts to fear.*

*In Thee, O Lord, I hide me,*

*Thou savest me from ill,*

*And songs of Thy salvation*

*My heart with rapture thrill*

When David confessed his sins, he made a beautiful confession – “Thou art my hiding place” (Psa 32:7). David found refuge in Jehovah God. A place of refuge has the idea of a shelter from danger and a place of protection (1 Sam 19:2). A place of refuge also has the idea of a hidden secret place. It is a place of sweet fellowship and intimacy – the idea of a covenant. David was confident and assured that God was HIS hiding place. What a stark contrast in the attitude he has now and before he confessed his sin! When he was walking in the ways of sin, he was not able to make this confession because all his confidence and assurance was dried up by God's hot displeasure. It was only after God had brought him back to the hiding place that David was able to confess this truth. This teaches us that there is a way back to the hiding place. We ought to stay in the hiding place and enjoy sweet covenant fellowship with our God. If we stray for many months (God forbid), then we still ought to come



back to Him.

The hiding place that David speaks of is secure. To be in that hiding place is to experience deliverance (Psa 32:7). This necessarily implies that we will have tribulations and troubles that we need deliverance from. We are to expect tribulations. Just like how a traveler does not think much of a hiding place until he is in danger, God sends us storms and afflictions to help us confess that He is our hiding place. The tribulations and troubles that we need to be delivered from are described here as “floods of great waters” (Psa 32:6). They are also a picture of God’s judgement (Isa 28:17). Our comfort is in the knowledge that we will never be swept away by the “floods of great waters”. God has testified throughout history that even when

He removes every earthly support from us, we are not swept away by the flood but are lifted up. This is only possible because the “floods of great waters” was on Christ. He had no hiding place (Psa 69:2). Because of His redemptive work, no “floods of great waters” will come nigh unto us (Psa 32:6). May this give us the confidence to confess that “Thou art MY hiding place”.

David is thrilled by the experience of God’s efficacious grace. This is the very beauty of the gospel. David was a godly man before he fell into sin. Even though He sinned grievously against God, his sins did not cause him to lose his salvation. This gives much hope to those who fall into sin, and is a great encouragement and comfort to us who sometimes are burdened by the wretchedness of

our sins. We sin, but God graciously forgives. This is why I like singing psalter 83! How truly blessed are we whose sins have been forgiven.

May we have a growing appreciation of God’s forgiveness of our sins through Jesus Christ so that we may ever more be thankful to Him for our salvation.

(This article is a reflection and summary of the sermon series on Psalm 32 “Teaching Transgressors Jehovah’s Ways” by Rev Martyn Mcgeown from the Limerick Reformed Fellowship. The article is written with his permission. For a more detailed exposition of Psalm 32, please listen to the sermon series found here: [http://www.limerickreformed.com/index.php?view=serie&id=10004&option=com\\_sermonspeaker&Itemid=24](http://www.limerickreformed.com/index.php?view=serie&id=10004&option=com_sermonspeaker&Itemid=24))

days when the judges ruled, “every man did that which was right in his own eyes”. (Judges 21:25) There was no king to lead the Israelites. Israel was both in a political and spiritual distressing state. Surely this had to be a good reason to leave Israel.

Another reason or rationale that Elimelech used was that he only intended to be away from Israel for a short period of time. In the same verse we are told that he only wanted to “sojourn in the country of Moab”. (Ruth 1:1) In other words, Elimelech wanted only to sin for awhile. He knew it was wrong to leave Israel but he reasoned with himself that it would only be for awhile and so it wasn’t that bad a sin.

All these reasons were essentially wrong because at the root of all Elimelech’s reasoning, his heart was not right with God. Having been raised up in the church, Elimelech ought to have known to seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness (Matt 6:33) and also to seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. (Col 3:1) Elimelech should have also known that “no man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” (Matt 6:24) And he should have learnt from the manna that God sent from heaven that “man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” (Matt 4:4) Similar to what Job confessed in Job 23:12, “I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.”

**What should Elimelech have done instead?**

With regards to the famine, Elimelech should have stayed in

Israel and repented for the sins of Israel. The famine in Israel was a sign from God that they were not obeying His commandments. God promised Israel a land flowing with milk and honey, a picture of prosperity. But as soon as Israel disobeyed, God promised to bring drought and famine to the land. (Deut 28:15-24) What God required was repentance. (Lev 26:40-42)

When Elimelech reasoned that he was just going to leave the church for a short period of time, he created for himself an uncertain future. Elimelech intended to return to Israel after the famine was over. However, he did not realise that he was not in control of the famine and did not know how long the famine would last. Finally, the situation he placed himself in resulted in him dying in a heathen land.

Why is leaving the church such a serious matter? By leaving a church, one declares that that church is the false church and that, therefore, he cannot remain.

When we leave the true church, we are leaving God’s people and God’s office-bearers. This implies that we leave God Himself. And to leave God is to perish. (John 14:6) “We believe, since this holy congregation is an assembly of those who are saved, and that out of it there is no salvation...” (Belgic Confession Article 28)

One major implication when the head of the house brings the family out of a true church is that the children will suffer. This was evident in Elimelech’s family where both his sons married heathen women. This was inevitable because there weren’t any Christians around for Elimelech’s sons to interact with. Elimelech’s plan to provide his family with earthly needs made him forsake that which was more important, spiritual food.

Could Elimelech and his family have survived the famine if they stayed in Israel? Yes they could, for other families in Israel stayed throughout the famine and greeted Naomi, Elimelech’s wife when she returned. (Ruth 1:19)

When one leaves the church, he is not only hurting himself spiritually, but he is also hurting the other members in that church. In 1 Corinthians 12 we read that the church of Christ is like a body where the members of the church are the different parts of the body. This teaches us that every member of the church is important to the church just as every part of the body is important and necessary for the body to function properly. This is rightly summarised in article 28 of the Belgic Confession when it says that every one is bound to join himself to a true church “and as mutual members of the same body, serving to the edification of the brethren, according to the talents God has given them.”

**In what circumstances then can one leave the church?**

In article 29 of The Belgic Confession, we are told, “The marks, by which the true Church is known, are these: if the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin: in short, if all things are managed according to the pure Word of God, all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of the Church. Hereby the true Church may certainly be known, from which no man has a right to separate himself.”

Therefore, when one finds the church in a state contrary to this, one ought to remove himself from

## Leaving Israel for Moab

>> Boaz Leong

Many of us face the temptation of moving out of the country for a better future. Whether we are working adults, or students looking for a university, the grass often seems to be much greener on the other side.

In Ruth chapter 1, Elimelech too faced the same temptations. Right at the very first verse we are told that there was a famine in the land where Elimelech and his family were staying. And so, being the head of the family, he decided to move to Moab, a country where he could feed his family and provide for their needs.

On the surface, this may seem like

Elimelech was doing something honourable and maybe to some of us even the right thing to do. But let us look closer at Elimelech’s decision, that we may learn the principles of our church membership as stated in article 28 of our Belgic Confession. Namely, “...that no person of whatsoever state or condition he may be, ought to withdraw himself, to live in a separate state from it; but that all men are in duty bound to join and unite themselves with it...”

However, we must do well to remember that Elimelech lived in the Old Testament where Israel was the only true church and all the other

nations were seen as heathen. The time where we now live in has many true churches in many different nations. But the fundamental principle remains the same because we believe that the Scripture is not bound by time and is applicable to both the Old and New Testament saints. Thus, in the decisions that we make, we are finally accountable to God who will judge our hearts.

Besides the famine, there were other less obvious reasons why Elimelech left Israel. One such reason was due to the unrest in Israel. Ruth 1:1 tells us that Elimelech left “in the days where the judges ruled”. And in the

such a church. “Come out from among them, and be ye separate” (2 Cor 6:17)

References: Church Membership in an Evil Age, Ptr Steven R. Key & Elimelech’s Rationale for Moving to Moab, Rev. A. Stewart

## The True Joy of Life with God

>> Pastor Andy Lanning

In Psalm 84:10, the Psalmist has something wonderful to say. Let us listen to him sing for a moment: “For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.” What a beautiful song!

The Psalmist is singing about where he would like to live. There are only two choices. One dwelling is the house of God; the other is the pleasure-tents of wickedness. For the Psalmist, the choice is easy: he would rather live with God.

Even if he could only spend one day there! Even if he had to be the lowest servant there!

Because life with God is the best life there is. One could wallow in the pleasures of sin for a thousand days, and it would still not compare to the pleasure of serving God for one day.

And what about you and me, dear youth? Where shall we live? Would our choice be the same as the Psalmist’s? Do we find the joy of serving our Saviour to be greater than the joy of serving sin? By God’s grace, as we look at these two choices, we shall find ourselves singing the Psalmist’s song!

The tents of sin promise joy. By his deceptions and his temptations, Satan is able to make sin look good. Remember how Satan approached Eve in the Garden of Eden, telling her the lie that eating from the forbidden tree would make her like God? The sin sounded so good, and our first parents disobeyed. Satan still tells the lie today that sin is good and brings joy. In our own experience, we can see this. God’s law appears so restrictive. It seems that God is constantly telling us, “NO,” when our flesh is constantly telling us, “YES.” By walking in God’s way, we miss out on so many of the things that make life fun on this earth. Sin looks so appealing, and God’s way looks so boring.

That is why the Psalmist speaks of the tents of wickedness. Those tents refer to feasting tents and pleasure tents. They are tents where the wicked offer every pleasure under the sun to satisfy the lusts of the flesh. Our enemies set up those tents at many places along our pathway. Of course, they are not literal tents of sin, but all of the temptations that we find along our earthly sojourn. In all of those temptations, the devil appeals to our sinful lusts, making the way of sin look good.

However, the joy of sin is not true joy. In reality, a life of sin is a life of misery and sorrow. Look at Adam and Eve again in the Garden of Eden. When they ate of the forbidden fruit, they did not find the joy they had anticipated, but plunged themselves and the human race into the misery of depravity and sin. Sin can never satisfy our hearts.

In fact, so far from satisfying our hearts, sin only inflames our lusts the more. Our sinful lusts are like the muscles of our bodies. The more you exercise a muscle, the stronger it will become. So also, the more we exercise our sinful lusts, the stronger they become. This is part of the great sorrow of slavery to sin. Even when the wicked can see that sin is destroying them, they cannot and will not let it go. Sin has them in its clutches, and they are miserable.

Thanks be to God that we have been delivered from that spiritual slavery! Through our Saviour Jesus Christ and His sacrifice upon the cross, sin’s power over us has been broken. By Christ’s Spirit in our hearts, we are made alive and made willing and able to follow Him. Oh, we do not follow Him perfectly yet. We still must battle our sinful desires every day. But sin does not have the victory over us; instead, our Saviour has the victory over sin!

Therefore, for the child of God redeemed by grace, the only true joy is found in serving God and walking in His way. Listen to the Psalmist again, this time at the beginning

of his song: “How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts!” Amiable means lovely and beloved. Living with God is the loveliest thing the Psalmist can think of, and with all his being he longs for that life. “My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.”

And by God’s grace, we agree with the Psalmist! We have been delivered from a life of sin and misery to a life with God. We have been freed from bondage and have been adopted as children of the Father. When we compare the false, temporary, unsatisfying joys of sin to

the true, eternal, satisfying joys of life with God, there is no comparison! A thousand days spent in the greatest pleasures of sin is only misery. But even one day as the lowliest servant in the house of God is bliss!

So we sing, and sing with all our hearts:

*In Thy blest courts to worship, my God, a single day*

*Is better than a thousand while far from Thee I stray;*

*Though in a lowly station, the service of my Lord*

*I choose above all pleasures that sinful ways afford.*

(Psalter 228, stanza 2)

## Weaning Ourselves Off Sinful Entertainment

>> Ryan Barnhill

Godless entertainment. Pleasure-madness. Our world is full of it. Our society lives for such entertainment and, indeed, worships it. Because entertainment is so prevalent wherever we go, and because its inroads are found even in the Church, we do well to ask and answer a few questions: What is the origin of sinful entertainment, and is the entertainment of the past different from the entertainment we have now? How does entertainment affect us as young people? What about so-called “innocent” shows, books, etc.? How do we wean ourselves off sinful entertainment? We will answer these questions briefly.

Sinful entertainment reaches far back into history. Already in the early days of the Old Testament, men and women looked for pleasure and enjoyment in their inventions, such as the various instruments Jubal constructed. Undoubtedly, the wicked during that period used these instruments for sinful entertainment. In addition, feasts, with drunkenness, dancing, and all manner of wickedness existed both in the Old and New Testament. For example, you will recall the feast at which Belshazzar saw the handwriting on the wall, or the supper where Herod, controlled by his lusts, murdered John the Baptist at the request of Herodias’ daughter. Furthermore, during the Apostle Paul’s day, Rome was known for its Coliseum, where thousands of fans cheered and jeered as lions tore apart Christians, and gladiators fought to the death. This is only a small sampling of sinful entertainment throughout history.

The existence of wicked entertainment since the beginning should not surprise us. Man is totally depraved. Fallen in Adam, the reprobate seek to walk the path of wickedness, trampling the law of God. Instead of treasuring God’s commandments and loving His truth, they slip farther and farther into the pit of destruction by their ungodly lifestyle and inventions. Their hearts are evil, stony, and cold, and from those hearts proceed “evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness” (Mark 7:21-23). The totally depraved heart “is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it” (Jeremiah 17:9)? But sinful entertainment is not a surprise for us, either. We, who have been regenerated by the Spirit of God, still fight against our sinful flesh, which drags us sometimes into the mud of God-dishonouring forms of pleasure.

In one sense, entertainment has not changed throughout history, and in another sense, it has. The pleasure-madness of unregenerate man is no different today than in history, because, as we have just noted, that love for sinful pleasure and entertainment comes out of a filthy heart. The same, basic sins are committed over and over, whether they be adultery, murder, stealing, or other violations of God’s commandments. But the way those of the world seek their pleasure changes from century to century. Hollywood did not exist in Paul’s day, nor did iPods or movies. In the last century, entertainment has ridden the wings of

technology to unbelievable heights. Our laptops, iPads, and phones hold more information and capability than anyone would have even started to imagine fifty years ago. Therefore, the means have changed, but the basic principle of sin which underlies the entertainment has not.

But the ways or means that have changed in our day are what makes sinful entertainment so widespread, easily available, and tempting to the Christian young person. Who of you, young people, are not constantly bombarded by the assaults of the world, whether that attack comes through your music, walking in the mall looking at the posters and ads, or watching television? The entertainment of the world, it seems, has so much to offer; the entertainment industry holds out its violent movies, its stories of jealousy and strife, its satanic, lust-filled music, and says, “Take it in! It’s readily available for you, in whatever form you would like! Drink deeply of these waters, and you’ll be satisfied!” Or, “No one will ever know what you look at on your computer in the privacy of your own house.” Or, “Download that movie – it’s a really funny one – sure it has some bad language in it, but that won’t affect you.” Or, “You need to watch that show – you may not agree with everything, but it has a good storyline.”

But sinful entertainment’s wide availability is not its only threatening feature. It can also hide under the mask of being innocent. The books and shows which speak about love and relationships often attract young women. Shows and movies with the violence of war spark the interests of young men. Let us not be deceived by these “innocent” entertainments! But, you might say, the movie, show, or music does have some good in it, and after all, the good character wins, and the bad character eventually loses. Is not that acceptable entertainment for a Christian? It is not acceptable entertainment for a Christian. They are deceptive. Examples abound: Under its “harmless” cover and advertisements, a romance novel hides a worldview that promotes twisted ideas of love and human relationships. Despite storylines that boast of justice, equality, and love, many video games, movies, shows, and pieces of music glorify rebellion and murder. These are just two examples. In general, most “innocent” entertainments spew forth a filthy stream that is poisonous to drink; not the healthy, clean, and pure stream of God’s Word, which edifies and builds up.

What are we to do, young people, in our world of sinful entertainment? How do we wean ourselves off sinful entertainment? We wean ourselves by living the

antithetical life! That is, living spiritually separate from the world, and living in holiness as God’s children. We must busy ourselves, by the grace of God, in building the antithetical wall, brick by brick.

Evaluate the strength of that antithetical wall. We can do so by asking these questions: Do we love God’s Word, and make it our meditation, day and night? Do we love and have a passion for the preaching of the Word? Are we in regular prayer, confessing our sins, praying for God’s daily grace, praying for the strength that only He can provide for our pilgrimage in this wicked, entertainment-loving world? Do we have Christian friends, and do we seek the communion of the saints? Do we obey our parents, especially when they tell us what we may or may not do with respect to our recreation? Let us maintain a strong defence!

Then, once you have built the wall, walk on top of it, constantly scanning the activities both outside and inside that wall. “. . . Let us watch and be sober” (1 Thessalonians 5:6). “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” (1 Peter 5:8). Be not drunk with sinful pleasure, but constantly watching, always guarding yourself, lest its filthiness come into your church, home, and heart. Become well-acquainted both with the enemy in the world, and the enemy within: flee from sinful desires, such as fornication, idolatry, and murder, which crave worldly pleasures. Scripture is radical concerning sin. When temptation arises, immediately shut down the laptop, and sell it if you must. Burn those books which entice you to evil thoughts. Let us recognize the sin in our own heart (Matthew 5), our own sinful desires for evil entertainment, and confess them before the throne of God, praying for the power of the Holy Spirit to lead us more and more in a life of sanctification.

And more positively, read God’s Word. Meditate upon it. Drink its waters freely. May you and I know, in an increasingly greater measure as we grow spiritually, that we are the children of God! We are the citizens of the kingdom of God, sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty (2 Corinthians 6:17, 18). We have a covenant identity, and as such we hate the sinful entertainment all around us, and endeavour all the more to live, not as children of the world, but as children of the king.

May God grant us the grace to live this kind of life. May we find our joy not in the sinful pleasures and treasures of television, movies, and music, but in the endless, sweet delights of God’s Word.



## How a Wife Must Treat Her Husband

>> Sister Wilma Hanko

Dear young people,

*Salt Shakers* has asked me to write an article for the magazine on “How a Wife Must Treat Her Husband”. My husband is a writer; I am not, but I will try to write this article for you.

Because the Bible requires wives to be submissive to their husbands, the first thing that comes to mind is the need to honour and treat him with respect, as well as to obey him in all things lawful.

But sometimes we have disagreements. In that case, God calls us to work our disagreements out together with prayer. When we both believe the Scriptures, this is never impossible. Sometimes we have to say, “I’m sorry”. We must never be afraid to do this, although those two words are the hardest words for anyone to speak in the whole English language. But those two simple words have the power to make all wrongs right.

I am going to remind you of a paragraph in our *Marriage Form* at the back of our *Psalter*. It speaks of the duties of a wife towards her husband. “In like manner, must you who are the bride, know how you are to carry yourself towards your husband, according to the Word of God. You are to love your lawful husband, to honour and fear him, and also to be obedient in all lawful things, as to your Lord as the body is obedient to the head, and the Church to Christ. You shall not exercise any dominion over your husband, but be silent: for Adam was first created, and then Eve, to be an help to Adam; and after the fall, God said to Eve, and in her to all women, ‘your will shall be subject to your husband’. You shall not resist this ordinance of God, but be obedient to the Word of God, and follow the examples of godly women, who trusted in God, and were subject

to their husbands; as Sarah was obedient to Abraham, calling him her lord: you shall also be an help to your husband in all good and lawful things, looking to your family, and walking in all honesty and virtue, without worldly pride, that you may give an example to others of modesty.”

The Bible also teaches that the wife, as well as her husband, possesses the Holy Spirit of Christ. That makes her equal with her husband under the law and in making the home a covenant home. He is king in the home, and she is queen. He is prophet in the home, and she is prophetess. He is priest in the home, and she is priestess. Because this is true, all the decisions in the home are made by discussions and talking things out. There are two examples especially that come to mind. If husband and wife disagree over matters of discipline, they must not express their disagreements in front of the children. They must talk together in private.

All disagreements ought to be settled in private, for fighting together does terrible harm to the children to whom their sense of security comes chiefly from happily married parents. And if anger sometimes arises between them, “Let not the sun go down upon your wrath” (Ephesians 4:26).

This is the vow we wives make: “Do you acknowledge here before God, and this His holy Church, that you have taken and do take to your lawful husband here present, promising to be obedient to him, to serve and assist him, never to forsake him to live holily with him, keeping faith and truth to him in all things, as a pious and faithful wife is bound to her lawful husband according to the holy gospel?” This is necessary for a covenant home.

Because the Bible requires wives to be submissive to their husbands, the first thing that comes to mind is the need to honour and treat him with respect, as well as to obey him in all things lawful.

## The Attributes of God (Belgic Confession 2a): General Revelation

>> Pastor Angus Stewart

### *Belgic Confession 2: By What means God is made known unto us*

We know Him by two means: first, by the creation, preservation and government of the universe; which is before our eyes as a most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many characters leading us to contemplate the invisible things of God, namely, His power and divinity, as the apostle Paul saith, Romans 1:20. All which things are sufficient to convince men, and leave them without excuse.

Secondly, He makes Himself more clearly and fully known to us by His holy and divine Word, that is to say, as far as is necessary for us to know in this life, to His glory and our salvation.

### What Does the Universe Reveal About God?

What does the universe indicate about God or divine things? Here are six wrong answers that present various erroneous views. First, some claim that the cosmos teaches us that there is no God; just matter, time, and chance. This is atheism. Second, others reckon that matter is evil and was created by a “bad god,” while spirit or mind is good and was created by a “good god.” This is dualism. Third, some think that the various aspects of creation reveal the existence of many gods. The Romans thought Neptune ruled the sea, Vulcan took care of fire, Vesta was concerned with the hearth, Venus with love, Bacchus with wine and Mars with war. The Nordic peoples and the Greeks also had their pantheons. This is polytheism. Fourth, others believe that all is god. The oceans, sunsets, trees, spiders, love, etc., all are the divine. This is pantheism. Fifth, some, with a shrug of their shoulders, ask, “Who can know about divine things? The universe is so complicated that it is impossible to make sense of it

all. I don't know if there is a God” This is agnosticism. Sixth, others cop out completely: “I never really think about it. I'm simply concerned with just getting by in life.” This is irreligiosity and burying one's head in the sand.

The truth is that the universe declares the glory of the one true and living God (Ps. 19:1). Thus *Belgic Confession 2* begins, “We know him ... by the creation, preservation and government of the universe; which is before our eyes as a most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many characters leading us to contemplate the invisible things of God, namely, his power and divinity ...” This is the same God set forth in *Belgic Confession 1*. *Belgic Confession 2* mentions two “books:” general revelation in the creation (Book 1) and special revelation in the Bible (Book 2).

### General Revelation and the Unevangelized Heathen

Let us consider general revelation (Book 1) and the unevangelized pagans. What is the key passage in Scripture in this regard? Romans

1:18-32. What does Romans 1 teach about what the universe reveals about God? It mentions the following attributes or perfections of God as being revealed by the creation: eternity (v. 20), power (v. 20), glory (v. 23), incorruptibility (v. 23), truth (v. 25), blessedness (v. 25) and justice (v. 32). This passage also states that God's works as creator (v. 25), governor and judge (v. 32) are declared by the creation. Everybody, even the unevangelized heathen, know this from the creation (vv. 18ff.).

What ought everyone to do in the light of God's general revelation? Glorify and thank Him (vv. 21, 25)! What does unregenerate man do instead? He suppresses and holds down the truth of God (vv. 18, 28). He substitutes idols in the place of the true God (vv. 23, 25). The pagans engage in various sexual sins (v. 24), some of them even descending to sodomy and lesbianism (vv. 26-27), by God's just judgment (vv. 24, 26). The Almighty also gives them up (v. 28) to a whole host of other iniquities (vv. 29-32). Not only do the ungodly do these things, but they also “have

pleasure in them that do them” (v. 32), which is why worldly dramas on television and in the cinemas are so popular.

What is God's purpose with His general revelation in the creation? Romanism teaches that from it, pagan man can forge a true natural theology, believing which he can be saved (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 36). Arminianism holds “that the corrupt and natural man can so well use the common grace (by which they understand the light of nature), or the gifts still left him after the Fall, that he can gradually gain by their good use a greater, namely, the evangelical or saving grace and salvation itself. And that in this way God on His part shows Himself ready to reveal Christ unto all men, since He applies to all sufficiently and efficiently the means necessary to conversion” (*Canons III/IV:R:5*; cf. *I:R:4*). Anabaptists, Quakers, Open Theists, Amyraldians and hypothetical universalists, like hymn writer Philip Doddridge (1702-1751), also believe that unevangelized heathen can be saved through the right use of God's general revelation in creation. Sadly, many evangelicals believe this too.

This is false doctrine, first, because Book 1 (general revelation) does not reveal the truth about Christ and His cross, the only way of knowing the forgiveness of sins. Second, man is totally depraved, and the unevangelized heathen, with wills in bondage to sin, always suppress the truth of God (Rom. 1:18, 28). Third, Romans 10:14-15 affirms the necessity of the preaching of the Gospel for salvation, for how can people believe and call upon the Lord unless they hear the Word proclaimed by one sent by God?

The purpose of God's general

revelation in creation is not to save the unevangelized pagans but to leave them without excuse. This is the express teaching of Romans 1:20: “so that they are without excuse.” This is echoed in *Belgic Confession 2*: “All which things are sufficient to convince men, and leave them without excuse.” Besides our *Belgic Confession*, the Reformed creeds unitedly confess the impossibility of the salvation of unevangelized heathen (*Scottish Confession* 16; *Thirty-Nine Articles* 18; *Canons of Dordt III/IV:4*; *Westminster Confession* 1:1; 10:4; *Formula Consensus Helvetica* 18, 20).

Here we see, first, the *necessity* of general revelation for leaving the unevangelized heathen without excuse. Otherwise they would protest, “But I never knew!” We learn, second, the *sufficiency* of general revelation to leave the unevangelized heathen without excuse; otherwise they would be able to object, “But, Lord, Thou didst not tell me enough to know that Thou art the creator and governor of all things!” We also see, third, the *clarity* of general revelation, for the unevangelized heathen cannot claim, “But Thy revelation of Thyself in forming and ruling the universe was too hard to understand!”

No wonder Romans 1:18-32 stresses the necessity, sufficiency and clarity of God's general revelation, which leaves the unevangelized heathen without excuse! In especially six of its verses, it states that, even though they worship idols and live wickedly, they all know that God is the Creator and Lord who must be thanked and served (vv. 18, 19, 20, 21, 28, 32).

All of this is important, first, regarding God Himself for He must be and is righteous in judging and punishing the unevangelized pagans

for their ingratitude, idolatry and manifold iniquities. Second, this is an important truth for the witness of the Church. It underscores the necessity and urgency of mission work to unreached people for without the Gospel, they cannot be saved.

### The Abuse of General Revelation With Respect to Creation

There are many ways in which Book 1 (general revelation in the universe) is wickedly abused by those who profess to be Christians so as to contradict Book 2 (special revelation in Scripture). Let us consider this with respect to the creation. Theistic evolutionists believe that the fossil record, erosion, sedimentation, etc., indicate that the earth is millions and billions of years old. Therefore, they “modify” the Bible. However, Scripture teaches that the world is a few thousand years old and that there was a global flood, which explains much concerning fossils, erosion, sedimentation, etc.

From similarities in bone structure and chemical make-up, etc., between man and the animals, theistic evolutionists claim that man evolved from the primeval slime. Out go Genesis 1 and 2! Scripture teaches that Adam was formed by the Most High out of the dust and Eve was fashioned from his rib. Besides, why wouldn't there be some similarities between man and the beasts given they have a common creator who formed both us and them for the same world?

Theistic evolutionists also believe in the “big bang,” that our orderly world is the product of a gigantic explosion. All this denies the inerrancy, authority and inspiration of Genesis 1. “Through faith [not unbelieving evolutionism] we understand that

the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear" (Heb. 11:3).

Do you see what the theistic evolutionists are doing? They view Book 1 (general revelation in the created universe) with evolutionary spectacles to "reinterpret," that is, contradict, Book 2 (special revelation in the Bible). This is dead wrong! The Christian Reformed Church in North America's Synod of 1991's report on creation abused *Belgic Confession 2* and appealed to the false doctrine of common grace to do precisely this.

### The Abuse of General Revelation With Respect to Providence

As an example of another abuse of Book 1, this time with respect to providence, which *Belgic Confession 2* refers to as God's "preservation and government of the universe," we shall consider the Nazis and their dupes in the churches, the so-called "German Christians." Building upon evolutionism and their idea of the Aryans as the master race, the Nazis claimed that it was the will of God that Adolf Hitler was the German führer or leader. They did not simply mean by this that Hitler became the German chancellor according to God's decree and providence (and wrath). They meant that God approved of Hitler and raised him up in His favour and grace. In this sense, too, they claimed that the Almighty willed a vast expansion of German land (for *Lebensraum* or living room), the exaltation of the German race and people or *Volk*, and the establishment of a German kingdom, the Third Reich (to last a millennium!).

The German church (both Roman Catholic and Lutheran) was to be

subservient to the Nazi state so that it would not oppose but promote Nazi ideology. Its doctrine was the so-called "Positive Christianity" declaring one German führer for one German people in one German kingdom with one German land. Biblical virtues such as humility and meekness were despised as merely "passive." "Active" virtues were to be preached and inculcated, qualities befitting an industrial and militaristic people whose destiny it was to conquer and rule – the survival of the fittest!

Read carefully the following four quotes from Nazi apologist and theologian, D. Cajus Fabricius, in his *Positive Christianity in the Third Reich* (Dresden: H. Püschel, 1937), as he perverts Christianity by making Nazi history a source – even the main and determinative source! – of God's (gracious) revelation.

First, "It is true that Christendom is not of opinion there is no other Divine revelation except through Jesus Christ. On the contrary we know that God's hand is to be traced in history and in Nature" (p. 69). "History" as the Nazis interpret it!

Second, "... our German *Volk* is a part of the Aryan race; German blood courses through our veins, and we live on German soil. We love this *Volk* with all the surrender we are capable of, and we love precisely this people of ours today, raised as it has been from out the depths of direst need by an overwhelming act of Divine Providence. And in this great happening we look upon the fact that the Führer, Adolf Hitler has been given to us as a very special mark of God's mercy towards us. We shall never be weary of thanking God for this special ordering of our history in the great happenings of the world" (p. 46). God's "mercy" is seen in His

providential raising up of a Nazified Germany and the elevation of Hitler! Common grace with a vengeance!

Third, "One fact in this struggle for existence has become to them an overpowering reality: the Führer. In him they have experienced the incontestable fact that all great happenings in history do not originate in the universal but in the particular, not in crowds but in some great personality. In him too, they have experienced that great historical deeds are not only planned in the magnificence of royal palaces, or at the official boards of parliaments and ministries, or even in the buildings of large banking-houses, but may have their source in one simple life that started in modest circumstances, having to struggle onward through poverty and privation, and after much hard fighting finally reaches the height, and even on the height thinks only of self-denial and sacrifice" (pp. 70-71). In his exaltation from a lowly beginning to great heights, the noble Hitler still "thinks only of self-denial and sacrifice" for his German *Volk*!

Fourth, "The Führer himself belongs to those who fulfil the will of God and realize the life of Christ in this life in an extraordinary degree. The Führer in uniting the nation and helping it to rise from the laxity and neglect into which it had fallen, to a sense of moral discipline, fulfils the law of Christ respecting love in a way few mortals could ever hope to emulate ... And when he [i.e., the Führer] himself in the strength of his trust in God places the destiny of the whole nation in the hands of the Father, he manifests the Spirit which through the coming of Christ has become a living power in the world" (p. 71). Hitler is a Christ-figure who trusts in God, fulfils God's will and

law in "love," and manifests God's Spirit!" Thus he unites the nation "in the hands of the Father!"

Can you see what is happening here? A false view of providence (Book 1) is used to contradict and subvert the truth of the Scripture (Book 2). Instead of the biblical and Reformed faith, an idolatrous worldview is substituted with Hitler as the Christ-like man and a Nazified Germany as the church which he saves by his self-denial and sacrifice and consecrates to God. This is evil! The so-called confessing church in Germany opposed Nazism. The neo-orthodox Swiss theologian Karl Barth, because

of the Nazi perversion of general revelation, even went to the length of denying general revelation altogether! Emil Brunner, another neo-orthodox theologian, opposed Barth's denial of general revelation.

*Belgic Confession 2* is crucially important and must be understood, maintained and confessed by us and our children in this present evil age. The "creation, preservation and government of the universe" points us to the true and living God. This "most elegant book" of creation and providence leads us, as believers, to "contemplate the invisible things of God" and to thank and praise His glorious name!

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is general revelation? What does it declare about God's perfections and works, and our calling? What does it *not* reveal about Him?
2. Do you think that the abuse of "science," as if it were general revelation, is a big threat in the church in our day?
3. How would you analyze and critique Fabricius' Nazi theory of history in the light of *Belgic Confession 2*?



The days are counting down until Christmas. The loud-speakers in the stores will be playing Christmas Carols and Santa Claus and Reindeer Songs, whatever will get the people in the proper mood. Many look forward to the holidays; others dread it and the busyness, disappointments and let-downs that will arise.

What brings you joy? What brings you true joy?

In the materialistic world that we live in, usually when people think of Christmas, they think of presents, either buying or getting them. "What will I get for him?" "What will she like?" "What will I receive?" "Do they know that I really want \_\_\_\_\_?"

Is it joy in a toy, which probably will be broken one month later, or have missing parts when I put it together, or of course, will need batteries?

Is it joy in new clothing, the right style, the right brand, the right size, the right colour... that are a fad today, and out of date shortly after?

Is it joy in jewellery, for as they say, "diamonds are a girl's best friend..."? Maybe some sparklies that look nice but are not as pricey!

No for many, it is the latest tech gift, which one stands in line for when they come on the market. I just have to have the latest iPad, telephone, laptop computer; sleeker, faster, and fancier. How that tech industry has joy in the lack of contentment folks have in whatever they already possess!

Perhaps your joy is in the parties and get-togethers with family and friends...only to be disappointed because someone could not or did not want to come, or someone said the wrong thing or looked the wrong way...oh the material things that folks get caught up in. No wonder Scrooge said, "Bah, humbug!"

Now in the title, I mentioned **TRUE JOY**. That word 'true' implies that there are false or counterfeit joys. Now I am not addressing the unbeliever, for he will always be looking for joy in all the wrong places. But I want



to address Christians, believers in Jesus Christ. What is the joy in Christmas? Well, look at the word Christmas. It must be Christ! The angel said to humble shepherds long ago, "...behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:10,11)

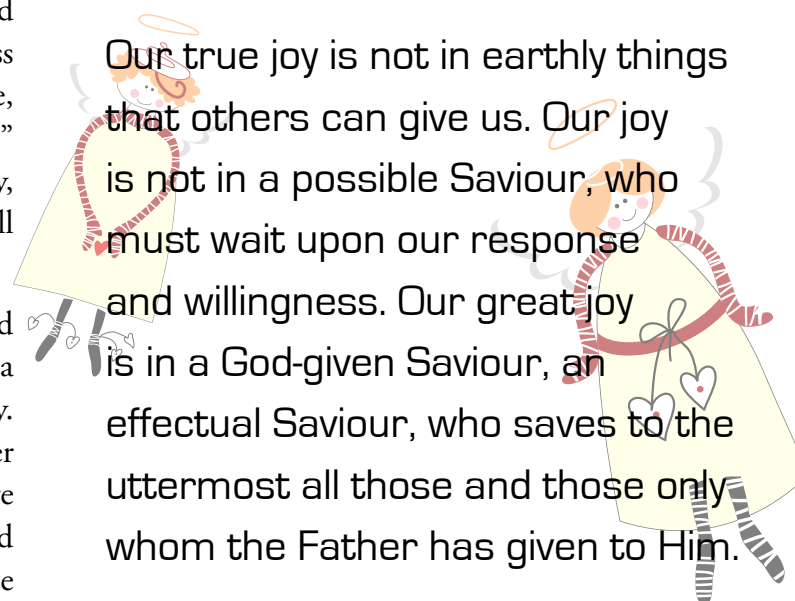
What are these good tidings that bring great joy? "Born this day..." is the answer of the angel. This day- no, we do not know the exact day or month or even year, just as we do not know the day or month or year of His coming again. 'This day', of all the days that followed the very first day of Creation is different; it is a particular day, a great and glorious day. God's people in the 4000 years after Creation and the Fall had been looking forward to and hoping for this day. All history was fulfilled in this one day. God had planned each age of history, the development of the promise as well as the development of sin. All of history finds its purpose on this day, all worked for this day. We read in Luke 2:1-6, "And it came to pass in those days...And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered." The days accomplished are those of Mary's pregnancy, but especially it is the days that God appointed, when all things were ripe.

"Born this day...a **Saviour**..." Born is not merely a good man, a mere teacher, or a good example. Born is not a liberator or great social reformer that will change society. Born is not a king in a palace to develop and reign over an earthly kingdom. Rather born is a Saviour, to save His people from their sins. Born is a new Federal Head to represent us and provide for us the perfect obedience that is demanded of us. Born is one who comes from above, He is God. Born, He is one who comes from the womb of the virgin Mary. He is a man. He is **Christ**: One ordained and anointed by God eternally to save us. He is the Prophet who reveals to us the Father and His secret counsel concerning our redemption. He is only high Priest who offers himself as the perfect, once for all sacrifice for our sins and by that sacrifice makes continual intercession for us. He is the eternal King who brings all His and our enemies into subjection and destroys them, while He establishes His kingdom in our hearts. He is our **Lord**, who rules, defends, and preserves us in the salvation that He has accomplished for us.

He is born; born not of the will of man, but conceived by the Holy Spirit. What that means is that God has come in our flesh. God is dwelling with us. His name is Immanuel! That is the wonder of the Incarnation. It is a wonder of

grace. The good news of great joy is a joy in Christ, He is God's great gift.

Notice carefully that the angels speak to the shepherds not of a **possible** Saviour. A possible Saviour would be one who is willing to save you, offers to save you, but is able to save you only if you are willing to let him. Such a Saviour is no Saviour at all, who must wait for you to act first before he can save. Those who cling to such a Saviour find joy in their own acceptance, their own opening up of their hearts, their own willingness to be saved. That is not true joy, even though they name the name of Christ! Theirs is a counterfeit joy, really no joy at all, because the dead man can do nothing to be saved. All they have is a want-to-be Saviour, a weak Saviour who wants to save but cannot unless they let him! But the Christ that we know and love is an effectual Saviour. The angel said to Joseph, "thou shalt call His name JESUS, for He shall save His people from their sins." (Matt 1:21)



Of them, He says that he will lose none of them (John 6:39). Not one of those for whom Christ shed His precious blood, and paid for their sins, will be lost, but be saved. Forever! Now that is good news, of great joy.

That good news is for humble shepherds who looked and believed in faith. That good news is for all those whom God has in His grace has chosen for Himself out of every nation, tribe and people of the world. The good news is of the Incarnation. The good news is of great joy to believers, the joy of knowing Christ Jesus as one's personal Saviour and Lord. Notice: I did not say that our joy is in knowing about Jesus Christ. Our joy is in knowing Jesus Christ; knowing Him personally. Do you? Do you love Him? Do you live for Him?

Our true joy does not come from other humans under a Christmas tree. Our true joy does not depend upon

others or even our own actions. True joy is derived from what God did and does in His only begotten Son. God gave. God sent. God saves. God preserves. Christmas is all about God, His attributes and work. He gave His Son for

us, to be with us, to save us. Do you have, and are you filled with true joy? Not only at this season of the year, but every day of your life? There is a song that goes, "I have the joy, joy, joy, joy, down in my heart....down in my heart to stay"

## Interviews about the Reformation

>> RDC Committee

In connection with the CERC's Reformation Day Conference 2012 (RDC 2012), the organizing committee collaborated with *Salt Shakers* to interview a few members of CERC concerning the Reformation.

Hear the thoughts of different members in the church!

**Interviewers:** Ivan and Yang Zhi

### Background of interviewees:

- Angela Chan (Founding member)
- Leh Wah (Founding member)
- Iva Chan (Born and raised in CERC, Daughter of Angela)
- Dorcas Lee (Born and raised in CERC, Mother of two)
- Marcus Wee (The Mysterious Guy)
- Pastor Lau Chin Kwee

**Question: What is your understanding of a Reformation?**

**Aunty Leh Wah:**

Reformation is God's work, for the renewal of His people's understanding of Himself and of the Scriptures. It is all God's work and it is for the good of His church.

**Iva:**

It is a period when the doctrines get more established.

**Aunty Angela:**

A going back to the original beliefs.

**Marcus (The man of few words):**

A radical change.

**Question: What has the 16th century Reformation got to do with us?**

**Marcus:**

We are who we are because of that.

**Aunty Leh Wah:**

There are a lot of things which we can learn from the Reformation. First and foremost, we can learn about God's work in the lives of certain individuals, especially when God made use of various men to lead the church out of darkness.

It benefited us a lot because many of the doctrines and creeds were formed during this period.

Because of this reformation, our knowledge of God is refined. We need to have the right knowledge of God, because it affects our life. In

order to have a better life with God, we need to know Him more.

**Aunty Angela:**

We believe what the reformers thought. They pulled the church out of Roman Catholicism and brought the church back to the Truth. These doctrines were the "5 Solas" and that we are saved by grace alone.

**Dorcas:**

Everything. I am very thankful for it. The 16th century Reformation forced people to write out the doctrines, and there were many doctrines made clearer and formulated. It is during such heated times and through arguments that the doctrines were developed. We benefit a lot from this heritage.

**Question: So Dorcas, Which doctrine benefitted you the most?**

**Dorcas:**

The doctrine of the covenant is very dear to me now, especially when you have your own family and your own children. I also appreciate the fact that I was born in a Christian home, and the privilege of being catechised at a young age.

**Question: Why do you commemorate the Reformation with the RDC?**

**Aunty Angela:**

To remind ourselves of the great event, so that we will not forget our heritage – our heritage inherited from the Reformers who broke off from the Roman Catholic church.

**Iva:**

To remember our forefathers and what they went through to establish the Reformed faith.

**Aunty Leh Wah:**

To remind us the importance of God's work, to let us rejoice in God's work and to share it with others. There are many people in our modern society who are not aware of the Reformed doctrines and theology. It is also a good opportunity for publicity.

**Marcus:**

It's about discovering the Truth which God gives us.

**Pastor Lau:**

To point out the right direction in which we are travelling, and that we should press on. The Reformation points out the right direction, and that we should continue steadfast in that right direction.

**Dorcas:** Because it is worth remembering.

**Question: Why is it worth remembering to you Dorcas?**

**Dorcas:**

It is a very big thing to me, because it affects the church of the present. If God had not ordained the Reformation, our church would still be steep in Roman Catholicism. There is a lot to be thankful and

joyful about.

**Question: Has there been any reformation in Singapore?**

**Pastor Lau:**

Not like the 16th century. The starting of the reformed church is a good reformation in that we do return to the doctrine of grace. We are actually bringing the church back to the 16th century Reformation.

**Question: Pastor Lau, what does the phrase "always reforming" mean to you?**

**Pastor Lau:**

The best is yet to be, and only in heaven will we have that perfect doctrine.

**Question: Which is your favourite reformation and why?**

**Aunty Angela:**

Reformation itself is not a good thing. When there was a reformation, it meant that there was a problem before and a deviation from the truth. Therefore it is a sad thing.

I see the celebration of it as a solemn reminder of why our forefathers had to suffer. All reformation is a realisation of this and going back to the old paths.

**Dorcas:**

The 16th century Reformation would be most interesting to me, because there are many different aspects to it.

Through the Divorce and Remarriage (D&R) reformation, though not a happy event, we see God working on it.

And because of the D&R controversy, we also see a flourishing second generation. We are also more

aware of doctrines with help from the PRCA.

I think I grew the most spiritually during this period of time (from the split onwards).

**Aunty Leh Wah:**

The PRCA's reformation, because the doctrine of common and particular grace were well developed there.

**Pastor Lau:**

The 16th century Reformation. In this Reformation, the church broke away from Rome and the doctrine of salvation by grace was restored to the people of God.

The influence of this event is most widely spread to the European region. It is the most dramatic and eventful reformation.

It showed that God truly cares for His people. He also works at the right time, preparing different places for this very moment.

It has a good lasting effect, especially in the confessions. The truths were embodied in the many reformation confessions such as the Belgic Confession, the Canons (of Dort), and the Westminster Confession.

All these took place in the 16th century.

Because of this reformation, our knowledge of God is refined. We need to have the right knowledge of God, because it affects our life. In order to have a better life with God, we need to know Him more.

## PRAYER & THANKSGIVING

>> Salt Shakers

1. Thank God for the provision of Pastor Lanning to CERC as a Minister-on-Loan. We pray that he and his family will be able to adapt to the new culture and surroundings. We also pray for Faith PRC, that God, in His time, will provide a minister for them.
2. Thank God for the RDC 2012 and the Youth RDC 2012, that Prof. Engelsma was able to deliver his speeches on the Reformation, particularly on the preservation of God's universal church and the Reformed practice of Catechism.
3. Pray for the organising committee of the CK/CKS camp 2012, that God will continue to guide them as they continue to plan for the camp. We also pray for Pastor Lanning, even as he prepares the speeches for the camp.
4. Pray for those who are taking their exams and studying, that they will remember their purpose of studying is ultimately to learn more of God as the Creator of all things.
5. Pray for the sick in the church – Aunty Daisy, Pastor Lau, Mdm Tan – that they will continue to be comforted, in the midst of physical afflictions, by the salvation that God has given to them.
6. Pray for the youths who recently made their Confession of Faith – Joshua and Ruth Teo, Natalie Wong, Paul Liu and Anthea Lin – that they will continue to fight the good fight of faith.
7. Pray for those serving their National Service (NS), that they will continue to be good testimonies in their army camps.

## Deliverers From the Lord

**CK/CKS Camp 2012**

Theme verse: Judges 2:16

Speaker: Rev Andrew Lanning

Date: 17-21 Dec

Duration: 5 days 4 nights

Location: Aloha Changi, Cranwell Bungalows

Age range: 13 and up

Activities: Character Studies on 7 judges, group discussions, organized games, healthy camp-cooked meals, dragon boating and more!

Camp Fees For Full-Time Campers: \$20

Camp Fees For Part-Time Campers: \$10

Other details: Camp shirt provided!

For further enquiries, contact Marcus at marcc92@gmail.com

## GOD SENDS A MINISTER ON LOAN

>> Elder Chan Chee Seng

On Saturday, 11th August 2012, I woke up to the much anticipated email from Rev. Lanning to me, the clerk of Session, informing the church that he was accepting Grandville's call to be the Minister on Loan for CERC. Because Faith and Grandville PRC are twelve hours behind Singapore, our congregation had the arduous task of having to keep such good news close to our bosom so that Rev. Lanning could personally inform his congregation that he was accepting this call.

For the benefit of those who do not know our Minister on Loan yet, he graduated from the Protestant Reformed Seminary in June of 2006, and was ordained and installed as pastor in Faith Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan in September the same year. CERC will be his second charge. His parents are Gary and Pat, and Rev. Lanning is the oldest of three children. His sister Kerri is married to Josh, a professional cook – a good one, I must add. I know because I tasted his kebab when we had lunch at his house. His brother Nate is married to Dawn. I remember them because, like me, they have three children and their first son is Isaac. Their family has had another addition since we were there. We all know Rev. Steven Key. He lectured at our Reformation Day Conference in 2007 and we have been listening to his Heidelberg Catechism sermons as they were read by our elders during worship service on Sundays. Now, his

daughter Stephanie will be coming. Stephanie, Rev. Lanning's wife, is the oldest daughter of Rev. Key's four daughters. Her other three sisters, Michelle, Mary Anne and Elisabeth are married to a Jon and two Daves. The Lannings were married on 20th July 2001. In fact, Rev. Lanning and Stephanie, both 34 soon, celebrated their 11th anniversary this year with their family in Colorado. Their five children are Jessica, who is 10 years old, Eric, 8, Emily, 6, Megan, 3, and Jason who will be 8 months old when he comes to Singapore. We had lots of fun playing "Round and Round the Garden" with these kids, so much so that they only remember me as the "round and round the garden man".

God had brought about a whole sequence of events that led to Rev. Andy Lanning accepting the call to be the Minister on Loan to CERC. He first came to Singapore with Rev. Koole in April 2011 as delegates to discuss the establishment of a sister church relationship. While they were here over two Sundays, they preached and taught, like every PRCA minister who set foot in Singapore. He preached two sermons and taught an adult Sunday school class on an article in the Canons. While I was impressed by his youthful looks, his flair for writing, and the gifts that God has given him, I remember him telling me about his good impression of the zeal of our young people. I had no idea that he would one day be our Minister on Loan.

For the first time, three of our young people visited the PRCA in July 2011. This was followed by another much bigger group in June 2012. The second group also had the opportunity to be at Synod 2012. I believe these visits gave opportunity for Rev. Lanning to know CERC better. After representing CERC at this Synod, which confirmed our sister relation as well as approved sending us a Minister on Loan, I had planned to stay in Chicago until my return to Singapore. However, an irresistible offer to go to the Niagara Falls made me go back to Grand Rapids. It was during this trip back there that I was able to spend a day with Rev. Lanning and his family, and he seized the chance to bombard Angela and me with a multitude of questions about Singapore, the education system, the people in CERC and the church's needs. Synod was just over and Grandville had yet to form a trio to call the Minister on Loan. I could sense his excitement and he assured me that he would seriously consider CERC if the call came his way. At that time, he was also due, the following week, to give an answer to a call by one of the churches to be their pastor.

By God's grace, after he received Grandville's call, he made a very difficult decision. He wrote that he was "torn up about leaving Faith", which he has grown to love dearly after six years there, to come to CERC but is "thankful for the clarity of God's will". God works

in mysterious ways, bringing about opportunities that enabled him to get to know CERC and her needs here. God showed him His will in this call and gave him the burden to serve His people at the other end of the globe.

After seeing numerous places in our search for a home for the Lannings, it became apparent that with the budget, we had to choose between a smaller but more convenient place

and a bigger but less convenient place with more rooms to meet the Lanning's need for space. We thought that it was almost impossible to find that 'perfect' place; but God graciously provided an apartment of 1,750 square feet that surpassed all expectations for space, and furthermore, it was also centrally located in Bishan! By God's grace, the owner compromised on the rental to meet our budget. Once

again, God provides for His church. In God's own good pleasure, He gave us a minister at the first "call" – sooner than we had thought. Rev. Lanning is God's instrument to bring the preaching of His Word, so that His church in Singapore may grow in grace and in knowledge of Him, and that His people may be gathered to preserve His truth and keep His faith. Let God's name alone be praised.

## BRITISH REFORMED FELLOWSHIP CONFERENCE 2012

>> Marisa Kobilan

This summer, the British Reformed Fellowship's biennial family conference proved to be a tremendous success, as it combined beautiful scenery, wonderful fellowship, and superb teaching. Saints from Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, England, Italy, France, Wales, The Netherlands, Hungary, Canada, and the United States of America gathered for a week of teaching and fellowship in beautiful County Down, Northern Ireland. The theme of this year's conference was, "Ye Shall Be My Witnesses." All facets of what it means to be a Christian witness were covered, with plenty of emphasis put on the practical aspects. Thought-provoking questions and discussions occurred after the speeches were given. The weather remained cool and rainy for most of the conference, with some occasional periods of sun. Near the seaside resort town of Bangor, and within a short distance

of Belfast, stands Lorne House, a 21 acre estate including house and grounds. This was the venue for the 2012 BRF conference. Lorne House was built in the Scottish-Baronial style in 1875 by a man named Henry Campbell. Lorne house proved to be splendid accommodations, and conference goers enjoyed excellent meals prepared by the cooks.

Saturday afternoon marked the start of the 2012 BRF conference, which included arrival of attendees, dinner, introductions, and fellowship.

On Sunday morning Prof. Herman Hanko preached on the text Zechariah 4:1-6, entitled, "By the Spirit of the Lord." This sermon focused on the important truth that the building of the church is entirely God's work. The Sunday evening worship service included a sermon by Prof. David Engelsma on the text Acts 7:54-8:1a entitled, "The Martyr Church's Witness to the Ascended

Lord." This sermon explained the relationship of the church's witness and Christ's Lordship.

Right away on Monday morning, the group headed off via train to the Titanic Museum in Belfast. The museum provided a stunning, visual experience, with nine galleries utilizing multiple dimensions. The Titanic was designed to be the very best in comfort and luxury, and the museum brought this to life. Much to everyone's enjoyment, the museum even featured a ride, where a full-scale reconstruction of the shipyard and ship building could be viewed. Covering the entire history of the Titanic, the museum exhibits began with the economy and industry of Belfast at the time of the great ship's conception, and ended with the tragic wreck when the Titanic hit an iceberg south of Newfoundland.

Later that day, some from the BRF conference went on an open-air bus



tour of Belfast, which highlighted some of the major history of the city. Various ornate buildings and churches were viewed, as well as a very large estate, and Queen's University. The tour included a recap of the recent unrest in Northern Ireland, known as the Troubles. These struggles lasted from 1969 to 1998, and involved Protestant Unionist versus Catholic Nationalist communities. Their quarrels involved political and military matters, not religious ones. Mainly at stake was the constitutional status of Northern Ireland. The Troubles ended quite recently in 1998 with what is known as the Good Friday Agreement. The older, residential part of Belfast is still divided into Catholic and Protestant areas, with Shankill Road as the divider.

That night Prof. Hanko gave the first conference address entitled, "The Divine Calling to Witness." He expounded upon our biblical calling to witness, and emphasized God's sovereignty in salvation. He described the world as a very dark place, with the church as the only light shining in it. Many at the BRF conference sang Psalms together in the evening.

Tuesday saw two conference addresses, and the first was by Prof. Engelsma entitled, "The Content of the Witness." Prof. Engelsma explained that the worth and value of our witness is the content, and that the content must be the truth.

There was a period of free time during the afternoon, and some of the group walked to the nearby town of Holywood, where they enjoyed talking together at a cafe.

The third conference address was given that night by Prof. Hanko. It was entitled, "The Official Witness of the Church." Prof. Hanko

expounded on the fact that the official witness of the church is the preaching of the gospel. He went on to explain that only the true church is able to produce individuals who can be witnesses, and that the goal of individual witnesses is to bring people under the official preaching of the church. That evening more Psalms were sung, and later on, games were played by those who were interested in staying up later.

On Wednesday morning, the group went on a coach (or bus) tour of the East Antrim Coast. Along the way, the bus driver explained what we were seeing on the tour. The tour included a stop at Carrickfergus Castle, one of the best preserved medieval structures in the world. Carrickfergus Castle was built in 1177 by an Anglo-Norman knight named John de Courcy. John de Courcy built the grand edifice after he had invaded and conquered Ulster. Parts of the castle had been redone to show what it probably looked like in its original state. Replicas of medieval weapons were available for inspection, and many in our group tried their hand at using some of the weapons; only in jest, of course. The weather during the tour of the castle was very authentic: rain and a fair amount of wind. Outside the castle stands a statue of Prince William of Orange, a diminutive man from the Netherlands who lived from 1650 to 1720. His history is significant, as it relates to the spread of the Protestant Reformation. In his attempt to conquer the British Isles and restore Roman Catholicism, King James II of England also endeavoured to conquer Ulster. Prince William took his troops, landed in Carrickfergus, and helped to defeat James II at the Battle of the Boyne on July 1, 1690. The tour also included a stop

on the edge of the Antrim coast, where many in the group walked a fair distance along the coastline to a lighthouse. Later on the group was allowed time to tour the town of Carnlough, and at this time the weather began to improve.

That night, Rev. Martyn McGeown gave a special lecture entitled, "Mission Work: Message and Methods." Rev. McGeown explained that it is the instituted church alone that sends missionaries. He also outlined the method used in mission work, which we gather from the book of Acts and the writings of the apostle Paul. An update on the progress in Limerick was also given. Later in the evening, Psalms were sung and more games were played.

On Thursday morning the biennial general meeting of the BRF was held. Various matters of business were taken care of, including selecting a theme for the next BRF conference. The topic for the 2014 BRF conference will be, "Be Ye Holy: The Reformed Truth of Sanctification," DV.

In the afternoon that day, the Lorne establishment offered several optional, outdoor activities, and many chose to participate in them. One activity was archery, and the other was a high ropes course in the shape of a square, called the cube. The ropes course included a rope wall, climbing a tall post, walking on a balance beam, walking on a rope while holding onto a loose cord above, and jumping off a high platform while trying to hit a small punching bag. All the participants wore harnesses, and had a very enjoyable time. Some of the others who chose to opt out of these activities went to Belfast for shopping and sight-seeing.

That evening Prof. Engelsma gave the fourth conference address entitled, "The Personal Witness by the Word," in which he explained that the members of the instituted church participate in the church's witness by membership, praying, and financial contribution. He also talked about the fact that the individual members are still required to witness by their speech, and that the church instructs and trains the members to be good witnesses.

On Friday morning Prof. Hanko gave the fifth conference address entitled, "The Personal Witness of a Godly Life." He expounded this topic by saying that there is no witness without a godly life, and that we must have a godly life before we can give a spoken witness. He also made clear the important fact that the church is absolutely essential in the life of a pilgrim.

Friday afternoon consisted of a period of free time, and many conference attendees passed the time by talking together, while some did some sight-seeing.

Friday evening brought about the sixth conference address entitled, "The Manner of a Christian Witness." Prof. Engelsma said that the wrong manner of witnessing will hinder the witness. He discussed how 1 Peter 3:15 describes meekness and fear as the correct manner of a Christian witness, and explained what that means. He also said that we must keep in mind who we are witnessing to; the sharp condemnation of a false teacher would not be appropriate as an answer to a curious unbeliever. Prof. Engelsma emphasized the fact that love for God must motivate us, and also warned against the attitude of tolerance that is so prevalent in our day. This tolerance of wickedness, he

said, is destructive of churches, souls, and society.

Many of the conference attendees were successful at starting a small bonfire that evening, an endeavour that was made quite difficult by the damp environment. More games were played as well.

On Saturday morning the conference was brought to an end and people departed. There was more than a little sadness as goodbyes were said. Enjoying fellowship with saints from all over the world is a precious thing, and it is difficult to bring it to an end.

In short, the 2012 BRF conference was a remarkably wonderful event that comprised of the best elements that anyone could hope for: excellent teaching, blessed fellowship, and sightseeing in one of the most beautiful areas of the world.







Rev. Lanning

Megan

Eric

Emily

Stephanie

Jason

Jessica



Prof. Engelsma



**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 Dort.

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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