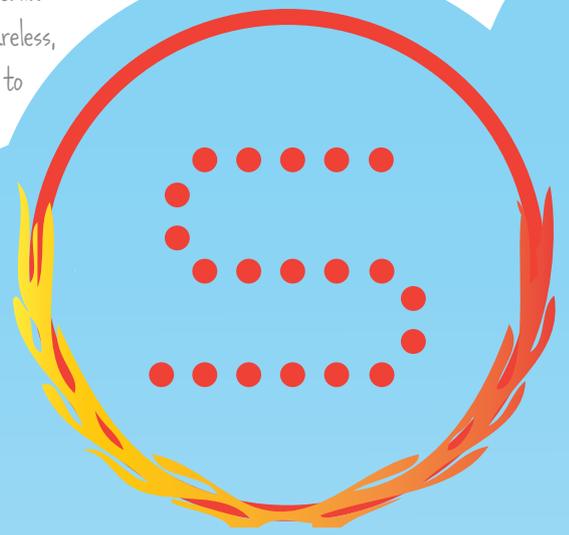


• "I don't simply hear my pastor telling me about this or that I hear the voice of Jesus."
- The Primacy of Preaching by Pastor Steven Key. • "If he is spiritually unwell, careless,
lethargic, and lukewarm, how can he be the spiritual leader in a relationship?" - What to
Look for in a Girlfriend? by Elder Lee Kong Wee • "Protestantism denies that any
of the apocryphal books are inspired or canonical." - Critiquing the Apocrypha
by Pastor Angus Stewart



salt shakers
joel 3:16 matthew 5:16

Issue 23 | Nov 2013

"... Yea Lord; thou
knowest that
I Love thee.
He saidth unto him,
feed my sheep."



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HELLO DEAR READERS, WELCOME TO THE 23RD ISSUE OF SALT SHAKERS!

Did you notice something new in this month's and the previous issue of Salt Shakers? Yes, we have an exciting new section called "News from the Churches"! This section contains bite-sized news information about the latest happenings in churches that are close to us. Very often, they will be accompanied by thanksgiving items and prayer requests. Indeed, it is a marvellous and heart-warming thing to be aware of God's work in the Church of Jesus Christ all throughout the world, and to know that God's mercy in Salvation extends to all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues. This section is here to stay, and we hope you will enjoy it!

If you noticed the front cover, you will find a very familiar illustration that is used all over Scripture! In this issue, you would find articles that have much to do with the LORD, our Shepherd, and how He feeds His beloved flock through His Word.

The 16th century Reformation is a great example of how God provides for His sheep by restoring His Word to them. In the last weekend (Friday and Saturday) of October, CERC had its Reformation Day Conference to commemorate the 16th century Reformation. It is good to be reminded of God's goodness and grace to His Church in preserving it through all the ages. Such great times of revival are the towers and bulwarks that are spoken of in Psalm 48; these are places and times of great victories won in the name of Jesus Christ. We must observe and mark these, for the purpose of telling it to our following generations. These beautiful testimonies of God's faithfulness cannot and must not be forgotten!

If we look at our own lives, do we also see personal towers and bulwarks? Remember them; these are more important than your best holiday experience, most horrible service experience at a restaurant, or some other trivial matters. These are important events in your life in which God's hand was unmistakably at work and displayed for everyone to see! Speak and testify of them often, that God's name may always be glorified and magnified!

Pastor Lanning was speaker at the Reformation Day Conference which was themed "The Kingdom's Inheritance Rediscovered". There were three speeches entitled "The Kingdom's Identity", "The Kingdom's Righteousness", and "The Kingdom's Blessedness". In the first speech, we learnt that Jesus identified His Kingdom as a spiritual one. In fact, He showed clearly in His ministry that He had no part and interest in anything earthly. This is in stark contrast to false teachers who mislead their followers by mixing carnal and earthly agendas together with doctrines of the Bible. In "The Kingdom's Righteousness", we were reminded of what the "righteousness of God" meant, and how it is not anything that we can accomplish by our own might, but rather that it comes only by faith in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. In the last speech, pastor spoke about the blessedness of being in the Kingdom – knowing the King, and being in communion and having covenant fellowship with Him. This Covenant in which He is our God, and we are His people, is really the most blessed and important thing to us His children! God has also chosen to reveal His greatest glory through the Covenant of Grace in our Lord Jesus. It follows then that we must defend the truth of God's unconditional Covenant without compromise, that His name be rightly glorified and honoured. If you would like to listen to the speeches online, please go to tinyurl.com/ceaudio and click on "Seminar", then "2013", and then "RDC". May you be edified by God's Word!

I know you can't wait... So, till the next time, blessed reading! Christ regardless, paul.

PSALM 23 : VERSE 4

>> Paul Liu



Paul Liu is a confessing young adult in CERC. He is the editor of Salt Shakers.

Psalm 23

1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

Introduction

Previously, we learnt that everything that Shepherd does for us, and everywhere that Shepherd leads us, He does it for the good of our souls. This may mean that outwardly we still only have simple coats of wool which may be quite unattractive to sheep of other shepherds. And we may probably not be as healthy as those marathon-running sheep who breeze all around the place with no signs of slowing down... But yet, these don't change the fact that something really good is happening to us, and it is happening to the most important part of our being – our souls!

And how blessed it is to know that we are led on the right path, not because we are “right” sheep who “know so well” and never go astray, but because we belong to our Shepherd who has given His word that He will love us and take care of us! He has said it, and His beautiful and good name is at stake; Shepherd will never leave us, nor forsake us, because He has put His name on us! (Numbers 6:22-27)

YES! After knowing much about Shepherd from the first three verses, we sheep have to ask ourselves, “What does it mean to ME? If Shepherd is such and such and such, what kind of sheep will I be?” Oh, a shepherd that does not lead in any consistent way gives rise to sheep who have no knowledge about where they should go or how they should act. Some shepherds lead their sheep at times for the “restoration” of their souls, and at other times for the satisfaction of their carnal lusts and desires; the poor sheep are confused and distracted,

led in circles of emotional highs and lows with no rest in sight. When these sheep have to think about what following such a shepherd means to them, they pull their wool over their eyes and trudge on without saying a word.

Not so, for the sheep of our Shepherd. In spite of our thin wool and weak knees, we “Baaa” an unexpectedly strong “YES!” that brims with confidence and determination. We are sure of what it means to us, to be a follower of Shepherd. His power, love, and attention has always been unwaveringly focussed on us, and we draw strength from Him to respond with an assurance of amazing clarity.

Unmovable

Sheep seldom talk this way; they are normally timid, bashful, insecure, and typically always looking around for someone to help out with generally anything. But, the sheep in Psalm 23 have a very unsheep-like thing to say – “I’m unmovable.”

We sheep are normally so afraid to die, and we'd do anything to stay alive. For example, following the sheep that is in front of me, because he represents survival for the near future, even if he is about to walk off a cliff. And we are so easily terrified; if anything threatens, we would run as fast as our little legs take us and hope to work ourselves out of the bad situation.

Oh, but Shepherd's sheep aren't that normal, they walk. Oh no, they're downright abnormal, they're somewhere near death... strolling. But, they are just doing what they said they would! In response to knowing

their Shepherd, they ever said, “Come what may, bring me the most dreaded enemy, and I will still be fearless!” (Psalm 62:6-8, Psalm 46)

And so they are. 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 puts it beautifully, that we are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed. “SERIOUSLY?!” those around tend to question us incredulously. “You are going to WALK over THERE?!” Little do they know that we are actually happily walking to the end of our sin-corrupt life and entering into the blessed beginning of our sin-free life. How fearful can that be? If Shepherd leads us here, we are most willing to follow!

Shepherd with Me

The simple reason why sheep like us are fearless is because we know Shepherd is with us. Not just because the first three verses said so; not just because the two Psalms above say so; not just because the whole Word of God says so... but also because we have seen it in our own lives! God does not just say things, He shows Himself faithful to His Word, even in our lives – and that is reason enough to believe that Shepherd will be with us, even to the end.

However, though we know it so well, we sheep have the amazing ability to forget really quickly! Sometimes, as the way gets abit darker, and scarier, our imaginations run wild as we lose sight of our beloved Shepherd. We think that we are brought to a wrong place by our Shepherd; perhaps He made a wrong turn? We think that we are alone; did He lead me here only to forsake me when I need Him the most? We almost feel like running, and getting out with our own strength, and on our own. Forgetful sheep need reminders; our loving Shepherd knows, and provides in His mercy toward us.

“ The rod of our Shepherd reminds us that He is with us; and He being with us reminds us that we belong to Him. This gives us such great comfort that it makes us sheepish no more as we exclaim, “YES, I fear nothing!” ”

How does Shepherd remind us of His presence? Verse 4 tells us that the comfort of His presence comes through the rod and staff that Shepherd uses. They probably refer to the same item that belongs to Shepherd, and as we hear it firmly tap the ground with each step of His, we are reminded of two wondrous facts that calm our souls.

The Rod of Love

This rod, or staff, is one of correction in love. From the day we were little baby sheep, this rod has been gently nudging us away from the wrong paths and pushing us to the paths of righteousness. Not only that, this rod has also been used often to chastise us when we misbehaved and went astray, and put ourselves in danger because of our own foolishness. In Hebrews 12:6-8, we read, “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.” God’s chastening hand

on us reminds us that we are sons who are loved by Him. Shepherd’s rod of correction reminds us that we are His precious sheep who will never be lost.

God’s hand is sometimes heavy on His children by way of afflictions and trials in this life. It is always done in love to bring His children closer to Himself, and further away from the world. Each time we are brought to lean more and more on Him, we see more and more His sanctifying work in our lives. The grace that God provides in our afflictions is also evidence of His undying faithfulness to us.

This rod of correction also comes to us as the Word of God. It rebukes us from evil, and encourages us to walk in the ways of the LORD. Without a doubt, the conviction of sin from God’s Word, and the sad realisation that we straying far away from communion with our dear Shepherd, is indeed the pain of chastisement that we feel on our bums. And the blessed promises of God’s unchanging love and faithfulness to His people, as found in His Word, together with the blissful promises of eternal life and communion with God in our Lord Jesus Christ, can be none other than the tender prodding of Shepherd’s staff in bringing us back to the right path.

As we sheep hear the tapping of this rod, ah... wonderful! The familiar sounds remind us that Shepherd has always been with us even in the greatest of afflictions. The call to remembrance of how God’s Word has been with us all through our days on this long journey also warms our heart and gives us peace that surpasses all understanding.

The Rod of Protection

This rod is, also, one of protection in love. While Shepherd uses the rod to care for us, He also uses it to destroy all those wild animals that would hunt us down and harm us. He exacts judgement and destruction on all that would harm His elect.

Is it not true, if you look back, that the staff has often been used to save you in your time of need? That those who would do spiritual harm to us have often been “chased away” or destroyed before we could be eaten alive? Unseen to us, God works all things for our good – even the existence and destruction of the wicked. (Romans 8:28, Psalm 1:4)

The Word of God also protects us from the wicked by pronouncing sovereign judgement and victory over the enemies of God. By this Word, we are safe and secure, knowing that there is no valley too dark that would frighten us; and there is no enemy too great for Shepherd to defeat. (1

Corinthians 15:57) Blessed assurance!

Unbelievable Comfort

And so, we have come to the end of the fourth verse. If there’s only one thing you can remember, remember this: *The rod of our Shepherd reminds us that He is with us; and He being with us reminds us that we belong to Him.* This gives us such great comfort that it makes us sheepish no more as we exclaim, “YES, I fear nothing!” – and sometimes, the sheep of other shepherds think we are crazy. But, so what, we mean it. (Hebrews 11:33-38, Romans 8:16-18)

What is your only comfort in life and death? *That I with body and soul, both*

in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ; who, with his precious blood, hath fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must be subservient to my salvation, and therefore, by his Holy Spirit, he also assures me of eternal life, and makes me sincerely willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto him. (The Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 1)

Do you believe these? If you do, then move along now... Shepherd is leading us on. =)

The Primacy of Preaching (Part 1)

>> Pastor Steven Key



Pastor Steven Key serves the Loveland Protestant Reformed Church in Loveland, Colorado. He and his wife Nancy have 4 married daughters and 11 grandchildren.

The calling of a preacher is inseparably connected with the salvation of God’s people. So Paul writes in Romans 10. No greater calling is there in all the world than that of a minister of the Word. Isaiah also emphasises that tremendous calling when he says in Isaiah 52:7: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!”

The blessedness of a preacher’s calling, the joy of my calling, rests in the fact that God is pleased to speak His own Word through me. So He said to Ezekiel His servant in Ezekiel 3: “Son of man, I have made thee a watchman

unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me... when I speak with thee, I will open thy mouth, and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD” (Ezekiel 3:17, 27a).

By the Word of the Lord are His people saved.

That is also the emphasis in the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 25. There the question is asked: “Since then we are made partakers of Christ and all His benefits by faith only, whence doth this faith proceed?” The answer is: “From the Holy Spirit, Who works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the Gospel, and confirms it by the use of the sacraments.” There is set forth the Biblical truth

of the primacy of preaching and its irreplaceable importance in your life and mine.

As those saved by Christ, we realise that our righteousness is only in Him; there is no salvation apart from Christ. And, we are one with Christ only by a true faith. The question we face, then, is this: How does a sinner like me receive this faith in Christ? And having acquired that faith, how do I keep it and how does it grow?

In answer to those questions, Scripture points us to the person of the Holy Spirit. The Author of that work of faith in us is the Holy Spirit. You and I do not possess faith naturally. Faith is a gift of grace. And when we speak of our consciousness of that faith and our exercise of that faith, then we find in Romans 10 and elsewhere that the Holy Spirit works and sustains and nourishes that faith by the use of means, and primarily by the preaching of the gospel.

The Necessity of Preaching

The necessity of preaching is a prominent element of Romans 10:14. Preaching is essential to active faith in Christ.

The reason for that is our own spiritual impotence. We are powerless to save ourselves. Jesus powerfully impressed this truth upon His disciples in Mark 10:23 and following. Having remarked about how hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God, His disciples were astonished. Christ might just as easily have said, "How hard it is for those who are angry to enter the kingdom", or "how hard it is for a lustful man or woman to enter the kingdom of heaven", or "how hard it is for disobedient children to enter the kingdom". But on this occasion He spoke about one who has riches and who trusts in riches. A very religious man had just departed grieved, because Jesus had told him that there was only one thing he lacked in his religious life, and that was to

sell all that he had and give to the poor, and take up his cross and follow Jesus. On that occasion Jesus spoke of the difficulty entering heaven for one who loves this world. And seeing His disciples standing there in shock, He proceeded to go even farther. And He said, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." At those words his disciples were so stunned, they said among themselves, "Who then can be saved?" It is impossible! And Jesus said, "You are right. You have not misunderstood my illustration. With men it is impossible."

Jesus plainly tells us that He demands the impossible. To one who is dead in trespasses and sins, who is caught in the snares of Satan, Christ sets forth the demand to repent and believe. Jesus demands the impossible. He establishes before His disciples the same truth which Jeremiah set forth so eloquently in Jeremiah 13:23: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil." Jeremiah asks two rhetorical questions to which the answers are plain. Black men cannot make themselves white. Leopards cannot peel off their spots. "Well then," says the prophet, "neither have you sinners any ability to do good."

That is why the disciples were dumbfounded at Jesus' teaching! These words of Jeremiah had not yet been impressed upon them by the Holy Spirit! And now they heard that Word of God with personal application! We are not half-alive. We are not dangerously sick. We are dead in trespasses and sins!

With men it is impossible, says Jesus. But it is not impossible with God, "for with God all things are possible." Though no man can find in himself the necessary resolve and ability to repent and believe, to follow Jesus, God can so change a sinner's heart

that the sinner will sell all and follow Christ. Our will cannot drag us into the kingdom. Nor can our heart and emotions, though they may be effected in such a way that we say we give our lives to Jesus.

The fact is, as Jesus said in John 6:44, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." All those who have ever been born again, all those who have ever believed, "were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13). So we also read in Ephesians 2:8-10, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." God alone changes the heart and life of a man. Faith, therefore, is the gift of God.

When we speak of the faith wrought by the preaching of the Word, we must bear in mind the Biblical distinction between the power of faith and the activity of faith.

First of all, and essentially, faith is the living bond with Christ. By faith we are united with Him in a spiritual union. That union is established in regeneration, when we are born again by the Spirit of Christ. That new birth, according to 1 Peter 1:23, is something the Spirit gives us apart from the use of means. With that new birth we receive all the powers and all the gifts that we shall ever receive – faith, justification, and sanctification.

When a child is born that child receives all the talents he shall ever receive – the mind, the will, the desire, natural gifts, even special gifts, say, the gift of music. All the gifts that child shall receive are his already at birth. They must develop yet, of course. But the powers and the gifts are there. So in regeneration we are joined to Christ by the bond or power of faith. Scripture

uses the figure of the branches being grafted into the vine. That graft, that connection with Christ, is the bond of faith.

But Scripture also speaks of faith as an activity.

When we confess that “the Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel”, the meaning is that the Spirit works active, conscious faith in our hearts. Christ, through the bond of faith, says to His people, “You are Mine. You belong to Me, body and soul. You don’t belong to the devil any more; you don’t belong to the power of sin. You are Mine. You belong to Me even as I died for you and rose again. You belong to Me as My own possession, cleansed by My blood, righteous in the sight of My heavenly Father.”

And by that same power of faith, through that same gift of faith, we respond to Christ. We say to Him, “Yes, Lord, I am Thine. I belong to Thee in body and soul, in life and death, forever!” That is faith as it comes to active expression in you and in me. That faith is worked in us by means of the preaching of the Word. God uses preaching as a means to work that active faith in us; and He uses preaching and the sacraments to sustain and strengthen our faith.

The Importance of Faithful Preaching

Do you see, then, the importance of preaching? Do you understand the importance of faithful preaching?

In Romans 10:13-15, the Spirit confirms that salvation is dependent upon the preaching. The Apostle shows from a threefold perspective the importance of preaching, saying in the first place, “How shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?” To call on Him does not merely mean to worship Him. When you consider verse 13, and that especially in the light of the prophecy of Joel 2:32 where these same words are found, you learn

that to call upon the name of the Lord is to call for help out of the midst of trouble. When the Spirit gave us to see ourselves as we are before God, we became deeply aware of the trouble of our sin and corruption and death. From the midst of that trouble we cry out for help. And the promise is, “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” But the Apostle also says that this calling upon Christ is impossible, except we believe in Him. Faith is first. By faith we see our trouble; and, seeing our trouble, we call on Christ for help. That is the idea here.

In the second place, the apostle says, “How shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard?” We shall see more about the translation in another article when we discuss the power of preaching as a means of grace. But notice, the proper translation speaks not merely of hearing **about** Him, but hearing **Him**. How shall they believe in Him **Whom** they have not heard? In the context the emphasis in this act of believing is in the element of trust, of confidence that He shall surely deliver us from our trouble. To believe on Christ is to rely upon Him for your righteousness. But how can we so believe on Him, if we have never heard Him? Your righteousness, your salvation, does not depend upon the word of a man. You must be able to say with confidence, “I heard Jesus speak to me, saying, ‘Come unto me and rest.’” It is the power of His call, of His voice, that moves us to lay hold upon Him. “How shall they believe in Him Whom they have not heard?”

Third, you cannot hear, says Paul, without a preacher. Nor has that changed in the centuries since Paul wrote that! There are those who say, “Well, that may have been true when Paul wrote it; but that is no longer true for us. We have our Bibles. At the time of the apostles they did not yet have Bibles. We have Bibles. And we have all kinds of writings. We can just sit at home and study our Bibles. It isn’t

necessary any more to have a preacher, in order to have Christ.” Well, if you mean that it is not necessary to have a preacher in order to know about Christ, that is true. But we must not only know about Christ; the devil, too, knows **about** Christ. We must know **Christ**.

You may not say, “I can just as well stay home and read my Bible and gather with my friends in a spiritual discussion, as to sit in church under the preaching.” You contradict **Christ**! We can and we do well to have edifying gatherings, where we talk about spiritual things and grow in our knowledge of Christ. The organic life of the church is important. Bible studies are a blessing, and useful for our spiritual growth. But that is not where we actually hear Christ.

It was when Jesus sent forth His disciples to preach, that He said to them (Luke 10:16), “He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me.”

I well remember my late seminary professor, Homer C. Hoeksema, talking about this subject. He said, “If to come under the preaching was simply to learn more about God and about Christ and about the Bible, I would just stay home. I probably know as much as any preacher in our churches about those things. But there is something that happens when I go to church. I don’t simply hear my pastor telling me about this or that. I hear the voice of Jesus. And that voice I cannot do without.”

Let us hear, therefore, with humility, the instruction of God’s Word, and say, “How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!” How beautiful are the feet, that is, how welcome are they that preach the gospel to us; not because of who they are or what gifts they have, but because **Christ** speaks through them who proclaim His Word in faithfulness.



Joanna Tang is a confessing youth in CERC.

Exodus 20:12 “Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.”

We children all know that it is sometimes difficult to honour our parents. Perhaps it is often difficult. This difficulty might even become so great that it surrounds almost our entire lives each day. We look at the people around us and think, “Our friends don’t listen to their parents anyway, so why do we have to?” Do we really have to? Yes, we have to. Why? Because the Word of God tells us to.

What does the Bible say about honouring our parents?

“My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother: For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck.” (Pro 1:8-9) “Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding” (Pro 4:1). “A wise son heareth his father’s instruction: but a scorner heareth not rebuke” Pro 13:1). “Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and thy mother; which is

the first commandment with promise; That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth” (Eph 6:1-3). “Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord” (Col 3:20).

We have the direct command: Children, hear! Children, obey! Children, honour! Honouring Mom and Dad is not an option we have. It is not something we can choose to do when we feel like it, or something we do only when our parents are “nice” to us. It is a command *from God*.

What does honouring our parents mean? The Heidelberg Catechism tells us that it is to “show all honour, love, and fidelity to my father and mother and all in authority over me, and submit myself to their good instruction and correction with due obedience; and also patiently bear with their weaknesses and infirmities, since it pleases God to govern us by their hand” (Lord’s Day 39).

Honouring our parents involves, first of all, honour itself. To honour someone is to have an attitude of respect towards the person. The Lord commands us as children and youth to respect our parents, to think of them, treat them, speak to them, and speak of them in a respectful way. Honouring our parents means more than doing whatever they say; it means that our whole perspective of them, our *heart attitude*, is one that places them in high esteem.

Second, honouring our parents involves love. What is love? A

dictionary definition might go something like, “Love is a strong feeling of care towards someone.” While that is true—we certainly do have good feelings towards those we love—we must remember that love is not a mere feeling. The well-known passage in 1 Corinthians 13 tells us what love is. Charity (love) suffers long, is kind, does not envy, does not vaunt itself, is not proud... (Read the passage on your own; it will be of great benefit.!) What we see from this passage is that love is *active*. It is a living, intentional purpose of heart to do all it can for the good of someone else. We love our parents when we do all we can for their good, and seek their spiritual welfare first and foremost.

The Catechism tells us further that honouring our parents involves fidelity. Fidelity is faithfulness. We are to be faithful to our parents. We do not forsake them because of their weaknesses, but we remain faithful to them even in our thoughts and heart. We think good of them, and thank God for them.

God expects us to “submit [ourselves] to their good instruction and correction with due obedience.” Submission, like honour, love, and fidelity, involves the heart. In order to honour our parents we have to submit to them. That means getting rid of our pride and wilfulness, and deliberately placing ourselves under the authority of our parents. By nature we want our own way. (Wouldn’t it be great if everyone submitted to *me* instead?!) But that is not how God



has decreed. He says, “Children, you submit to your parents.” And He goes on to tell us that the instruction our parents give us is good! Mom and Dad have far more experience than we do. Experience brings about, by the grace of God, a greater measure of wisdom. Proverbs 16:31 tells us that “The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness.” A “hoary head” simply refers to a person with age. Our parents certainly have much more age than we do, and this age is a crown of glory to them, because by the years they have gone through, God has taught them many valuable lessons, and He has now commanded them to teach these lessons to us, their children.

Not only is our parents’ instruction good, but their correction is also good! Most of us probably have unpleasant memories of the occasional use of a long, thin piece of cane on us in our earlier days. Proverbs 29:15 says, “The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame.” Proverbs 23:13 also tells us, “Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, *he shall not die.*” Instead of holding a grudge against our parents for using the rod of reproof on us, we really ought to thank them for it – look at Proverbs 23:13 again! “If thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die.” Our parents chastise us because they love us, because they seek our good, because they desire that we receive life, not death!

But what about that incessant nagging we hear all the time? Isn’t that annoying? Proverbs 23:22 says, “Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old.” We are not to despise the “nagging” we hear. Instead, we are told to hearken, to listen, to what our parents say. Just like the rod, all that “nagging” is given out of our parents’ love for God and love for us. We should not consider our parents’ instruction and correction as “nagging” at all. In

fact, we should value whatever our parents say—in the Lord of course—very highly, and treasure the instruction as gold and silver!

We submit to our parents’ instruction and correction *with due obedience*. “Due” implies that we owe obedience to our parents. This obedience is an obedience that comes from the heart. Outward conformity is not true obedience. The obedience due our parents must be rooted in a heart of love for God and a desire to obey HIS commands which include honouring and obeying our parents. God has told us to obey our parents, and therefore, we owe obedience to them.

“ Exodus 20:12
“Honour thy father
and thy mother:
that thy days may
be long upon the
land which the
LORD thy God
giveth thee.”

We are also to “patiently bear with their weaknesses and infirmities”. Oh yes, we think, Mom and Dad sure have LOADS of weaknesses! But how is that different from ourselves? We must not be making a list of all the shortcomings our parents have, and all the times they have wronged us, and all the times *we* have been right and *they* have been wrong. Scripture tells us that all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). “And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?” (Matt 7:3). It is terribly wrong of us to use our parents’ flaws as excuses for

dishonouring them. And yet we often do it, much to our shame. We ourselves are sinners and totally depraved. What gives us the right to point fingers at our parents’ weaknesses? The Lord commands us to bear patiently with them. Now at this point I think we must note that we should not be putting on a pietistic air of self-righteousness and thinking, “Oh, our parents are so weak, and therefore we must be so *kind* and so *patient* towards them in tolerating their shortcomings”. Patiently bearing with our parents’ weaknesses and infirmities means more than tolerating them. It means being patient with them out of God-given love, recognising in humility that we are the chief of sinners, and obeying them from the heart despite their weaknesses and infirmities.

And why do we have to? “Since it pleases God to govern us by their hand.” Mom and Dad are the authorities God has placed directly in charge of us. He has commanded them to bring us up in the fear and admonition of the Lord, and that includes teaching us to honour and obey them. Our parents are *our* parents for no other reason than God’s sovereign and specific ordination. Our parents are *gifts* from the hand of God! Gifts are good things! God has given them to us because He knows that they are the best parents for us, even if we often are blind to that fact. It is His good pleasure to use our parents as instruments to guide and to govern us.

And that is why we honour our parents. Because He has commanded us to, and because it pleases Him to place them in authority over us.

So, how do we honour our parents?

First of all, we are to obey them. Obeying our parents means, practically, that when they tell us to do



“ We must ask the Lord to help us be obedient sons and daughters, and ask Him to help us grow, so that we love our parents and we love to honour our parents. ”



something, we do it – immediately. If we are unwilling to obey, or if we take our time to fulfil what our parents tell us to do, we are not obeying. Neither are we obeying when we attempt to “cut corners” from our tasks.

Ephesians 6:1 does add something to that command, though. “Children, obey your parents *in the Lord*.” By the grace of God, Covenant parents do not ask their children to do things that are against the teachings of the Bible. On rare occasions, parents may in their weakness ask of their children things that are wrong, and only in those cases (which may God graciously forbid), we must remember to obey God rather than man. We have to tell them that we cannot obey them because

God forbids us to, and we need to show them from the Word why we cannot obey them. But even then, our thoughts, actions, and speech towards them must still be in honour and submission to them. This is a difficult calling, and we must pray for grace, and pray for our parents too.

Honouring our parents also means that we love them. We love them as we love ourselves (Matt 22:39); and we love ourselves as God has loved us – as sinners saved by grace. We show our love to them. It is no use to claim that we love our parents and yet do nothing to prove it. Showing our love for our parents can come in very simple ways. We could help out with the chores (preferably, without being asked!); we could remember their special days and write notes of encouragement on any day; we could

show them that we care by asking how they are doing – show that we are interested in their lives, spend time talking with them and listening to them. We show that we love and respect them when we voluntarily ask for their advice. Mom and Dad are the ones who have brought us up and they continue to bring us up. What pain it causes them when we fail to appreciate their labours! Surely we as Covenant children could show them the love of God we have experienced in very practical ways!

We honour our parents by seeking their good – most of all, their spiritual good. Mom and Dad are not just our parents, they are also our brethren in the Lord. And so we are to edify them just like we seek to edify our friends. We search the Scriptures with them, heed their admonishments, and admonish them humbly when necessary. We encourage them with the Word – yes, our parents do need encouragement!

We show appreciation for our parents. Many of us fail in this area. Are we not always very appreciative of whatever our friends do for us? We readily thank them when we drop a pen on the floor and they pick it up for us. Do we ever stop to thank our parents for the countless things they have done for us over all the years of our lives? Perhaps we could look for ways today to show appreciation for our parents!

Honouring our parents also means that we honour them in the *way* we speak to them. We do not speak to them in an impatient manner as if we cannot wait for them to get out of our

sight. Neither do we talk to them as if we know better than they do.

We honour them in the way we speak *of* them. How do we talk about them to our friends? Do we complain about them? Do we make fun of them in front of our friends? And how do we *think* of our parents? Do we think ill of them? That is dishonouring too. We must remember that in every single aspect of our lives, we are to honour our parents.

And we pray for our parents. Our parents are humans just as we are and face the trials and temptations that we face. It is extremely important to pray for our parents, for it is only by the grace of God that they can fulfil their calling as Covenant parents.

All that we do must stem from a love for God and a deep desire to obey His command to honour our parents.

But it's so hard!!!

It sure is; but who says life is easy?

There is the old man of sin. We do not want to honour our parents; we feel that they are so mean to us. Rebellion against authority is prevalent in society. People everywhere are doing whatever they like, so why must we be different?

“Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (Eph 6:13). We must constantly battle against our old depraved natures, and we can only do so because of Christ. It is only in Christ and His grace that we are able to begin to love Him and begin to obey our parents.

It is not fun to be different from the world, but that is what we must be. This world is not our home. We are just pilgrims on a journey to Canaan. That is why we are so different from the people around us, and rightly so, for we “are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar



people; that [we] should shew forth the praises of him who hath called [us] out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Pet 2:9).

Honouring our parents probably becomes even harder for those of you who do not belong to Covenant families. Your parents might be unbelievers who do many things you disagree with. That makes it harder for you than it is for those of us who are blessed with believing parents. But the calling remains, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord.” Unbelieving parents are not an excuse to dishonour and disobey. Whether our parents are Christians or not, we are called to love and obey them, as long as what they ask of us is not contrary to the Word of God. For those of you who do not have believing parents, there is the added responsibility of praying for the salvation of your parents, and the added responsibility for you to be a good witness to them. May your everyday life be a faithful testimony

of your God! Certainly, your calling is more difficult, but God gives grace!

It is important that we never forget to pray. Of ourselves, it is impossible to honour our parents; we would never honour our parents, because we would never want to obey God. We must ask the Lord to help us be obedient sons and daughters, and ask Him to help us grow, so that we love our parents and we love to honour our parents. When we depend wholly on God (and that is all of Him too), the calling becomes easier, and we experience much joy in obedience!

And there is blessing – what a gracious God we have!

In our present lives, there are blessings in honouring our parents. There will be peace and happiness in the family, and that pleases the Lord – “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” (Psa 133:1). We as children will be blessed with the enjoyment of fellowship with our parents. We will

be blessed with the wisdom they impart to us.

There is blessing eternally too. Exodus 20:12 says that when we honour our parents, our days will be long upon the land which the LORD our God has given us. This does not mean that our earthly lives will be long, but this is a promise of heavenly blessing. When we honour and obey our parents, this is the reward – an eternity of life in and with Jehovah! What more blessed hope could we have?

Honouring Mom and Dad may not be easy. Your relationship with your parents may already be strained. But that is no excuse, and so let us pray and ask God to help us to honour them. By ourselves, we cannot; but in Jehovah is all strength to do all things. In His mercy and grace towards us, He gives us the strength we need to obey Him, and to honour our parents!



Public Confession of Faith (Part 2)

>> Aaron Lim



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“The truth is above all.” Belgic Confession Article 7

In the previous article, we introduced the idea of public confession of faith as a Reformed tradition that has been faithfully passed on to us. Young people in the Reformed church make that confession as a sacred vow to commit their entire lives to God, His truth, and His church. That confession marks their transition from immature to mature members of the church of Jesus Christ. It is a living confession that by God’s grace will endure to the very end of their lives.

All three questions that are posed to the young person are inseparably connected. The first concerns doctrine, the second life, and the third church government. The latter two depend on the first, that is, right Biblical doctrine. This is the doctrine that is based on Scripture alone. Scripture is the sole authority for what we believe and practice. In this article we make a deeper examination into the first question:



“ God is pleased when His young people confess His truth. That is a testament to the church and to the world that He faithfully maintains His Covenant in the lines of believing generations. ”



1. Do you acknowledge the doctrine contained in the Old and New Testaments and in the Articles of the Christian faith and taught here in this Christian church to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation?

This question assumes that the young person has been thoroughly educated by his parents in the Reformed faith. This is in harmony with the vow that covenant parents make at the baptism of their children. They promise and intend to see their children “instructed and brought up in the aforesaid doctrine, or help or cause them to be instructed therein”, to the utmost of their power (Form for the Administration of Baptism). That aforesaid doctrine is the doctrine found in Scripture and the Reformed creeds, and as confessed by the church of which covenant parents are members. Having been faithfully brought up by covenant parents, the young person is able to make a mature confession of his faith.

God is pleased when His young people confess His truth. That is a testament to the church and to the world that

He faithfully maintains His Covenant in the lines of believing generations. Each successive generation faithfully proclaims His truth and lives according to it. In this way, God’s truth is preserved and developed through these faithful generations.

Doctrine

The question identifies three sources in which doctrine is found – the Old and New Testaments (Scripture), the Articles of the Christian faith (the church’s creeds), and other doctrines that are taught in this Christian church. Both the doctrines found in the church’s creeds and other doctrines taught by the church flow from the first source, the infallible Scriptures.

Doctrine means teaching. It is what the entire Scriptures teach concerning any particular topic. The Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is “profitable for doctrine” (2 Tim 3:16). These doctrines are the truths of God. They reveal who He is and how He is to be worshipped and served. They are “most perfect and complete in all respects” (Belgic Confession Article 7). Therefore, they are necessary for the “regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith” (Belgic Confession Article 5). Without doctrine we cannot and do not know God. Without doctrine we cannot worship Him properly.

Doctrine is fundamental to the life of the Christian. It is what he believes concerning God. Doctrine shapes his thinking, determines his lifestyle, and moulds his character. The child of God is “nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine” (1 Tim 4:6). True doctrine leads the man of God to be perfect (complete), “thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim 3:17). He is called to “adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things” (Tit 2:10). That doctrine is “according to godliness (1 Tim 6:3).

When the church teaches sound and good doctrine, the members of the

church grow in the knowledge and grace of Jesus Christ. They grow in love for Him and His truth. But when the church neglects to teach sound doctrine, or allows false doctrine into her midst, the members become children in their spiritual understanding, “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Eph 4:14).

The Articles of the Christian Faith

This question also identifies the second source of doctrine as the articles of the Christian faith. These articles refer to the creeds that the Reformed church confesses. A creed may simply be defined as “what the church believes to be the truth of Sacred Scripture” (The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches, p7). These creeds include the earlier creeds in the history of the Christian church, such as the Apostle’s Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed, and the Creed of Chalcedon. In the Reformed heritage, we hold to the Three Forms of Unity – the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dordrecht. These creeds summarise and beautifully explain what we in the church believe according to the Scriptures.

The creeds connect us to the church of the past. The truths that we confess in these creeds are exactly what the church of the past confessed. As the truth develops over the ages through controversies, we stand together with our spiritual fathers in a united confession of the truth.

Prof. Barrett Gritters of the Protestant Reformed Theological School emphasizes an important function of the creeds:

Creeds serve the important purpose of defining and defending theological orthodoxy. If you trace the history of the creeds, you will find almost without exception that they are the fruit of the Spirit in the church when the church

faced heretics, and the people of God were threatened with denials of the fundamental doctrines of the Word of God, *by men who claimed to believe the Scriptures!* Because “every heretic has his text”, the faithful church was compelled to confess truth over against the misuse of the Scriptures. (Gritters, Barrett, *The Standard Bearer*, vol. 89, 442)

Reformed Christianity is creedal. Every Reformed young person making public confession of faith must recognise this. The Reformed creeds define Reformed Christianity, and that is his living confession. It is insufficient for that Reformed young person to confess that he believes the Scriptures, but exactly what the Scriptures teach is left to the individual, or worse - open to question and interpretation. By faith and a love for the church throughout all the ages, he embraces the truths embedded in these creeds as his living confession.

Doctrines Taught Here in this Christian Church

There are times when the Reformed church is compelled to draw up statements to explain her doctrinal positions. This is especially true when the church is faced with contemporary heresies and false doctrines which are not explicitly rejected by the Reformed confessions.

In the late 1940s, for example, our

sister churches in America faced the question over the character of God’s Covenant. Many in her clergy and membership were advocating a conditional covenant. They taught that the fulfilment and blessings of the covenant depended on the condition of faith and obedience. That theological position made God’s Covenant dependent on the will of man.

It was imperative that our sisters drew up a document to state the truth of the doctrine clearly. The fruit of that struggle over the truth was the Declaration of Principles, a document that explained the truth of God’s unconditional Covenant, sovereignly established with the elect only. The fulfilment of God’s Covenant does not depend on the faith or obedience of man, but on His sovereign will alone. He sovereignly establishes, maintains, and consummates that Covenant of grace with believers and their elect seed.

What comes to mind for us in CERC is the controversy over divorce and remarriage. In late 2004, the allowance of a divorced member in the denomination to remarry and participate in the Lord’s Supper occasioned the controversy. For the truth’s sake, CERC was compelled to draw up a document explaining her position on the matter. That document spelled out her uncompromising

stand that remarriage after divorce, whether the divorce is lawful or not, is adulterous. Since then, the rejection of divorce and remarriage has become a doctrinal distinctive in our church. The church confesses this doctrine to be the very truth of God, and rejects all things contrary thereto.

Maintaining a Doctrinal Spirit

Much of the church world today is not at all concerned about doctrine. Reputedly Reformed churches are selling the truth. They sell their glorious Reformed heritage so as to appear friendly to churches of other theological persuasions. They tolerate false doctrine under the false guise of being loving. Soon, men of every theological stripe enter their midst and corrupt the truth that they once had. Losing the truth, their people are destroyed for lack of knowledge (Hos 4:6). Such apostatising churches have lost their first love.

But the true Reformed church is a doctrinal church. She guards her doctrine jealously as her most prized possession. She loves it dearly as the truth of her faithful Husband. Reformed young people answering this question in their public confession of faith recognise this. They will be faithful to the doctrine they confess.

Up next, we examine the inseparable connection between doctrine and life in the second question of the form.



“ The child of God is “nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine” (1 Tim 4:6). True doctrine leads the man of God to be perfect (complete), “thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim 3:17). ”



Why I Love Singing the Psalms: Psalm 105

>> Woon Tian Loong

Woon Tian Loong is a confessing young adult in CERC.

“ Psalm 105 recounts history from the time when God made His Covenant with Abraham all the way to the inheritance of Canaan. ”

I love singing the Psalms. I love singing the Psalms not only because they contain deep, doctrinal, spiritual truths beneficial for salvation to the glory of God in Jesus Christ, but also because these truths are presented in many genres. One such genre is History.

There are many reasons why studying history is profitable to a person. It is a common saying that “those who do not know history are doomed to repeat it”. Another reason would be that “there is no new thing under the sun” (Ecc 1:9) and that the lessons of the past are applicable for learning. Yet, the historical account of the Bible is far above the history as recorded by mere men. For not only does the historical account of the Scriptures record the events that happened, it records the revelation and interpretation

of God as He unfolds His eternal counsel in time. Thereby, we are able to understand that the events that happened were His Covenant dealings with His Covenant people, for the sake of Christ, to the glorification of His name. The Scriptures demonstrate the usefulness of history in glorifying God and instructing His people by having a significant portion of the Bible recorded as history. In history, we learn of God’s attributes not merely in words as textbook definitions, but revealed in time as He leads His people. Immediately, we can think of Genesis and Exodus as primary examples of this genre.

Our most wise God saw it fit to record His glory in the form of history. Our most wise God also saw it fit to have Covenant history written as Psalms to be sung. Thus, we who are Reformed (according to the Word of God), who by the grace of God, understand and cherish the true doctrine of the Covenant of grace, also ought to cherish singing of the Psalms; for in singing, we are recounting, meditating upon, and even teaching others of the goodness of God and His Covenant faithfulness. That also means that we would be ready to defend the singing of the Psalms against our own flesh (for we are often weak), and against those who would rather not sing of it. For, it would be truly sad when we no longer sing of our very own Covenant history. We would also be deprived of all the other spiritual benefits which come in the way of the Psalms’ deep doctrinal truths and its emphasis on the antithesis.

In this article, I intend to highlight the beauty of Psalm 105. Psalm 105 recounts history from the time when God made His Covenant with Abraham all the way to the inheritance of Canaan.

In the singing of Psalm 105, as versified in Psalter 289, we must first understand that this inspired song recounts, not merely Old Testament (OT) history of Israel (as if it has little to do with us other than being an interesting story), but our history. It is ours as well because the New Testament (NT) church and the Old Testament Israel are one; that is, the saints in the NT continue from the OT, and the truth and substance remain the same, despite changes in the external administration. Also, as we consider the Psalm and read of God’s protection of His saints, we understand that—hypothetically speaking—if God had let the enemies have their way so much so that the OT saints were destroyed, then we would not exist as saints in the NT either for there would be no church to speak of, and neither could Christ come in the flesh to atone for our sins.

Second, this Psalm is deeply Covenantal. Even with just a brief reading of this Psalm, we can see that the word “Covenant” is mentioned three times (v8-10). More than that, we see the Covenantal nature of this Psalm when Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are mentioned – referencing the Covenant promise that God made to Abraham. Therefore the wondrous works of God in history are for His Covenant, as described in this Psalm.

Since this Psalm records the works of God for His Covenant, we must understand that all the works of God in history are for Christ, for the Covenant promises are first and foremost of and for Christ. Galatians 3:16 helps us to understand the interpretation of the Covenant promise. “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.”

Why did God remember his Covenant (v8)? Or why did God “suffer no man to do them (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) wrong? Or why was Joseph sold as a servant, feet hurt with fetters, laid in iron, tried by the Word of the LORD, but eventually loosed by the king, and made ruler of the people (v17-22)? For the sake of Christ. Here we see the immense love that the Father has for His Son, and that He would be glorified in His Son. Recounting of the history of God devastating Egypt in v26ff, we learn that God would raise up and bring low nations for the love for His Son. Other Psalms that bring out this point would be Psalm 2 and 110.

Yet, included in God’s love for His Son is His love for His Covenant people in Jesus Christ. For the sake of Christ, God will do good to His people. For the sake of Christ, God will defend His people against His enemies. For the sake of Christ, God will save His people. We can see all these in the text of this Psalm. Furthermore, if God does all these for the sake of Christ, it ought to teach us humility – that it is not because of anything that we are that God should love us. God did not love us because of our earthly reputation for God made a Covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob while they were “few men in number” (v12) and strangers, indicating that they were nothing in this world. Understanding this, we ought all the more to be encouraged to trust in the sovereignty of Jehovah to work all things for the

good of His people and that not one thing can happen unless it will work out for our good. Similarly, even the things that seem impossible, God will cause them to happen for our good – for Christ’s sake.

Closely related to, and implied in, the Covenant is the antithesis. The Psalms are full of the antithesis and this Psalm is no exception. The antithesis, being the warfare between God and sin and all the agents of sin, is felt and experienced by the church while she is yet on earth, for God has set enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman (Gen 3:16), and God will deliver His people, granting them the victory in Jesus Christ. This Psalm displays the working of the antithesis as we see the wicked world (as signified by Egypt) attempting to destroy and harm God’s people in their hatred; but God, in righteous judgment, devastated the enemies (v13-38). Though we are to hate sin and those who rise up against God, this does not mean that the people of God are to take up their swords and slay the unbelieving world, but rather, we are to trust in God’s deliverance at His appointed time. This Psalm gives us the assurance that God did and does indeed deliver His people, in the way of the destruction of the wicked, for His Covenant’s sake.

Third, this Psalm is doctrinally packed. As already mentioned, this Psalm teaches certain aspects of God’s Covenant and His dealings with us. It also teaches us the doctrine of God’s protection of His people, the omnipotence of God as He delivered Joseph from a seemingly impossible situation of being in prison and thereafter exalting him, the creative power of God as He caused signs and disasters to rain down upon Egypt, the providence for His people as He fed them in the wilderness, the deliverance of His people, the faithfulness of God, and more. In this Psalm we also learn of election when God referred to His

people as “ye children of Jacob His chosen” and “His chosen” (v6 and 43) as well as the doctrine of reprobation when God identifies those who are not of “his chosen”, as enemies (v24). Furthermore, this Psalm teaches us that God sovereignly and irresistibly (without the will or consent of man) turns the hearts of people so that men do the will of God. In this case, Egypt’s heart was turned so that it hated God’s people and did them great harm (v25); and so God was proven righteous when God sent His judgments upon them for their wickedness in harming God’s people.

In the fourth place, this Psalm is full of details. One might ask if it would be sufficient if this Psalm had stopped at verse 10. Nevertheless, God saw it needful to outline this Psalm with details of His works in His wisdom. I can think of a few reasons how this is beneficial to us as we sing of it. In the singing of the details, it allows our minds to meditate upon the works of God and helps us think through them that we may stand in awe of His greatness. Second, the details of His works are evidences of God’s attributes as He performs His work in time. Those strengthen our faith that we may be more confidently assured that God is able to do what He has promised. Thus, instead of merely knowing a statement such as “God is love”, we know that God is love as evidenced in His care for, and deliverance of, His people as recorded for us in the details of this Psalm, and that ought to give us a surer and heartier confidence in our God.

However, you would realise that Psalm 105 is not the same as a book such as Genesis or Exodus, and that clearly, Psalm 105 would not have as much details as Genesis or Exodus. Psalm 105 was written as a song and its content are the highlights of the Covenant history as recorded in the other historical books. These highlights, being briefer than the

lengthier history as recorded in Genesis and Exodus, do have their benefits. For one thing, it allows us to see the bigger picture, the overarching theme, and purpose of the works of God, lest in the finiteness of our minds, we get lost in the details. For another, it acts as a “mental springboard” as we sing of this Psalm. As we sing of the Covenant promise made to Abraham, if we and the children have learnt well of our catechism and Bible history, this Psalm would act as a “mental springboard” and bring to our memories the time when God declared His Covenant promise to Abraham as recorded in Genesis 17. As we sing, “Then Joseph sold to slavery, with cruel chains was bound...” (Psalter 289, stanza 9), we think of what was recorded in Genesis 37 where Joseph was sold by his brothers to the Ishmaelites. Such a means of recollection is definitely beneficial to our recounting of the goodness of God.

In the fifth place, the Psalm exhorts the saints to walk in obedience to the Word of God. While not every Psalm has obedience to the Word as an emphasis, this should not be missed when taking the book of Psalms as a whole. Psalm 105 also emphasises this after it recounts the wonderful doings of God in Covenant history, as it states, “that they might observe his statutes, and keep his laws...” (v45). Indeed,

what Jehovah our God has done for us is great motivation for us to live holy lives and recalling His wondrous deeds serve to encourage us further. Thus, it should not be surprising that those who sing the Psalms constantly, taking heed to the words with all their hearts, would be shaped by the Word of God to live holier lives in gratefulness by the grace of God and power of His Spirit.

In the sixth place, a Psalm that recounts the works of God in the history of the Covenant implies Covenant instruction and education. Though I do not know the time in which Psalm 105 was written, it is highly likely that this was written and sung by the people of God generations after the actual occurrences. Psalm 105:6 makes clear who the audience of the Psalm is: “O ye seed of Abraham his servant, ye children of Jacob his chosen.” The Psalmist saw it fit to instruct the saints of a later generation through a historical Psalm. Such great a desire was in the heart of the Psalmist. Such great a desire ought to be in us also. Thus we too, must see it fit to teach our children the wondrous works of God throughout all history with the revelation and interpretation of Scripture. Reading, learning, and singing the Psalms are great ways to teach our children the wondrous works of God in history.

Recounting our Covenant history

where the glory of God is revealed in Jesus Christ, what shall our response be?

1. O praise the Lord, His deeds make known,

And call upon His Name;

Sing ye to Him, His praises [Psalms] sing,

His wondrous works proclaim.

2. Let hearts rejoice that seek the Lord,
His holy Name adore;

Seek ye Jehovah and His strength,
Seek Him for evermore.

3. Ye children of God's Covenant,
Who of His grace have heard,
Forget not all His wondrous deeds
And judgments of His word.

4. The Lord our God is God alone,
All lands His judgments know;
His promise He remembers still,
While generations go.

15. [...] That they might keep His holy laws;

Jehovah praise and bless.

(Psalter 289, word added in [] is mine to reflect the word that is used in Psalm 105 in the KJV)



“ Yet, included in God’s love for His Son is His love for His Covenant people in Jesus Christ. For the sake of Christ, God will do good to His people. For the sake of Christ, God will defend His people against His enemies. For the sake of Christ, God will save His people. ”



What to Look for in a Girlfriend?

>> Elder Lee Kong Wee



Elder Lee Kong Wee is the husband of Dorcas and their family is blessed with 2 children.

Introduction

At first glance, one might think that this article is meant for brothers to read. But really, it is relevant for both brothers as well as sisters. Sisters can learn how they ought to behave and relate to brothers who may be interested in dating them. They can learn the biblical characteristics and behaviour they ought to cultivate in themselves that they may, if the Lord wills, become a godly girlfriend or spouse in the future. They can also learn what they ought to expect from a godly brother who might be interested in starting a relationship with them.

Nevertheless, it is primarily to brothers that I write this article. It is to brothers that I specifically address and exhort. This article is written from the viewpoint that the initiative of starting a relationship ought to come from the brother. The burden of facing rejection by the sister is the brother's to bear. The responsibility of desiring to form a relationship that, in

the Lord's providence, would lead to marriage eventually, weighs upon the brother's shoulders. I write in such a manner because of the role of headship and leadership that God has given to the man in a relationship (1 Cor 11:3; Eph 5:25-33). He must exercise proper, loving authority and headship in the relationship. To fail to do so would lead to many difficulties in a relationship, if not disaster. The headship of the man has crucial implications in all aspects of the relationship. Hence, in this article, I wish to impress upon our brothers their 'leading' roles in a relationship and underscore their heavy responsibilities when considering starting a relationship with a sister.

Looking at Himself

If the title of this article directs your attention to the girl, and you think its content is mainly about what kind of a girl would make an 'ideal' girlfriend so that you can start looking for 'her', I'm afraid you are mistaken. Certainly we would be talking about the godly traits in a woman our brothers must look out for, but the place to begin is not 'the other person', but himself. The brother must first look at himself before he even looks for a girlfriend. He must begin by turning the spotlight on himself. That is because in a relationship, the priority is not 'what the other person ought to be for me', but what kind of a person ought I to be for the other person. In other words, we ought to be more concerned about being or becoming a certain kind of person rather than finding a certain kind of person when seeking a relationship. The brother

must, first of all, examine his own spiritual life and walk before he even considers starting a relationship. He ought to ask himself honestly, 'Do I seek first (as a priority) the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, or do I seek my own interests first? Do I hunger after the Word of God and desire to grow in the knowledge of its truth? Do I desire to conform my entire life to that truth? Do I commune with the Lord in prayer and in the reading of His Word daily? Do I delight in attending to the means of grace (preaching and the sacraments) regularly which my heavenly Father has graciously given to the church? (That means that as a young man, the brother desires to make confession of faith in a true and faithful church, if he has not.) Do I love Jesus Christ and His bride Whom He has purchased with His blood? Furthermore, the brother ought also to ask himself seriously if he is ready and prepared to commit himself to another person with devotion and self-sacrifice, regardless of whether she 'meets up to his expectations' or not. He must be ready to live with another person in his daily life, to spend time with her to get to know her and for her to get to know him, and to consider her needs and feelings other than, and even above, his own.

Perhaps you might be thinking to yourself now: Are you saying that a brother must meet a certain 'spiritual standard' before he is ready to date? How 'godly' must he be? But that's not the point. Rather, the point is that the brother must be serious about his spiritual life, and sincerely desirous to grow in godliness and spiritual

maturity, if he wants to enter into a relationship someday. This is where he must start. His primary and foremost concern must be his own spiritual life and walk with God, rather than on hastily 'finding a girlfriend' out of a selfish desire for companionship or peer pressure. If he is spiritually unwell, careless, lethargic, and lukewarm, how can he be the spiritual leader in a relationship? How will he ever establish a spiritually strong foundation for a lifelong relationship of marriage, God willing, in time to come? How will he ever lead the sister to know and

experience something of the love and beauty and glory of her Husband Jesus Christ?

If a brother is considering starting a relationship with a sister, he ought first to examine his own spiritual life honestly before the Lord. If he is spiritually lukewarm, and the things of God hardly interest him, then he ought to repent and get right with the Lord before he proceeds any further. To lead a sister astray or cause her to become lukewarm like him in her spiritual walk is a serious sin. Through a consistent,

godly walk with the Lord, a brother shows himself ready to look for a godly sister as his girlfriend. This is crucially important because it lays the foundation for a spiritually strong and God-centred relationship. In the way of prayerful preparation and spiritual diligence, the Lord will lead and guide the brother to the point of making a wise and God-honouring decision to approach a sister and initiate a relationship.

In the next part, we shall talk about "Looking for Her" and examine some concluding thoughts.

Lessons from the History of the Beloved Church of Jesus Christ Now Among Us (II)

>> Pastor Arie den Hartog



Pastor Arie den Hartog is a minister of the Word at Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Wyoming, Michigan. He previously served as a missionary to the ERCS for ten years.

In the last issue of "Salt Shakers", I began a series of articles about the history of the church you belong to, namely Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore. It is important that we remember this history. When we do so, we do so in thankfulness to God who formed us as His beloved Church. Tracing our history helps us as members of the church to understand who and what we are. Originally, I had intended to write just one article on the subject. In doing the work of making the first article, I thought it might in fact be beneficial to write more than one article. I personally had a part in this history and therefore can write from experience and a personal perspective. I was privileged to be missionary in Singapore for ten years. I have an on-going deep love for this church and for her members.

The more I thought about writing somewhat extensively about this subject, the more I also realised the seriousness of the task which I have undertaken. When one writes on the history of a church that has existed now for a number of years, it is of course necessary to be able to summarise this history. Many events have taken place during this history and it would take way too long to give any detailed account of this history and this would also be more than is necessary. In order to write a history, one has to be able to determine which events were of greatest significance. At the time when these events were taking place, we could not yet fully understand their significance; but looking back now, we can appreciate the importance of these events.

One needs to be true and faithful in representing events. Judgments have to be made of events and sometimes even of persons. Some of this can be painful. Some of those mentioned might be offended. We make these judgments in charity and only in as far that they will benefit the present day members of CERCS. God will be our judge.

We are also deeply convinced that the main focus for writing a series of articles must be the glorious truth of the Word of God. The church is called to be the “Pillar and Ground of the Truth”. The ERCS once regularly published a magazine with the name, “The Pillar and Ground of the Truth”. The idea of this name cannot of course be that the truth of God somehow depends on any church to uphold it. God alone preserves His truth and the church founded on it. He is never dependent on any mere earthly institution. Rather the calling of the church is to uphold the truth of His Word in a world of darkness and the lie. She is called to defend the truth and reveal the glory of His truth. She is to hold the truth high, for it is by the power of this truth that the members of the church are saved and preserved, and the name of the Lord, Who is the Saviour and Lord of the church, is exalted.

Having given this somewhat lengthy introduction of the subject again, I shall pick up the story of this history where we left off the last time.

ERCS had its beginning with a group of young people, who were recent converts from the darkness and hopelessness of heathen religion. These young people themselves confessed that they were chosen of God in His amazing love and saved by His grace.

What made this group of young people so significant in the church world was its love and devotion to the truths of the wonderful sovereign grace of God, whereby He saves His people and forms them as His beloved Church. These truths are commonly summarised in what are called ‘the

five points of Calvinism’, also called the five great doctrines of grace. These doctrines are 1. Total Depravity, 2. Unconditional Election, 3. Limited Atonement 4. Irresistible Grace, and 5. The Preservation of the Saints. These doctrines are commonly remembered by the letters of the flower TULIP.

The young people who were members of the GLTS (Gospel, Literature, and Tract Society) showed a new and zealous interest in the Reformed Faith which is rightly summarised in the TULIP doctrines. In the early years of the GLTS, our former Pastor Lau Chin Kwee and other leaders of the GLTS began to study the Reformed Faith by the careful consideration and teaching of the Westminster Confession. This confession is one of the great historic Reformed confessions of the church which summarises faithfully the doctrines of grace.

The members of the GLTS soon, by the grace of God, understood how central these doctrines are to the Reformed faith and to the very heart of the Gospel of God in Jesus Christ. I trust that the readers of these articles have and are studying the doctrines of grace I am referring to, so I am not going to give a detailed discussion of these doctrines in these articles. There are many sources available for those who are interested in such a study, and every reader of this article should be. The doctrines of grace are not merely one way among others of interpreting the Gospel; they are statements of truths that are foundational to the Gospel. Through the history of Christianity, many false teachings have over time arisen to contradict these truths and lead believers astray into false teachings.

I came to Singapore in the providence of God at the exciting time when GLTS was zealously studying the doctrines of grace. This was at the beginning of 1980. I remember with thankfulness to God the calling and privilege and opportunity which I was given personally to advance the members of the GLTS in the deeper understanding

“ I came to Singapore in the providence of God at the exciting time when GLTS was zealously studying the doctrines of grace. ”

of the doctrines of grace.

In the course of the study mentioned above, there were many who attended the meetings of GLTS and came by the grace of God to know the glorious truth of salvation by grace alone. Some of these were converted to God and became followers of the Lord for the first time in their lives. Others came to a new understanding of the Gospel which they never before had, and they were very excited and full of thanks to God.

The study of the doctrines of grace immediately stirred up controversy with some who attended the meetings of GLTS – this was to be expected. Wherever the truth of God is being proclaimed, there will arise enemies of this truth who oppose it. However the controversies involved in the early days of GLTS were not by any means always with those who were enemies. There were many who were learning the great truths of sovereign grace for the first time. They were surprised by them. Among the most difficult truths to grasp and believe were the truths of predestination, election and reprobation, limited and effectual atonement. God saves His people by His sovereign and irresistible grace. In saving His elect He Himself breaks the rebellious hearts that are in all of them by nature. Salvation is not by the will and choice of man himself. Salvation by the free will and decision of man is a teaching which is so popular among man. But our salvation is all by the wondrous working grace of God and Spirit of God, in the hearts of those who once were rebels against God.

God saves all those who were elected in Christ and redeemed by the cross of Jesus Christ. None of those whom Christ died for will ever perish. This is impossible, for then the grace of God would be a failure. To some, it seemed at first that the truths they were learning contradicted teachings which many of the members of the original GLTS had learned in other churches which they were once a part of. There were thankfully among the members of the GLTS at the time, those who questioned and zealously debated issues of the truth because they were learning; they wanted to understand more deeply and distinctly the blessed truth of the Gospel. These wanted to be able to distinguish the truth from false teachings so current. They wanted to do this through a serious and careful study of what Scripture has to say about the truth of the Gospel. The members of GLTS, already in the early days were convinced of the infallibility and authority of Scriptures. Every truth we believe must have its foundation in Scripture, and be thoroughly tested and tried by the absolute and only standard of the Word of God.

In the early days of GLTS, meetings were held at the Bible-Presbyterian Church on Gilstead Road. There was in those days consideration of whether the GLTS should simply become a part of the Bible-Presbyterian Churches in Singapore, since this church also confessed adherence to the Westminster Confession. There were questions about the necessity of starting a new church.

However an important conviction arose among the members of the GLTS, and especially among her youthful leaders. They realised the need of a more distinctive witness to the doctrines of grace. They became convinced of weaknesses in Arminian teachings promoted in the Bible-Presbyterian Church. They wanted to be separate from these.

The Lord began to convince the members of the GLTS of the need of a church more fully committed to

the doctrines of sovereign grace. Not everyone in the group agreed with this, but God was leading in a definite path which would, in His providence, come to a very important stage of development among the members of the GLTS.

The institution of the ERCS took place under the supervision and direction of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America. I was and still am a minister of the Word of God by God's grace in this denomination of churches. In my mission work from the beginning in Singapore, I was able to share with the young Reformed believers and guide the establishment and direction of the ERCS with the benefits of the heritage of the truth which God gave Protestant Reformed Churches among whom I was a minister of God's Word. I always considered and continue today to consider that this was a great advantage. No new church today should begin on its own. For every new church is and must be a continuation of the true church that is already in the world.

In labouring to come to the point of the institution of the church in Singapore, the Protestant Reformed Churches in America insisted on the need of adopting a creedal basis for the church to be established. Not everyone agreed with such a pre-requisite for organisation. However, this resulted in a very energetic and extensive study of "The Three Forms of Unity": The Belgic Confession, The Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort. On 24th January 1984, the Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore was instituted with the three above mentioned creeds as her creedal basis.

I close this chapter of the story of which we are remembering with these thoughts. This history should be a demonstration to the members of CERC of how central and precious the doctrines of grace are to the Gospel, of which the church must be the pillar and ground of as mentioned above. Never should the members of CERC allow the glorious truths of grace to recede

from being central to her confession and life as the church of Jesus Christ and to her calling to preach the true Gospel of salvation in the world.

Second, wherever the distinctive and glorious truths of the Gospel are proclaimed, there will always immediately be controversy and challenges. We who are members of the church must not be afraid of this. Read the history of the church recorded in the Scriptures. In both the Old and New Testament church, these challenges arose. Every church is called upon to defend the truth. We are involved in a great spiritual warfare, the great battle of the ages. In 2 Timothy, Paul calls this battle the good fight of faith.

Any church that has, by God's grace, been given the glorious truth of the Gospel must be ready to zealously and courageously defend the truth of the Gospel against all and every challenge. The members of the church must in fact count the truth to be more precious even than our own lives. If necessary, we must be ready to give our lives as martyrs for the truth. Many thousands through the centuries of time have fought in this – the glorious battle of the truth. The victory of this battle has already been won by our Lord Jesus Christ.

The glorious heritage of the Reformed Faith will be preserved by the church when her members know and love the doctrines of sovereign grace and continue to understand how absolutely central and foundational these truths are for the Gospel. Young people also must be willing to stand in the battle of the history of the church. They must know and love the truth to be ready for this challenge.

In our next chapter of the recounting of this history, I will give you a brief history of the new challenges that ERCS faced in defending the truth of the Gospel in her history, and how she was preserved by God in meeting those challenges and standing for God and His truth.

Building a Godly Home

>> Dorcas Lee



Dorcas Lee is a member of CERC. She is married to Elder Lee Kong Wee and they have two children.

Introduction

The family is the creation of God and forms the foundation of society. It is therefore a foundational unit of the church in this earthly creation. This article focuses on the Covenant family unit. However, it does not disregard His elect who are also called out of unbelieving homes. For God then uses the family of the church to provide them with the warmth of the spiritual family and the blessings of belonging to the family of God.

As we approach the second coming of Christ, godly families are of paramount importance. This is because the world increases in its wickedness and false prophets will increase in influence as they sweep the nominal Christian world with their heresies. They are so cunning that even the elect will be deceived except for the preservation of the Lord. How critically important it is then for us to build godly homes, where the Word of God is at the foundation of family life, such that

children are brought up in the love and fear of Jehovah. Deuteronomy 6:7 reads, “And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up”. How else can our Covenant children be grounded in the truth except in godly homes where the truth of God is consistently upheld in the lives of its members? Where else can we find solace from this anti-Christian world than in the fortress of a godly home? God has given us godly homes where we can be recharged, reenergised and revived to live antithetically in this wicked world and to bear our burdens in this valley of tears.

We approach this topic of ‘Building a Godly Home’ with Psalm 127:1 in mind: “Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain”.

What Scripture Says

The basis of building a godly home is the Covenant as clearly stated in Gen 17:7, “ And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.” A Covenant home is synonymous to a godly home.

Godly homes must be established for the sake of the Church and the glory of God’s Kingdom. Strong, godly families are vital to the growth of the church. For if we believe that God often saves

His people through the line of believers, then we can certainly say that God also uses strong godly families to bring forth spiritually strong men and women to serve in His Kingdom and to stand for Him in this world. These men and women are also the future generations of the church. Children will learn from personal experiences of being bought up in a godly home and apply these lessons to their own Covenant homes in the future. We are urged on by the promise in Proverbs 22:6 to “train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”

Godly homes are also a distinct mark of antithetical living which is required of every child of God in this earthy life. Living the antithesis is to bear witness to God’s eternal purpose in Jesus Christ. Divorce, remarriage, broken families, and children born out of wedlock are what characterises the family unit of society in this day and age. The Christian home must be radically different from that of the world. It must reflect the unbreakable bond of marriage between Christ and His Church, and the sweet fellowship that the triune God enjoys within the Godhead. Our goals for marriage and family life are governed by the Word of God because we are ambassadors of His Kingdom.

How do we build a godly home?

We look to the Bible for instruction in our roles in the family. The main relationship in the family is that of husband and wife. And so these two, as “King” and “Queen”, must and will

set the tone for the family. They will be the examples that their children look to and emulate. Husbands are to lead in love (Eph 5:23), wives are to submit in love (Eph 5:22), parents are to nurture and instruct in love (Eph 6:4), and children are to obey in love (Eph 6:1). Love for God and a desire to obey His Word governs each individual's role and will in turn be exhibited in love for one another in the family.

Obviously, God and the Church must be at the heart of our family life for us to be able to build godly homes. "First Things First", a sermon preached by Pastor Key in our church recently, emphasises the priority of worshipping God on the Sabbath. Sabbath worship is of utmost importance in a godly home. The parents guard this day jealously and teach their children to do so too. By attending both services faithfully, children will learn that their parents eagerly anticipate and love being in God's presence and will not give up such a privilege. Children will learn the blessedness of being instructed in doctrine from their parents' attitude towards their catechism and Sunday school lessons. They quickly learn that true knowledge of God is important for it deepens their love for Him.

What better way to anticipate our meeting with the Most High on Sunday, than by preparing ourselves throughout the week through immersing the family in His Word, praising Him with songs, and communing with Him in prayer daily? Family worship ought to be central in the daily life of the family. Rev. B. Gritters writes in his pamphlet *The Family*, "No quake can shake loose the family that is built on the love and worship of God."

Another great way to be mindful of God in our homes is to be surrounded by the fellowship of the saints. When parents fill the family life with the life of the church, children will quite naturally learn that the church is not only a physical place, but a congregation of people which is an extension of their

Covenant home. The fruit of the godly home is never selfishly hoarded within the family unit itself but spills over as a blessing to others of the household of Christ.

Challenges Faced in Building a Godly Home in Singapore

The devil does not like the church to comprise of strong covenant families and so even in Singapore, we see his direct onslaught on the home.

Fathers are enticed by the lie that they need to earn more money to provide the best for their children. And so they are swept up in the pursuit of their careers and statuses, and have no time for their families. 1 Peter 3:7 stands in clear contrast to this disillusion, and insists that "husbands dwell with them (their wives) according to knowledge..." Dwelling implies being physically, mentally and emotionally present with their families.

Mothers are bid to return to the work force as soon as possible with great monetary assistance provided in the care of their children whom they leave behind. "Super-mums" are celebrated and put on the pedestal for the nation to admire their accomplishments of juggling their responsibilities both at work and in the home. We must submit willingly to the Word of God when we are told in Titus 2:5 that the wife and mother finds her work as a "keeper at home." We have a most honourable calling to be directly used by God in the nurturing of His princes and princesses for His Kingdom.

Children are deceived by the media and their unbelieving peers into viewing disobedience and rebellion as cool. The Bible is clear in all aspects that children who obey their Covenant parents are kept out of danger and in the sphere of safety. Proverbs 6:20-24 reads, "My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother: Bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck. When thou goest, it shall lead thee;

when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee. To keep thee from the evil woman, from the flattery of the tongue of a strange woman."

Young adults are blinded by the charm of a luxurious and pleasurable lifestyle such that marriage and children are placed on hold. Psalm 127 says, "Lo, children are a heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is his reward... Happy is the man whose quiver is full of them." Let us not be dictated by worldly standards, but by what God's Word says – that children are a blessing and a gift from God.

More can be added to this list of challenges that we face here in Singapore. But we see here one common strain that sounds through each of the peculiar challenges the individuals in the family unit face – God is not The priority; He has become insignificant. That is how the devil in all his craftiness subtly attacks the families and subsequently attacks the church. And he succeeds when we allow other things to replace God at the centre of our lives.

Blessings of a Godly Home

A Covenant home is a haven of peace and joy. The world scoffs at our idealism because all they see around them is the breaking up of homes and self-centred strife even in the unit of the family. However, the Christian family that works at building a godly home, though sinful in every way, is redeemed by the blood of the Lamb and has the victory over sin and its influences which is the root of all strife. We have the power of God's Word to resolve conflict, the blood of the Lamb to cover a multitude of sins and the grace of God to forgive as we have been first forgiven.

The Covenant relationship between God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit is the epitome of the family life in all its perfection. These Three dwell in perfect harmony and fellowship with one another. In this earthly life, in the sphere of a godly

home, we experience a little of that beauty of covenant fellowship one with another. How sweet the fellowship that is centred on one common refrain – God and His church! It is fellowship so sweet it hints of Heaven.

May we as a church jealously guard this institution of the family and labour diligently to build godly homes for the sake of His Kingdom. We cling fast to God's promises in His Word, with the certainty that He will use our most

feeble efforts to build up His church through the generations. Deuteronomy 7:9 says, "Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations."



“ God has given us godly homes where we can be recharged, reenergised and revived to live antithetically in this wicked world and to bear our burdens in this valley of tears.

”



WHAT IS REFORMED? REFORMED WORSHIP

>> Prof Hanko



Prof. Hanko is a retired professor of the PR Theological School. His present work consists of preaching at Hope Protestant Reformed Church, and writing for the Salt Shakers magazine, a forum for the young people in Singapore, and new books. He has visited Singapore on many occasions and is like a grandfather to all the youths here.

In earlier articles, I talked about what it is to be Reformed from a historical point of view, and from a doctrinal point of view. Now it is time to talk about what is Reformed from the point of view of worship.

Many in our day claim that there is no such thing as being Reformed in worship. There are even some who hold to the truth that Scripture is our standard for doctrine and life, but who insist that these same Scriptures cannot be considered a rule for worship. Worship is loose and a matter of individual choice; or if we are speaking of church worship, there are no guidelines in Scripture for the worship of the church.

But this kind of reasoning is false. Reformed worship is Biblical worship, that is, worship according to the standard of preaching.

Many churches practice what is called "contemporary worship." I have seen churches in our area that have on their sign in front of the church that morning worship is traditional worship and evening worship is contemporary worship. Traditional worship is evidently worship that satisfies some old people in the church who are used to worshipping in a definite way and do not like change. Such worship is intended to satisfy some old people, but is not essential in a Reformed church.

Contemporary worship includes music that approaches, and sometime is, rock and roll; it is called "Christian Rock." It includes banjos, guitars, drums and other music suitable for modern jazz. It frequently includes ditties to be sung, which some wag has called 7/11 songs. There are 7/11 stores in Singapore; there is one, I know, in the basement of Far East Plaza on Scotts Road, near Orchard. This wag called these songs by this name because they have seven words, but have eleven lines. That is, they are endlessly repetitious and usually say nothing of value.

Contemporary worship often includes what is called "liturgical dance." Although I have never seen it, it is similar to ballet dancing, but is supposed to have religious meanings – although I suspect only the dancers know what their dances mean.

Contemporary worship usually includes audience participation in some form or another – responsive readings, standing and kneeling, or other rituals. Contemporary worship usually includes some sort of homily that usually is of some content that makes people feel good. Contemporary worship is not worship that follows a fixed form, but changes from week to week. A committee prepares the order of worship that is never quite the same. In other words, contemporary worship is a sort of worshipping "free-for-all" in which anything with any sort of slightly religious tinge to it is used.

Many years ago, Mrs. Hanko and I were in London on a Lord's Day, and we wanted a place to worship. In the morning, we went to Westminster Chapel, where the well-known Martyn Lloyd-Jones had preached for many years. But he had died, and a man who was introducing some sort of

Pentecostalism into the church had taken his place. In the afternoon, we went to Westminster Abbey, but heard and watched a traditional Anglican service called "Evensong," climaxed by a woman "preacher" whose theme was "Unilateral Disarmament. We knew that John R. Stott was a conservative evangelical who preached in All Souls Church. And so we went to that cathedral in the evening. But instead of hearing this rather well-known evangelical, the church was holding a contemporary worship service. It was a day in which we went to church three times, and profited not at all. We could not help but say with Solomon, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity."

One of the important words for worship in the New Testament is a word that literally means, "to bow the knee towards." It is the word used throughout John 4 in our Lord's discussion with the Samaritan woman concerning the right place to worship: Jerusalem where the Jews worshipped, or Mount Gerazim where the Samaritans worshipped.

To bow the knee is an act performed by people in the presence of someone much higher in rank and authority than they. Citizens bow before kings; servants and slaves bow before their masters; poor people used to bow before rich people. To bow the knee towards someone is, therefore, an act of homage, of respect, of praise – to bow before one who is worthy of homage and praise. To worship God is to acknowledge who He is, greater and higher than all creation; alone worthy of adoration and praise. Whenever anyone truly worships, this is what he does.

My grandfather, who aspired to be a minister but never became one, often said that it is easier to lead in a

worship service and to preach than it is to worship in the pew and listen to a sermon. In a way, he was right. It is, I admit, easier to preach a sermon than to listen to one. But what he forgot is that a minister too, as well as the congregation, must truly worship in church. A minister may lead in worship and deliver a sermon, but the question may very well be asked: "Is he worshipping when he preaches?" Then things get a little more difficult and I, who knows what it is like to be behind the pulpit and to sit in the audience, thinks that just maybe preaching is more difficult.

The point is that worship involves being consciously in the presence of God, the Creator of heaven and earth, the sovereign Lord of the universe, the infinitely holy one, the one in whose presence the angels cover their faces with their wings and cry, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isaiah 6).

It would seem to me that anyone who knows who and what God is, cannot fail to realise that God has His own rules about how people enter His presence. No one need try to enter the Oval Office in the white house with shorts and a torn T-shirt. No one would, I am sure, have any success entering The Queen of England's presence with bare feet and a wad of chewing tobacco in his cheek. Even Ahasuerus' "wife", Esther, hardly dared to enter her husband's presence when the salvation of her people required it.

The true worship of God depends on God's rules for coming into His presence. And these rules are found in Scripture. This is traditional Reformed worship.

CRITIQUING THE APOCRYPHA

(Belgic Confession 6a)

>> Pastor Angus Stewart



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Belgic Confession 6: The Difference Between the Canonical and Apocryphal Books

We distinguish those sacred books from the apocryphal, namely: the third book of Esdras, the books of Tobias, Judith, Wisdom, Jesus Syrach, Baruch, the appendix to the book of Esther, the Song of the Three Children in the Furnace, the History of Susannah, of Bell and the Dragon, the Prayer of Manasses, and the two books of the Maccabees. All of which the church may read and take instruction from so far as they agree with the canonical books; but they are far from having such power and efficacy, as that we may from their testimony confirm any point of faith or of the Christian religion; much less detract from the authority of the other sacred books.

Have you ever seen a copy of the Apocrypha? The word itself comes from the Greek and means “hidden”

or “obscure.” This could refer to its origin (since the authors of many of the books are not known) and/or its contents (because some of its material is legendary or even puerile) and/or its use (for what ought people to do with it?).

Belgic Confession 6 enumerates thirteen apocryphal books. Other confessions add IV Esdras and so list fourteen books, for example, article 6 of Anglicanism’s Thirty-Nine Articles and article 3 of the Irish Articles (1615).

Protestantism denies that any of the apocryphal books are inspired or canonical. Only the 39 Old Testament books and the 27 New Testament books are the Word of God (Belgic Confession 4-5).

Roman Catholicism, on the other hand, receives eleven apocryphal books as inspired and authoritative. III Esdras and the Prayer of Manasses are the two books listed in Belgic Confession 6 which Rome does not accept as canonical.

Eastern Orthodoxy receives all the eleven apocryphal books that Rome accepts, plus III Esdras and III Maccabees. However, these thirteen apocryphal books are deuterocanonical, having only secondary authority in Eastern Orthodoxy, whereas Rome’s eleven apocryphal books have full authority.

In the remainder of this article, we shall

consider (parts of) three apocryphal books which clearly betray the fact that they are not the Word of God.

II Maccabees

Read carefully the last three verse of II Maccabees:

37 Thus went it with Nicanor: and from that time forth the Hebrews had the city in their power. And here will I make an end. 38 And if I have done well, and as is fitting the story, it is that which I desired: but if slenderly and meanly, it is that which I could attain unto. 39 For as it is hurtful to drink wine or water alone; and as wine mingled with water is pleasant, and delighteth the taste: even so speech finely framed delighteth the ears of them that read the story. And here shall be an end (15:37-39).

Do you see the big issue here? It is not merely that it is questionable (to say the least), even in the ancient world, that it is “hurtful to drink wine or water alone” (v. 39). Verse 38 reveals that II Maccabees is a purely human composition! The author states that he has tried hard to tell his story well but recognises that if his readers judge that it was poorly told, it was the best he could do. He knows that he has not penned the words of God, and the perceptive reader recognises this too.

Tobit

Moving from II Maccabees, we turn to Tobit. Study closely the following

excerpt:

8 Prayer is good with fasting and alms and righteousness. A little with righteousness is better than much with unrighteousness. It is better to give alms than to lay up gold: 9 For alms doth deliver from death, and shall purge away all sin. Those that exercise alms and righteousness shall be filled with life: 10 But they that sin are enemies to their own life. 11 Surely I will keep close nothing from you. For I said, It was good to keep close the secret of a king, but that it was honourable to reveal the works of God. 12 Now therefore, when thou didst pray, and Sara thy daughter in law, I did bring the remembrance of your prayers before the Holy One: and when thou didst bury the dead, I was with thee likewise. 13 And when thou didst not delay to rise up, and leave thy dinner, to go and cover the dead, thy good deed was not hid from me: but I was with thee. 14 And now God hath sent me to heal thee and Sara thy daughter in law. 15 I am Raphael, one of the seven holy angels, which present the prayers of the saints, and which go in and out before the glory of the Holy One (12:8-15).

Verse 9 seems to teach salvation by (man's) works: "alms doth deliver from death, and shall purge away all sin."

Tobit also teaches a strange, unbiblical angelology. First, it refers to "the seven holy angels" (v. 15) but Scripture nowhere gives the specific number of any rank of angel. Second, one of these seven angels is identified as Raphael (v. 15), but Michael and Gabriel are the only two faithful angels named in God's Word. The canonical status of Tobit (with its reference to the angel Raphael) in Roman Catholicism, but not Protestantism, explains the popularity of the name Raphael

(including its alternative spelling, Rafael, and its abbreviation, Rafa) in a Roman Catholic country, like Spain, for example, Rafael Nadal (tennis player) and Rafa Benitez (football manager), whereas this name is extremely rare among Protestants. Third, the angel Raphael in the book of Tobit occupies an angelolatrous role in presenting the prayers of the saints before God (vv. 12, 15). Fourth, this allegedly holy angel actually lies! He says, "I am Raphael" (v. 15), but he earlier identified himself as "Azarias," the son of Ananias (5:12), and thus a human being with a physical earthly father.

Moving from the excerpt from chapter 12 (above) to Tobit 6, the man Azarias or the angel Raphael (!) proposes a means of exorcism that can only be described as magic! A demon is to be driven out by the smoke arising from cooking the heart and liver of a fish: "Touching the heart and the liver, if a devil or an evil spirit trouble any, we must make a smoke thereof before the man or the woman, and the party shall be no more vexed" (v. 7). The "angel" is none too hot on medical advice either! Listen to his prescription for a man with whiteness in his eyes: "As for the gall [of the fish], it is good to anoint a man that hath whiteness in his eyes, and he shall be healed" (v. 8).

Bel and the Dragon

The forty-two verses of Bel and the Dragon are too long to include in this article, though readers can find it easily enough on-line, if they do not have a hard copy of the Apocrypha.

In this book, it is claimed that Daniel, in two separate incidents, exposed and destroyed two idolatrous objects: Bel, who was merely a statue that cannot eat (vv. 1-22), and the dragon, which was merely some sort of animal (vv.

23-27). Enraged by Daniel's success, the Babylonians forced King Cyrus to deliver him to them, and they cast their enemy into the lion's den (vv. 28-42). Daniel survived the week without being devoured by the seven lions and was provided with a meal of soup and bread from the hand of the prophet Habakkuk (vv. 33-39).

There are obvious problems with this apocryphal book. First, unlike the real prophet Daniel, this other "Daniel" comes across as something of a smart alec, who "smiled" (v. 7) and "laughed" (v. 19) at the fraud of Bel. Second, how did the animal which was the dragon "burst in sunder" when the lumps of cooked pitch, fat and hair were put in its mouth (v. 27)? Third, did the Babylonians really have the power to threaten to destroy the Medo-Persian Emperor, Cyrus, and his house, so that he was constrained to yield Daniel to them (vv. 29-30)? Fourth, the inclusion of Habakkuk is clearly legendary. It is somewhat strange to read of a prophet going to a field with a meal he had made for reapers (v. 33), but his bringing a dinner from Judah to Daniel in a lion's den in Babylon is bizarre (vv. 34-37). Besides, Habakkuk, if alive at this late date, would have been extremely old. Fifth, the idea of the lion's den arose from the narrative of Daniel 6, wherein the prophet was cast before these ferocious beasts at Darius' reluctant command. Several Old Testament Scriptures are the occasion for a number of apocryphal books. Baruch picks up on the book of Jeremiah, and the idea for the appendix to the book of Esther is even more obvious. The Song of the Three Children in the Furnace (cf. Dan. 3) and the Prayer of Manasses (cf. II Chron. 33:11-13) are, likewise, man's uninspired "developments" of God's inspired Word.

News from the Churches

PRCA Young People's Convention - "Not Ashamed of the Gospel!"

This past summer, the youths in PRCA had their Young People's Convention at Lake Williamson. Their theme for the five day convention was "Not Ashamed of the Gospel" based on Romans 1:16. Organised by Crete PRC, the speech topics were "Not Ashamed of the Gospel", "Paul, a Servant of Jesus Christ" and "Living Unashamed of the Gospel Today".

Psalter 190 was chosen for the theme song. For recorded messages, outrageously fun photos and interesting ideas for youth camps, please visit <http://prconvention.com/>.

Evangelism Committee Randolph PRC - "Evolution from the Reformed Perspective"

Dr. Nate Lanning, a cancer biologist at Van Andel Institute in Grand Rapids, MI, spoke on "Understanding Evolution from the Reformed Perspective" on the 4th of October in Randolph PRC. He asserts in his speech that one can and must maintain a faithful Biblical stand while working in the sciences today.

PRCA Mission Work - PR Fellowship in Pittsburgh

The PR Fellowship in Pittsburgh hosted a Reformation Day Lecture with Missionary Pastor W. Bruinsma speaking on "Why the Reformation Was Necessary" on 30th October.

PRCP Mission Work - PR Fellowship in Albuera, Leyte

First Reformed Church in Bulacan has started a new mission work in Albuera which is located on the island of Leyte. Pastor John Flores and Elder Reden Zuniega visited the fellowship from 20th to 24th September. For more exciting news and eye opening photos please visit <http://kleynsphilippines.blogspot.sg>.

Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia - Youth Camp 2013-14, Tasmania

A biennial youth camp will be held at Bridport Bayview Centre from 28th December 2013 to 3rd January 2014. Lord willing, Pastor Ronald Van Overloop, who has visited their island many times, will be the camp's speaker. The purpose of the camp is to engage in the study of God's Word with respect to subjects particularly relevant to Christian young people and for Christian fellowship. The campsite is located on the north-east coast of Tasmania on a beautiful beach. If you are 16 to about 30 and would like to travel to Australia at the end of the year, please contact Nick Kleyn (nick@kleynelectric.com) for more details.

Covenant PRC - Northern Ireland

Pastor Paul Raj (trained in Singapore) of Vellore Christian Church in Vellore, India, gave a special presentation on the mission work in India during his recent September visit to Covenant Protestant Reformed Church.

The India Mission Outreach in Vellore by Georgetown Protestant Reformed Church (GPRC) is two-fold. The first part of the project is to assist Pastor Paul Raj with the spread of the Gospel in and around Vellore; the second is to financially assist the children of Grace Foster Home (Karunalaya) through a sponsorship program.

For more information of GPRC's India mission outreach visit <http://georgetownprc.org/outreach/india-mission>. The Special above-mentioned presentation can be viewed online at www.youtube.com/watch?v=7SU_fhPilkq.



Special Item for CERC Anniversary



The Lannings singing 2 Chinese songs at CERC Anniversary celebration



CERC Session cake-cutting during CERC Anniversary celebration



CKS & CK Polemics Debate on the Sovereignty of God



RDC 2013 held at The Salvation Army Praisehaven Retreat Centre



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

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