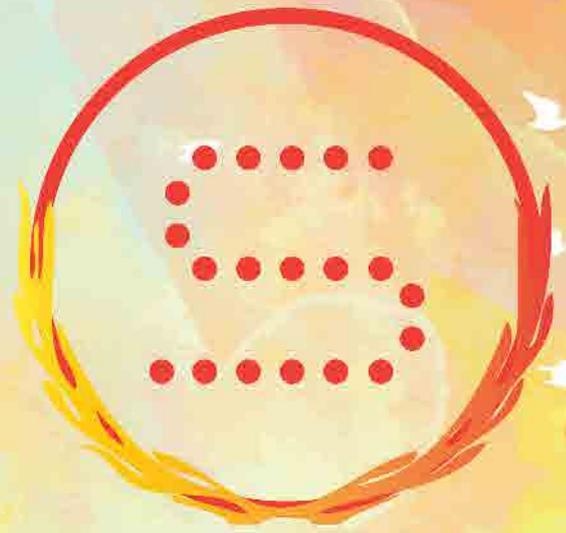


Because family worship is so important, we must zealously guard against its most formidable foe: busyness. — *Rev. Ryan Barnhill*

Even (and maybe especially) young people, in searching for a marriage partner, are quick to consider the handsome and pretty and consider a person's worth by outward appearance. The Lord does not do that. Outward appearance means nothing to Him. — *Prof. Herman Hanko*

Forgive, for you have been forgiven of a debt far greater than what is owed you. — *Marcus Wee*



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

Issue 47 | Jan 2018

*Blessed*  
are the *pure in heart,*  
for *they shall*  
see *God.*

Matthew 5:8

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## WELCOME TO THE 47TH ISSUE OF SALT SHAKERS!

Welcome to the 47th edition of Salt Shakers!

Dear readers, we have spent the last several issues considering our Reformed heritage, both in CERC and also in God's universal church. Now we turn to the practical living out of that calling. The theme for the next three issues is "Be Ye Holy", in line with CERC's ongoing church theme. Let us exhort one another to walk worthy of God, who has called us unto His kingdom and glory! Let us pray for the gift of holiness, being confident that the work that God has begun in us, He will also finish.

The year 2018 has come – a new year that brings new beginnings, and us one year nearer to the return of our Lord. CERC begins a new chapter of its history as Rev. Lanning returns to Michigan, answering the call of Byron Centre PRC. Rev. Lanning has faithfully shepherded the flock of CERC these past five years, and though we are deeply saddened to bid him and his beloved family farewell, we pray for God's richest blessings on his ministry in his new congregation! God has greatly prospered CERC under his preaching and dedicated work here. Our congregation now faces a period of vacancy as we submit to our Father's divine and perfect will.

But while vacancy comes with its difficulties and trials, these are exciting times! When I first visited CERC in 2012, we were also vacant. Many of us will fondly remember during that period of vacancy, many different ministers came in to help out with the pulpit supply, and the church – especially the youth – did everything to show them great hospitality. At times, something extra was being organized almost every week! God powerfully used those activities to draw the church closer together, strengthen friendships and forge lifelong bonds among the members. As a visitor back then, I was struck by the amazing vibrancy and warm congregational life of CERC. On a side note, hearing the same voice of our risen Lord through many different and faithful ministers on the pulpit was also helpful to remind us that we follow the doctrine of Christ, not any individual man.

Having an installed minister is a great blessing, but certainly vacancy has its own unique characteristics. Rather than face the future with fear, we believe that God is able and willing to turn all things to our profit. Indeed, we can sing in all of life's uncertainty: "Who shall my soul affright, or cause my heart to fear? While God my strength, my life sustains, secure from fear my soul remains."

There will be differences between the present time and 2012, of course. For one, those who were youth back in 2012 are now in adulthood with its accompanying commitments, but we are all deeply encouraged to see a new generation ready to step up and take the reins to lead the activities of the youth and show hospitality to our visitors. Through you, Christ inestimably enriches the life of the church. Treasure this time! For many of you, it could be the foundation that the Lord uses to root and build up your lives in the church, and establish your lifelong Christian friendships.

This month, we warmly welcome Candidate Dave Noorman and his wife Carisa into our midst, as well as Rev. and Mrs. Den Hartog. In the meantime, let us strive with zeal to live holy lives of thankfulness unto Christ who has redeemed us; may this new edition of Salt Shakers help encourage us along this path!

This issue also features a riddle written by a mystery contributor. See if you can figure it out!

Remember to pass the salt!

In Christ's service,  
Lee Yang

# CALVIN'S INSTRUCTION ON CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

>>Aaron Lim



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

## John Calvin on Church Membership

John Calvin (1509-1564), one of the main leaders of the Reformation, had important instruction on the necessity of membership in the church institute. Calvin recognized that the instituted church is the mother of all believers. Writing in Book Four of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*:

of the visible church, let us learn, from her single title of Mother, how useful, no, how necessary the knowledge of her is, since there is no other means of entering into life unless she conceive us in the womb and give us birth, unless she nourish us at her breasts, and, in short, keep us under her charge and government, until, divested of mortal flesh, we become like the angels (Matt 22:30). For our weakness does not permit us to leave the school until we have spent our whole lives as scholars. Moreover, beyond the pale of the church no forgiveness of sins, no salvation, can be hoped for...<sup>1</sup>

It is the church institute that gives birth to believers. Ordinarily, believers

are born, baptized, and raised in the church institute. They grow under her instruction, are fed to spiritual maturity, and are preserved in her fellowship. Calvin had a high regard for the church institute. He maintained that the church institute is responsible for raising her members to spiritual maturity. Apart from the church institute, we would still be babes in the faith:

the church, into whose bosom God is pleased to collect his children, not only that by her aid and ministry they may be nourished so long as they are babes and children, but may also be guided by her maternal care until they grow up to manhood and, finally, attain to the perfection of faith.<sup>2</sup>

Membership in the true church institute is necessary for the preservation of the truth. Calvin declared that “so long as we continue in the bosom of the church, we are sure that the truth will remain with us”.<sup>3</sup> Calvin also wisely recognised that God is the one who ordained the church institute to educate His people in the truth. God uses the church as a means to feed His people spiritually, so that they are not destroyed for lack of knowledge (Hos. 4:6).

We see that God, who might perfect his people in a moment, chooses not to bring them to manhood in any other way than by the education of the church... Hence it follows, that all who reject the spiritual food of the

soul divinely offered to them by the hands of the church, deserve to perish of hunger and famine.<sup>4</sup>

Communion with the saints in church is communion with God. Calvin states emphatically that “so available is communion with the church to keep us in the fellowship of God”.<sup>5</sup> Anticipating the temptation that believers may face with regard to church membership, Calvin insisted that they must gather publicly to worship God. He attributed the practice of private worship to pride and arrogance. He would not allow believers to worship privately in their own homes, like what the present house church movement promotes. He writes that “pride, or fastidiousness, or emulation, induces many to persuade themselves that they can profit sufficiently by reading and meditating in private, and thus to despise public meetings, and deem preaching superfluous”.<sup>6</sup>

The instituted church is important because she is the faithful guardian of the truth. God is pleased to use the church to proclaim and to preserve His truth in the world. He uses the church

to prevent the truth from perishing in the world; the church is its faithful guardian, because God has been pleased to preserve the pure preaching of

<sup>1</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, (Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2008), 4.1.4, 674.

<sup>2</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.1.1, 672.

<sup>3</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.1.3, 673.

<sup>4</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.1.5, 674.

<sup>5</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.1.3, 674.

<sup>6</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.1.5, 675.

his word by her instrumentality, and to exhibit himself to us as a parent while he feeds us with spiritual nourishment, and provides whatever is conducive to our salvation.<sup>7</sup>

So important is membership in the church institute that Calvin severely warned against leaving her for any slight reason. He insists that “we are not on account of every minute difference to abandon a church, provided it retain sound and unimpaired that doctrine in which the safety of piety consists, and keep the use of the sacraments instituted by the Lord”.<sup>8</sup>

Those who are in the church must exhaust their gifts for the unity and peace of the church. Calvin writes that “we must neither renounce the communion of the church, nor, continuing in it, disturb peace and discipline when duly arranged”.<sup>9</sup> Believers are duty bound to maintain the unity and peace of the church of Jesus Christ by joining themselves to her, and not separating themselves from her fellowship. Accordingly, Calvin declares: “How perilous, then, no, how fatal the temptation, when we even entertain a thought of separating ourselves from that assembly in which are beheld the signs and badges which the Lord has deemed sufficient to characterize his church!”<sup>10</sup>

To “revolt from the church is denial of God and Christ”.<sup>11</sup>

### Calvin’s Catechism (1545)

Before the final edition of his institutes was published in 1559, Calvin had written a catechism for his church. He wrote it especially with the instruction of the children and young people in

mind. In the catechism, he ties the experience of the forgiveness of sins with the church institute. In question 104 of the catechism, the question is asked:

Why do you insert this article [the forgiveness of sins] after the Church?

Because no man obtains pardon for his sins without being previously incorporated into the people of God, persevering in unity and communion with the Body of Christ in such a way as to be a true member of the Church.<sup>12</sup>

Those who are the people of God must persevere in unity and communion with the Body of Christ. That characterizes them as true members of His Body.

In his explanation of the fourth commandment, Calvin insists that the public gathering of God’s people is necessary for every believer. They are to congregate with the assembly of Christians to hear the Word, pray, and use the sacraments.

Explaining the fourth commandment – What else is there here for us?

That we observe the order constituted in the Church, to hear the Word of God, to engage in public prayers and in the Sacraments, and that we do not contravene the spiritual order among the faithful.

But are we not to take trouble and be diligent, and zealously strive by hearing and reading its teaching, as it is declared to us? Yes, indeed: for each one of us in particular ought to study it:

and above all, we are frequently to attend the sermons in which this Word is expounded in the Assembly of the Christians.<sup>13</sup>

Calvin astutely anticipates the temptation of believers to read the Bible at home, while neglecting the public gathering of the church. He instructs believers that we must not be wiser than God in thinking that we can do away with His appointed ordinances.

Do you mean that it is not enough for people to read it privately at home, without altogether hearing its teaching in common?

That is just what I mean, while God proves the way for it.

Why do you say that?

Because Jesus Christ has established this order in His Church, and He has declared this to be the only means of edifying and preserving it. Thus we must keep ourselves to it and not be wiser than our Master.<sup>14</sup>

Calvin issues the same warning against those who leave the instituted church. They are sectarian, and those who are part of them may not expect salvation. Asking in the catechism, “And so outside the Church there is nothing but damnation and death? Certainly, for all those who separate themselves from the community of the faithful to form a sect on its own, have no

<sup>7</sup>Calvin, Institutes, 4.1.10, 679.

<sup>8</sup>Calvin, Institutes, 4.1.12, 680.

<sup>9</sup>Calvin, Institutes, 4.1.12, 680.

<sup>10</sup>Calvin, Institutes, 4.1.11, 679.

<sup>11</sup>Calvin, Institutes, 4.1.10, 679.

<sup>12</sup>James T. Dennison, Jr., Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation, Vol 1, (Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 482.

<sup>13</sup>Dennison, Vol 1, 492.

<sup>14</sup>Dennison, Vol 1, 509.

hope of salvation so long as they are in schism.”<sup>15</sup>

### Calvin's 'Anti-Nicodemite' Writings

During the Reformation, Calvin wrote to Protestants in France who were living under the dominion of the Papists. They were being persecuted, and were tempted to compromise their faith. Many thought that they could go to the Romish church and participate in the mass while retaining their Protestant beliefs. Many Protestants “hoped to maintain their social standing by outward conformity to Romish rituals and worship; these dissemblers claimed that it was lawful to attend the outward ordinances of Romish worship, so long as they did not inwardly receive the heretical tenets of Rome”.<sup>16</sup> Calvin makes it clear that “true believers must remain separate from both false worship and the false church”.<sup>17</sup> Obedience “to

the word of God requires of believers an outward practice consistent with an inner commitment to the truth”.<sup>18</sup> Believers may not wilfully separate themselves from the true instituted church because this is

the order and policy which God has established in his church; that we be taught by his word, that we all worship him of one accord, and that we call upon him, having the observance of the sacraments to help us do this. This is how we train ourselves to become better and better confirmed in the faith, in the fear of God, in holiness, in despising the world, and in the love of the life of heaven.<sup>19</sup>

In times of severe persecution, the Christian religion is often banished altogether from the land. Calvin insists

that “a godly man living in such a country should consider relocating his family to some other place where he can join with the true church in worship”.<sup>20</sup> We must be diligent “in attending upon the sermons and public prayers”.<sup>21</sup> It is “an inestimable possession and privilege to be in God’s church, to partake of the means which this good Father has given his children to draw near to him”.<sup>22</sup> Those who are “deprived of the use of the sacraments and of the freedom of calling upon his name, and yet do not feel their ill and wretchedness so as to groan under it, are more stupid than dumb beasts”.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Dennison, Vol 1, 482-3.

<sup>16</sup> John Calvin, *Come Out From Among Them: 'Anti-Nicodemite' Writings of John Calvin*, (Protestant Heritage Press, 2001), 8.

<sup>17</sup> Calvin, *Come Out From Among Them*, 22.

<sup>18</sup> Calvin, *Come Out From Among Them*, 9.

<sup>19</sup> Calvin, *Come Out From Among Them*, 178.

<sup>20</sup> Calvin, *Come Out From Among Them*, 22.

<sup>21</sup> Calvin, *Come Out From Among Them*, 193.

<sup>22</sup> Calvin, *Come Out From Among Them*, 179.

<sup>23</sup> Calvin, *Come Out From Among Them*, 184.

## SCRIPTURE'S COVENANT YOUTH (X): DAVID

>>Prof. Herman Hanko



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In our last article in Salt Shakers, I wrote a rather general article covering David’s entire life and his importance in Scripture. We are particularly concerned with his youth.

Saul had forfeited his right to be king over God’s people because he had disobeyed God in two very important matters. He had sacrificed when God had specifically given that calling to the priests. It demonstrated that Saul cared not at all for the offices God had appointed in Israel, something for which much later, Uzziah, king of Judah, had been stricken with leprosy for this very sin. He had showed, while doing it, that he did not believe

that God could deliver Israel from the Philistines.

His second sin was the sin of refusing to obey God in destroying the Amalekites. Saul saved the king alive and refused to kill the sheep that belonged to the Amalekites, even though they were all under God’s curse. Although Saul actually was deposed, Saul refused to abandon the office and apparently let everyone know that he would kill anyone who was apparently to take his place. This is clear from Samuel’s hesitation in going to Bethlehem and God’s provision for Samuel to anoint a new king when he was in Bethlehem to sacrifice for the people – as Samuel did

regularly when he travelled around in Israel.

Jesse, who was of the promised line, came with his seven sons to the sacrifice and Samuel knew that the Lord would make him a king from Jesse's sons. But as, one by one they passed before Samuel, the Lord rejected them one by one. When Samuel learned that Jesse had one more son, the very youngest and, in Jesse's opinion, a son unfit for the position of king, David was called from the pasture where he was watching Jesse's sheep. In spite of Jesse's opinion, God had chosen him.

The reason why God's choice was determinative was found in the Lord's words to Jesse: "Look not on his countenance, or the height of his stature; because I have refused him; for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7).

There are two things of note in these words of God, truths that we do well to understand and put into practice. The first is that a person's outward appearance means nothing to God. Israel's pleasure in a king was because Saul was taller than all the Israelites and very strong. But that was the people's choice, not God's. Outward appearance means a lot to us. While unattractive people are often lonely people, we are quick to make friends with the popular and good-looking people. Even (and maybe especially) young people, in searching for a marriage partner, are quick to consider the handsome and pretty and consider a person's worth by outward appearance. The Lord does not do that. Outward appearance means nothing to Him.

The second truth of God's words to Jesse, which we ought to take to heart are these: "But the Lord looketh at the heart". A godly woman, pretty or not, makes a godly wife; a pretty face does not, in itself, mean that – although some young girls can have both; but their looks mean nothing. An ugly man who loves the Lord is to be preferred as a husband and father rather than the tall, handsome and fun-loving young man who has interest only in worldly things.

And especially when one assumes an important position in the church, God looks at the heart of a person, not his outward appearance: and so ought we. God is not interested in outward appearance of any kind: wealth, oratorical or musical gifts, powerful business magnate, nor high position in government: God looks at the heart, and so must we.

James, in chapter 2 of his epistle, makes this a matter of faith. A dead faith looks at the outward appearance in a church. It fawns over and favours the rich while it despises the poor. A living faith does not do that; it looks, as God does, at the heart, for there lie the Christian virtues.

David in Psalm 119, sings: "I am a companion of them that fear thee", meaning, of course that he is a companion of them that fear God. In every school there are those who are popular for their athletic or musical or intellectual gifts. There are others who come from poor homes and do not dress well, who have no intellectual ability nor gifts of any kind; they are isolated, ignored, despised. But that is not the criterion when we choose our companions. David says, the one criterion of important is the fear of

God. The rest is of no account.

In David's case, it was a matter of age; he was but a lad, young, of little account in the family – he could not even go to war with his brothers, only worth tending sheep in the work of the farm. How could he be king? King? The highest position in the kingdom? Yet then already God saw his heart, and saw him as a very godly young man. It is not impossible that already at that time he composed Psalm 23 and sang it on a stone in the field. It is a beloved Psalm, often the first covenant children learn when they can only lisp the words. But it is the Psalm that comes unbidden to the lips of aged people who face the last mile in their walk through the valley of death.

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall  
not want.

He maketh me to lie down in  
green pastures:

He leadeth me beside the still  
waters.

He restoreth my soul:

He leadeth me in the paths of  
righteousness for his name's sake.

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.

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

Surely goodness and mercy shall  
follow me all the days of my life:  
And I will dwell in the house of  
the Lord forever.

It is not possible to count the many times I and one dying have recited this precious Psalm together.

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

>>Rev. Angus Stewart



Rev. Angus Stewart is the minister of Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland.

Unbelievers are not in the image of God—this is the thesis and burden of this series of articles. So far we have considered arguments from the nature, number and idea of the *imago dei*, as well as the relationship between the image of God and divine sonship. We pointed out the amazing incongruities, massive equivocations and dangerous consequences involved in the position that the ungodly are Jehovah's image-bearers. In the last installment, we looked especially at two verses of Scripture from the Psalms: Psalm 17:15 (believers are God's likeness) and Psalm 73:20 (unbelievers are not in God's image).

Now it is time to respond to the three texts to which some appeal in an attempt to prove that the wicked are in the *imago dei* in the so-called "broader" sense: 1 Corinthians 11:7, Genesis 9:6 and James 3:9.

### 1 Corinthians 11:7

The first verse is 1 Corinthians 11:7:

"For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man".

"You see", exclaim our opponents, "everybody is in the image of God!" However, we should note two very simple points. First, this text says that man "is" the image of God, not merely that he is *in* the image of God. Second, 1 Corinthians 11:7 states that man "is the image *and glory* of God". Do our adversaries on this issue really want to say that an ungodly man "is the image *and glory* of God", the Holy One of Israel, who is "merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth" (Ex. 34:6)?

Apart from the problem that 1 Corinthians 11:7 proves too much for those who are our theological opponents at this point, the fatal weakness of their view of this text is its context. Paul is writing to the church, those whom he calls his "brethren" (2) and whose "head" is the Lord Jesus (3), not unbelievers. Thus the apostle calls the saints at Corinth to imitate him even as he imitates "Christ" (1), and praises them for remembering him in all things and keeping the ordinances that he delivered to them (2).

Paul tells us that he is writing about the instituted "churches" (16), in which the Lord's Supper is administered (17-34). The subject of 1 Corinthians 11:3-16 is the roles of godly men and women in the organized church, with respect to

headship, praying, prophesying, etc.

It is in this context that we must read our text: "For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man". It clearly refers to *believing* man as "the image and glory of God", as even some advocates of the so-called "broader" aspect of the image realise, for they do not use it in support of their position.

### Genesis 9:6

A second verse cited to by those who claim that absolutely everybody is in the *imago dei* (in some sense) is Genesis 9:6: "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man".

Unlike 1 Corinthians 11:7, which only pertains to believers, Genesis 9:6 speaks of mankind. However, Genesis 9:6 does not teach that mankind is in the divine image *now*.

In stating that "in the image of God made he man," Genesis 9:6 harkens back to Genesis 1:26-27 and the creation of man on day six. In Genesis 3, two chapters later, the human race fell and lost the image of God, becoming the sons and daughters of Satan (John 8:44).

The opening articles of the *Canons of Dordt III/IV* explain this:

1. *Man was originally formed*

*after the image of God.* His understanding was adorned with a true and saving knowledge of his Creator and of spiritual things; his heart and will were upright; all his affections pure; and the whole man was holy. But, revolting from God by the instigation of the devil and abusing the freedom of his own will, *he forfeited these excellent gifts, and on the contrary entailed on himself blindness of mind, horrible darkness, vanity, and perverseness of judgment, became wicked, rebellious, and obdurate in heart and will, and impure in his affections.*

2. *Man after the fall begat children in his own likeness.* A corrupt stock produced a corrupt offspring. Hence all the posterity of Adam, Christ only excepted, have derived corruption from their original parent, not by imitation, as the Pelagians of old asserted, but by the propagation of a vicious nature.

Thus Genesis 5:3 states, “Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image”. This Scripture does not teach that our first father had a son in the image of God. Instead, Adam “begat a son in *his own* likeness, after *his* image”, a totally depraved image, not the *imago dei* (cf. Ps. 51:5; Rom. 5:12-21).

The argument of Genesis 9:6 is that man was created in the image of God, unlike the animals. Therefore, the death penalty is to be administered to those who murder human beings (5-6), not those who kill animals (2-3), which have been given to man (2), especially for food (3-4). Genesis 9:6 does not teach that all the sons of fallen Adam, who are in “*his* image” (5:3), are also in the divine image.

All of this can be summarized in biblical order as follows:

Genesis 1—Creation: man is made in the image of God

Genesis 3—Fall: man loses the image of God and now bears the image of Satan

Genesis 5—Procreation: fallen humanity has children in its own (fallen) image

Genesis 9—Capital punishment: murderers are to be executed because man, unlike the animals, was originally created in God's image (1:26-27)

### James 3:9

James 3, the greatest chapter in the Bible on the tongue, states, “Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the *similitude* [or likeness] of God” (9).

The Greek verb translated “are made” is in the perfect tense. Thus it refers to both a past action (when people were made in the *imago dei*) and a present state resulting from this action, so that people are *now* in God's likeness.

The question is: Does “are made” in the perfect tense refer to man's original creation in Genesis 1 (and hence to everybody) or does it speak of man's re-creation (and hence to believers only)?

The latter is the answer, for James 3:9 in its context is dealing with God's people, who have been regenerated in the image of their heavenly Father (1:18). Thus James 3 is addressed to the “brethren” (1, 10, 12) and speaks of “masters”, that is, teachers, in the church (1). All Christians, and especially church teachers, are to be “perfect” (2) in their words (2-12) and “wise” (13) in their

deeds (13-16).

James 4, the next chapter, explains that this is necessary to avoid “wars” and “fightings” “among you,” that is, in the church (1). Some believers are not praying as they ought (2-3), and are forming friendships with the world and so are not living the antithesis (4-5). After warnings against pride in their midst (6-10), James exhorts, “Speak not evil *one of another, brethren*. He that speaketh evil of *his brother*, and judgeth of *his brother*, speaketh evil of the law” (11). The next verse also forbids this evil judging of one “another” (12).

Thus we return to James 3:9: “Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the *similitude* [or likeness] of God”. It refers to believers hypocritically using their tongues, on the one hand, to bless God their Father but, on the other hand, to curse human beings who have been made in the image of God in regeneration (*Heidelberg Catechism*, Q. & A. 86) and so are now in the image of God.

Believers speaking evil of one another (4:11-12) starts and continues “wars” and “fightings” in the church (1) or, to express it more graphically, it kindles and feeds spiritual “fire” in the congregation (3:5-6). People engaged in such activities are not equipped to be teachers in the church (1) for they are speaking wickedly (2-12) as those lacking wisdom (13-16).

Next time, DV, we shall consider the teaching of the Reformed confessions on the image of God.

## CKCKS CAMP REVIEW: EXAMINE YOURSELVES

>>Nichelle Wong



*Nichelle Wong* is a youth in CERC.

The annual CK/CKS Camp was held from 19-22 December 2017 (Tuesday to Friday) at Aloha Loyang – Seaview Bungalow 1. The theme of the camp was “Examine Yourself” and I thought it was something different from the themes we had for the past few years. For the past few years, we focused on learning different aspects of doctrine. But, for this year, the organizing committee decided to have a theme which was more personal and applicatory for the youths. The theme verse was 2 Corinthians 13:5: “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?”. Psalter 69 was the theme song which speaks for a desire of God to search our hearts and prove that we love to walk in His ways.

This year, there were many new members who served in the camp committee and younger youths who joined us for the first time. Kuang (the camp master), Rachel, Noelene, Meryl and Given were part of the organizing committee this year. Except for Noelene, the rest of

the committee served for the first time. We thank God for their willingness to serve in the committee.

The four speeches during the camp were given by Rev. Lanning and three elders. One thing that I noticed was the speakers started all of their speeches with a question. Rev. Lanning started with this question: “Am I doing/ speaking/ thinking things that God requires of me?” He gave the first speech on Examine Yourself and emphasized the importance of self-examination. The speech was especially applicable since Lord’s Supper was on the Sunday after the camp. “Where are you devoting your life towards?” Elder Lim asked with regard to the speech about Contentment. He expressed how godliness is related to contentment and our calling to be always contented. The next question, asked by Elder Lee, was “Do we walk as children of light in this world of darkness? When the people around us see us, what do they see?” He reminded us of the sharp contrast between believers and unbelievers and our calling on the third speech on the Antithesis. The fourth speech on Love for the Church was given by Elder Leong and he caused us to ponder: “Do you ever give a thought to the church of Jesus Christ?” The speech taught us how we ought to love Her and to be a lively stone of the church. I thought the four questions asked by the four speakers were very thought-provoking.

After each speech, we had a profitable

time of discussion. The discussion questions were fitting to our different callings in life and to our Christian walk in this world.

Other than the speeches, we had devotions which were related to the speeches and a fun time of games and an outing. For the outing, we headed to The Cage @ Kallang to play Combat Archery and Ninja Tag. Thank God for granting us safety and protection. On the last night of the camp, the parents of the youth were invited for dinner and a night of games. Everyone enjoyed the games very much.

Overall, the camp was well-executed and edifying for all the campers. This was also the last CK/CKS camp for the Lannings (Jessica, Eric, and Emily) before they returned to Michigan. We are thankful to God for the time we had at the camp to fellowship with each other. Pray that God will continue to bless the youths as we apply the lessons learnt in the camp to our spiritual walk with God.

**“...godliness is related to contentment and our calling to be always contented.”**

## IN THE YEAR OF THE DOG

>>Daisy Lim



Daisy Lim is a member of CERC.

2018 is the Year of the Dog, beginning from the Chinese Lunar New Year. The Chinese zodiac is based on a 12-year cycle; each year in that cycle relates to an animal sign. In the Chinese horoscope, it is believed that the years represented by the animals affect the characters of people – their strengths and their weaknesses.

The dog is the eleventh animal in the 12-year cycle of the Chinese zodiac signs. It is believed that a dog is a man's good friend. A dog can understand the human spirit and obey its master, whether he is wealthy or not. The Chinese regard it as an auspicious animal. If a dog happens to come to a house, it symbolizes the coming of fortune.

**“...can we believe in all these inferences from the Chinese horoscope? Emphatically, No!”**

It is believed that people born in the year of the dog have the following:

- a) Strengths – valiant, loyal, responsible, clever, courageous, lively
- b) Weaknesses – sensitive, conservative, stubborn, emotional

As believers in our Lord Jesus Christ, can we believe in all these inferences from the Chinese horoscope? Emphatically, No! It would be a form of idolatry. We would be lured into the devil's trap to depart from trusting the true and living God when we trust in horoscopes, whether Western or Chinese, to foresee our future or as a basis for our present decision-making.

Does Scripture use the symbol of the dog to portray any characteristics of human behaviour? Surprisingly, Yes! Let us go through some verses.

- (1) **Exodus 22:31** Dogs as lowly creatures

In the Old Testament, flesh torn from beasts was considered unholy. It should not be brought as an offering to the Lord. It should be thrown away and fed to the dogs.

- (2) **Deuteronomy 23:18** The dog as an obnoxious creature

The price of a dog is equated to the hire of a whore. These should not be brought into God's house for any vow. They are both abominations to God.

- (3) **1 Kings 21:19 and 2 Kings 9:36** Dogs used as an instrument against the wicked

King Ahab and his wife, Jezebel, had wickedly plotted and killed Naboth because they coveted his vineyard, which to godly Naboth was the Lord's inheritance. He ought not to sell his inheritance for whatever physical gains. Thus God will ensure that their blood shall be licked by the dogs.

- (4) **Psalms 22:16** Dogs are numbered among the wicked.

Dogs are like the assembly of the wicked who had conspired the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ. The wicked shall be judged for their wicked deeds, even though their deeds did not take God by surprise and are in His counsel.

- (5) **Psalms 59:6** The dog as a noise-maker

The barking of the dog can be irritating and threatening, disturbing the peace of a city.

- (6) **Proverbs 26:11 and 2 Peter 2:22** The dog as a foolish creature

The dog will return to its own vomit; so a fool will return to his folly. Those who have known and tasted the wonderful grace of God in the gospel, and yet turn away to their own wicked ways, are indeed fools in God's sight.

(7) **Isaiah 56:10-11** Dogs considered as dumb and ignorant

If believers or ministers of the gospel do not faithfully share and declare the Word of God when occasion arises, they would be like ignorant and dumb dogs. For those who have lack of understanding and only look to their own ways and seek their own gains are like discontented, greedy dogs.

(8) **Jeremiah 15:3** Dogs as instrument of destruction  
God could use the dogs to tear, devour, and destroy the wicked.

For those who love to keep dogs as pets, this is not sinful. Please do not take offence. Dogs as pets are usually a great companion and are usually faithful in some household chores. They can also be used as guard dogs or guide dogs. Perfectly fine! They are creatures of God to serve His purpose.

Please do refer to the verses in the Bible for a clearer understanding of the verses as they relate to dogs. This article is simply to share some thoughts about dogs as we celebrate the Lunar New Year in 2018.

**“Does Scripture use the symbol of the dog to portray any characteristics of human behaviour? Surprisingly, Yes! Let us go through some verses.”**

## RAISING A COVENANT FAMILY

>> Rev. Arie Den Hartog.



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The covenant family is God's gift to those who marry in the Lord. It exists where husband and wife are bound together in the love of Christ in the unity of faith. The covenant family is created by God through the work of regeneration in the hearts of the two so married. The covenant family begins with being serious about marrying a fellow believer with whom we are truly one in the truth of the Lord. We must

avoid being overwhelmed by feelings with a pretty face or an attractive body when seeking a life partner. If we are guided mostly by sexual attraction we are in danger of joining ourselves with the wrong partner. Sober judgments must be made concerning whom we will spend the rest of our life with.

Raising and maintaining a covenant home is a calling and solemn obligation God gives to the married. This is one of the chief purposes of Christian marriage. The married are not to live only for themselves and their own worldly pleasure. They are to live serving one another and if God gives children, to raise these children in the fear of the Lord. The life of the covenant home has its source in living faith in the Lord and abiding union with Him. The covenant family serves the continuation of the church of Jesus Christ in the world and the cause of His kingdom. It therefore has a very high calling.

Raising and maintaining a covenant family in this ungodly world is a daunting task. It requires great application and the life-long devotion of the Christian husband and the Christian wife. As husbands and wives we must be partners in the work of the Lord. God in His Word has defined the role of each partner in the marriage. This order was designed by the wisdom of God to serve the welfare of marriage and the family. The husband and father is to be the head of the home. He has the responsibility to rule the home in love and maintain its godly order and discipline. The wife and mother is to be the help meet of her husband. She is to serve her husband and children in love. She is to be 'the keeper of the home', indicating that she has a role for which she must stay home for the great work of building her family in God's given knowledge and wisdom.

The fact that the family of the Christian

couple is called a 'covenant home' is very significant. Both in marriage and in the family the covenant of God Himself must be reflected. As the Holy and blessed Triune God, the three persons of the Trinity, Father Son and Holy Spirit live in perfect knowledge, communion and friendship with each other. The truth of God's own covenant could itself be the subject of an interesting and lengthy article to consider the wonder and beauty of this as revealed in God's Word. But our focus now will be on the covenant home.

Our high calling in marriage is to reflect the covenant life of God. This means that we understand that the very essence of marriage as created by God is that it was intended to be a personal and intimate relationship of communion and friendship between a man and his wife. This is the heartbeat of it what will be a truly covenantal home. Without this being present marriage has lost its heart. We are still living on this sin cursed earth with its many troubles and miseries and we still have of our corrupt nature with us. Because of our sins, the above description of our families will still fall short of its beautiful and happy ideal. Nevertheless, we must constantly strive for God's ideal for His glory and the blessedness of our marriages.

In the covenant home, sin between husband and wife must be regularly

**“The married are not to live only for themselves and their own worldly pleasure.”**

confessed before the cross of Jesus Christ. There must be sincere humble godly sorrow for the many sins that mar the beauty of our marriages. There must be repentance from these sins and sincere forgiveness offered. This is hard. It takes a lot of grace. Festering sin if left unresolved will soon destroy the heart of marriage for a time until it is again restored by the grace of God. Wounds and offenses must be healed with the balm of Jesus' blood and righteousness. This must be done with great haste and urgency. Doing this, the covenant of God will be enriched between us as husbands and wives.

Husband and wife must be committed to life-long relationship of faithfulness and love together until they are parted by death. In special situations where God has taken one of the spouses to heaven, there can by the power of God's grace still be a continuing covenant family. Strife and division, especially that which ends in divorce, is treachery before God. When one of the members of a broken marriage remains faithful to the Lord, He will also give grace to continue the covenant home and give grace to endure the pain of rejection and the suffering of separation.

Marriage must be a true and spiritual covenant relationship between husband and wife before children are born into the marriage. Great spiritual effort and much prayer must go into having a covenant home prepared and strong before God gives children, if He so pleases. This home must prepare the healthy spiritual environment for the receiving and nurturing of God-given covenant children. This is even more important than making a pretty cozy bed before the infant arrives.

The spiritual reality of the bond of love,

fellowship and friendship that exists between the husband and wife will by the grace of God create an environment of personal warmth and protection, and security which children so urgently need. Such an environment is vital for helping children to grow up to mature responsible and stable adults. When this is there, this will be profound and obvious to all those who enter the covenant home. The importance of this cannot be over-emphasised for the spiritual and psychological and social well-being of the children and the development of their personalities as children of God, and as citizens of the kingdom of Christ.

God and the Lord Jesus Christ must live by His Spirit and through His Word in the family for a home to be truly a covenant home. Without this reality, the home is not really a covenant home. Practically, this means that there must be structured family worship at regular times in the covenant home. This family worship must include the regular, daily, careful study of the Word of God. The Word of God must be applied to the lives of the members of the family in the regular course of the functioning of the family. The family must pray together and for one another. Both father and mother must be engaged in this family worship with their covenant children. The father must be the leader of this family worship. Leadership in this area is really more important than any other. Mother must teach her children the truth of God's Word while they are sitting on her knees and embraced by her tender affection. An excellent part of regular family worship is the singing together of songs of praise and thanks to God. There is great joy in singing. Covenant children usually delight in it. The covenant home should be a place of great joy. This joy must not be the

empty laughter of the world but the joy of the Lord and His salvation.

Especially while the children are still in the home, both parents must help the children with their many daily problems and struggles and disappointments. They must in the course of life in the home give wise counsel and advice for all the great issues of life. They must give encouragement in time of sorrows and trouble. The father must be careful not to be cold and distant from his children. He has the calling to lead His family. He must do this in fatherly love and sincere and hearty concern for the welfare of his growing children. Father certainly must not behave like a cruel tyrant in his home. For then he will grievously abuse his wife and children and cause them deep psychological and spiritual harm. (The grievous effects of this kind of behavior will often last a lifetime for those who experienced this abuse).

One of the greatest challenges of parenting over the years is to maintain a personal relationship with them even into adulthood, especially during the difficult teenage years. Father especially and also of course the mother must themselves be an example of godliness, holiness, reverence and humility before God. Only then can he hope to instill this same attitude in the hearts of their children. Fathers must lead their children in their daily behavior and walk. All of this requires time and sacrifice both on the part of father as well as on the part of mother.

Father must not be so busy with his own earthly career that he has very little time for the care of his children and show interest in their lives as they are growing up. Children are only with us in our homes for a very short time

in their lives. Woe unto the father who is seldom home long enough to take any genuine interest in the lives of his own children. Mother must be devoted in love to the care of her children, not be busy with an independent career in the world for her own glory and satisfaction. There are very few roles in life that require more self-denial and self-sacrifice than the role of the covenant mother in the home. The complexities and business of the modern home easily crowds out true covenant living. Godly parents must carefully order their own lives so this does not happen. Sadly, it does even in too many covenant homes.

To maintain a covenant home there must be firm, consistent and loving discipline of the children. This ought not to be hastily given in the fit of anger or out of despair with the sinful behaviour of the children. The reason for the ongoing need of this is reality of the sinful nature of our covenant children with which they all were born. Through discipline children must be taught the seriousness of sin in the sight of God and the importance of holiness and obedience in all of their lives. They need to be corrected and turned from sin. They need to be positively encouraged in the way of obedience and the righteousness. Every child, even in the same home is different. God made them each unique. Some are in need of more discipline than others. Some occasionally need corporal discipline like spanking. Parents who neglect this according to the book of Proverbs do not truly love their covenant children. The crying of children should not deter the need of serious discipline at times. Though discipline is grievous at the time it is given for both parents and children, it will yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness. This is God's

**“Our high calling in marriage is to reflect the covenant life of God.”**

promised blessing in the book of Proverbs and in Hebrews 12.

We raise our covenant family in the midst of an ungodly world that is desperately wicked and full of temptations. The Word of God tells us that we are not to love the world nor the things of this world. We need to condemn this world and its ungodly philosophy and its ungodly life style, and its entertainment. This we must do for our children's sake. This is urgent. The friendship of the world is according to the Word of God enmity against God and makes ongoing covenant fellowship with God impossible. Our homes and our children must be guarded from worldly influence. We must guard the books that are read, television that is watched and how computer and electronic devices are used by our children. Our families must be protected from the great evils of this world such as fornication, alcohol abuse and illicit drug use. They must

**“...there must be structured family worship at regular times in the covenant home.”**

**"To maintain a covenant home there must be firm, consistent and loving discipline of the children."**

also seek by the grace and Spirit of God seek to deliver our children from hearts sins such sinful pride, self-centeredness, and the covetousness and materialism of this world. Negligence in this task of raising our covenant family will greatly endanger our children for becoming worldly and joining the friendship of the world. Parents need to do all in their power to guide and protect their

children in the choice of friendships and the company they go around with outside of the home.

In conclusion, let me make one more important point. God's covenant with His people is known in Zion, in the New Testament, through our active membership in the true church of Jesus Christ. There God's people come together to worship the covenant God of their salvation. There He dwells with them and they with Him. In His Fatherly house, He shows us His greatness and glory, His mercy and lovingkindness. We enjoy and appreciate the reality of God's covenant with us through the preaching of the blessed gospel in Zion. God protects and keeps us as our might Lord and God from our enemies within the walls of Zion. The great blessedness of the

communion of the saints is experienced in the church of Jesus Christ. Often this is the place where good and strong bonds of Christian friendship are formed. According to Psalm 128 the Lord blesses His covenant children 'out of Zion.' We maintain our covenant families by bringing them with us to Zion. Leaving and forsaking the true church of God in Zion will have very serious consequences for us and for them. Our children must be instructed in catechism classes in Zion to raise them to maturity in knowing and understanding the great doctrines of His Word. The goal is to prepare them to confess their faith in the midst of God's peoples as citizens of Zion.

Let us strive with all our God-given powers to maintain this ideal for our covenant homes.

## A LETTER TO MY UNFORGIVING SELF (I)

>>Marcus Wee



Marcus Wee is a member of CERC.

Are you caught in the throes of being unforgiving? Perhaps your heart deeply aches with pangs of betrayal, hurt, and loss; forgiving the offending person seems nigh impossible. Perhaps you maintain a cold, distant relationship, purposely holding a friend or family member at arm's length, due to something he or she did years ago. Perhaps you are fed up with someone's repeated sins against you; you were as

forbearing as was humanly possible, and he crossed the line one time too many. Even worse, perhaps you refuse to recognise that you are being unforgiving, and justify your actions with a host of excuses.

Does the familiar feeling of indignant pride well up within you, bristling as you read these descriptions, as you are all too ready to justify your unforgiving spirit? Do you feel a distant pang of guilt that you are about to sweep away, all too quickly? If the descriptions above characterise you, you are not alone. All of God's children are tempted to harbour an unforgiving spirit towards others, whether it be one which festers over the years or one which flares up momentarily. The rest of this article is addressed to myself, in the situations

when I sinfully refuse to forgive others. I invite you to undertake this meditation together with me. Together, we shall examine Scripture's requirement on forgiveness and expose our feeble excuses for being unforgiving. Lord willing, in the next article we shall consider how we can grow to be more forgiving.

**"All of God's children are tempted to harbour an unforgiving spirit towards others..."**

## Scripture's Requirement on Forgiveness

Self, it is good for you to know clearly what God's Word says about forgiveness, so that you are under no illusions as to what it involves.

First of all, we need to look at God's forgiveness of sins, the heart of the gospel. When God forgives sin, He cancels the debt that the sinner owes to Him, and does not punish the sinner with death as he deserves (Rom. 6:23a). That God, the holy, righteous God, should forgive the sins of His undeserving people, is a miracle of grace. That this forgiveness involved the sacrifice of His only begotten Son for those who were His enemies is mind-boggling. Self, let's now apply this truth personally. **You** have been forgiven of God! Yes, you, self, who are the chief of sinners. You know your own heart and can see how evil and abhorrent your own thoughts are. But God has still chosen to forgive your sins! Could there be any greater wonder?

Next, we see that having been forgiven, God also expects you, self, to forgive others. God makes this clear in many passages of Scripture. We are instructed to pray, "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matt. 6:12). Do you pray this prayer, self? We are also commanded to be "kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph. 4:32). Do you heed this command? It is interesting to note that there are two different words for "forgive". The one used in Matthew refers to a letting go, not holding onto a debt. The one used in Ephesians refers to something more demanding. Not merely are we to let go, but we are to go out of our own way to do something

**"Scripture's requirement to forgive our neighbour is clear: self, you are to forgive your neighbour even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."**

pleasant for the neighbour. We do this by seeking his repentance, even at a cost to ourselves.

Scripture's requirement to forgive our neighbour is clear: self, you are to forgive your neighbour even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. How God has forgiven you is the model for how you forgive your neighbour. Yes, it is not easy to do so. You might even feel that your particular circumstances justify not forgiving your neighbour. Self, let's look at some circumstances which you think are such. Or, to put it more bluntly, let's expose some of your feeble excuses which you use to justify your unforgiving spirit, and see whether these excuses accord with how God has forgiven you.

### My Feeble Excuses for Being Unforgiving, Examined

1. "But he did *this* to me!" Or, "She said *that* to me!"

Go ahead, self, and fill in *this* and *that* with the worst possible reasons you can think of. Could it be physical harm to a loved one or yourself, which leaves you scarred, or involving the loss of

life? Could it be an emotional anguish which tears at your soul, inflicted by the gross callousness of your spiteful neighbour? Understand, self, that I am not belittling the hurt that you face or the magnitude of the deed done against you. The deed was indeed grievous, and the pain steep; it aches my heart even to think of it. However, *no matter how serious the sin committed against you*, God's Word unflinchingly demands: Forgive! Imagine if God, looking at the greatest of our sins, thundered, "But he did *that*! He delivered up my Son, and by wicked hands crucified and slew Him! She did *this*! She cried, 'Crucify Him!' to the very person who was supposed to save her!" If God were to treat you that way, self, there would be no forgiveness for you. However, God's forgiveness does not have its basis in what *you* did, but in what *Christ* did – it is *for Christ's sake* that God has forgiven you. Likewise, self, away with this excuse of not forgiving because of what your neighbour did; instead, forgive because of *Christ's sake*: what Christ did *for you*.

2. "But she hasn't repented! She has to repent first, before I forgive her, right?"

Self, perhaps you aren't trying to be unforgiving here; this could be something that you are genuinely wrestling with. How do you forgive the person if she shows no sign of repentance of the sin? Perhaps it may be useful to distinguish between the external *act* of forgiveness and the internal *spirit* of forgiveness. The external *act* of forgiveness, which must be accompanied by the internal spirit of forgiveness, can only be properly manifested when the offender repents of his sin. Otherwise, there is no forgiving (the act) to even speak of. Luke 17:3

instructs us to forgive the brother “if he repent[s]”. However, how can you genuinely manifest the act of forgiving your brother, self, unless you are ready in your heart to receive the brother’s repentance – that is, already possess a forgiving spirit? But that’s not all, self. Don’t just expect to sit back and wait for the brother to approach you. **You** go to him, and seek his repentance. Here’s the whole of Luke 17:3: “Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, *rebuke him*; and if he repent, forgive him” (emphasis mine). Self, God’s Word tells us to rebuke our brother (see also Matt. 18:15), to *bring him back* to repentance, such that we can apply the act of forgiveness to him! This ties in to the more demanding meaning of “forgive” used in Ephesians 4:32 – the one that requires us to seek out the neighbour’s repentance at a cost to self.

This takes care of a similar-sounding excuse that you may use, self: “Since he has a problem with me or did something hurtful to me, he should talk to me about it first. I’ll wait.” Imagine if God let Adam and Eve, cowering behind some trees, seek Him first to repent of their sins before He would forgive them – there would be no seed of the woman! Imagine if God let you approach Him first before He would forgive – there would be no forgiveness for you, self! God commended His love toward you, sending Christ to die for you, when you were ungodly, a sinner, one without strength, and utterly incapable of approaching Him (Rom. 5:6-8). Self, you need to imitate God in this too.<sup>1</sup> You need to possess a forgiving spirit towards your brother, and acting from that spirit, take steps to seek his repentance so that you may then manifest the act of forgiveness.

3. “I’ve forgiven him, but I don’t want to have anything to do with him.” Self, do you even hear what you’re saying here?! “I’ve forgiven him, but I’ve not forgiven him”? “I’ve cancelled his debt against me, but I still count his debt against me, so let me remain distant from him”? Yes, only you are capable of such manifest inconsistencies, totally depraved self! Here’s where you have to examine yourself: are your actions the manifestation of *love* in your heart, the outworking of a forgiving spirit? If your honest answer is no, then I’m afraid that’s hatred right there, self, the lack of love.

It’s likely that the brother or sister who sinned against us is someone who used to be close to us – a family member or close friend. That explains why the offence hurt us so badly. Self, for you to “forgive” such a person, and then *actively hold him at arm’s length* – that seems possible only out of an unforgiving heart, a heart of hatred, where no love resides. Imagine if God did that to you – if He forgave you, but banished you to live in a secluded corner of heaven, far from Him – what misery! What an unforgiving spirit! Instead, He chooses to dwell with His people, be their God, and wipe away all tears from their eyes (Rev. 21:3-4). What a wonderful example for us to emulate!

Now, there is no mandated level of interaction to which you must restore a relationship. It may very well be that the damage done to the relationship makes it such that the same closeness is no longer possible. However, you do need to examine yourself: are your actions after that the manifestation of *love* in your heart, the outworking of a forgiving spirit? Do not be too quick to answer this question, self; rather, pray

about it, asking God for strength to forgive where an unforgiving spirit still prevails.

## Conclusion

I pray your meditation on forgiveness has been profitable so far, dear reader. The Word of God is clear on the subject: Forgive, for you have been forgiven of a debt far greater than what is owed you. Shall we be as the unforgiving servant, who, having been forgiven of ten thousand talents by his lord, demand the payment of a hundred pence from his fellow-servant? Or shall we not rather be as Joseph, who, despite being sold to slavery by his murderous brothers, and having the power to destroy them, instead fell upon them, weeping in reconciliation? Perhaps you recognise Scripture’s uncompromising command to forgive, but find it immensely difficult to do so. Lord willing, we shall continue our meditation in another article and see how we can find the strength to forgive. Till then, may the grace of our forgiving God be with you!

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<sup>1</sup> Bear in mind this difference between God’s act of forgiveness and ours: His act of forgiveness is effectually manifested even before we come to repentance, unlike ours, which can only be manifested after the repentance of the brother. Remember, God’s act of forgiveness and forgiving spirit are both rooted in the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8).

## THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY DEVOTIONS

>> Rev. Ryan Barnhill



Rev. Ryan Barnhill is the minister of Peace Protestant Reformed Church in Lansing, Illinois.

The evening meal is finished. The father sits on one end of the table, arms folded over his chest, content with the good meal he has just eaten. His wife stands across from him, scooping the remaining food on a plate for one of the children. The children sit between their parents, chattering away about their day, still picking away at the remnants of food on their plates. After a few minutes, the father rises to pass out Bibles to everyone at the table. The children fall into silence, hands folded and Bibles open before them. Each family member reverently reads a verse of the evening's passage. After a lively discussion of what they read, they sing a psalm, and close in prayer. On a couple days of the week, they will even read out of one of the creeds, or discuss the Sunday sermons.

This is the good, biblical, and vital practice of *family devotions*! Is this found in *your* home?

A Christian who lives in a home with others leads a busy devotional life. Not only must he take time, every day, to study the Scriptures and pray *by himself* (personal devotions), but he must, if

he is married, read the Scriptures and pray with his *wife* (marriage devotions). In addition to all of this, he who lives in a home with others must take time, daily, to study the Bible and pray with his *family* (family devotions). It is this last form of worship – family devotions – that we will develop in this article.

Family worship is not tradition for the sake of tradition, but rests upon two solid pillars.

The first sturdy pillar family worship rests on is the evidence for such worship in the Bible. Family worship includes thorough instruction of children, instruction which Israel was called to give: “Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes. And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt write them upon the door posts of thine house, and upon thy gates” (Deut. 11:18-20). Surely, what stands at the center of the happy, God-fearing home in Psalm 128 is the worship of Jehovah – as a *family*. Then, remember that Joshua declared that he and his *house* would serve Jehovah (Josh. 24:15). Other such passages exist. Family worship finds good support in God's Word.

The second strong pillar family worship rests on is the doctrine of the covenant. We heartily believe and confess the doctrine of the covenant: the relationship of friendship God

establishes with His elect people in Jesus Christ. When a family is gathered together to serve God, they experience *fellowship with God* in the reading of His Word, in the singing of His Word, and in prayer. Furthermore, they enjoy *fellowship with each other* as they sit around the Scriptures. Also, knowing God establishes His covenant in the line of generations, they take seriously the command to *instruct* their covenant seed, and they partially fulfil this in family devotions. These devotions have solid support in the doctrine of the covenant.

Worshipping together is *vital* for the health of the Christian family. Your body requires food for proper functioning. Just so, you require spiritual nourishment for proper spiritual functioning. It ought not be that our spiritual nourishment is limited to Sunday worship; if that is our only meal for the whole week, we will be famished by the time the next Sunday comes! Yes, we eat a hearty meal on Sunday at church, but we should follow that with many meals *during the week*, Monday through Saturday, feasting on the Word in our homes. Without eating, we grow weak. By eating, we grow strong. Do you wish your family to be strong? Worship God together!

Because family worship is so important, we must zealously guard against its most formidable foe: busyness. The husband is too busy at work, preventing him from making it home on time for devotions. Without her husband, the wife is too stressed out to carry out devotions with the children after an

already hectic day, so she usually skips them. Children have homework to do, besides frequent obligations outside of the home in the evening – when will *they* have time to set aside to worship with their parents and siblings? Soon enough, the busy schedule swallows up worship in the home.

Considering family worship to be essential, and knowing how easily it slips away in the rush of life, we do well to make it a *priority*. Parents, we must be *committed* to daily communion with our children in the Word of God and in prayer. Young people, we must *diligently* see to it that *nothing* takes us away from this worship at home. Such disciplined consistency in this area of the Christian life might mean shuffling the family's schedule, waking up early, or staying up late; whatever it takes, we must make this worship a priority.

Knowing that such worship is necessary is one thing, but knowing *how* to go about it is another. Perhaps there are fathers reading this article who are intimidated by the task of leading their families, or mothers who would like to know more about the “how” of family devotions. It could be that some of the youth wonder how they can profit the most from these devotions with their siblings and parents. I provide below some basic guidelines for this worship.

- **Maintain reverence.** It is at home that children learn how to sit still and quietly during a time of worship – valuable lessons to learn for public worship, and even school. Children are taught, from an early age, that this is, after all, worship of the *holy God*.

- **Read the Word.** Read systematically through the Bible, book by book, chapter by chapter.

Encourage family participation by giving all the members of the family a Bible, and have them take turns reading the verses. Reading a whole chapter is not necessary, especially when the chapter is long. Stop reading, when necessary, and explain words that the children do not understand; reading with *comprehension* is crucial.

- **Discuss the Word.** Too often the Bible is shut immediately after the last word is read. This is one of the most serious mistakes in family devotions. Keep the Bible(s) open! Fathers, explain the doctrines in the passage. Teach the history, and help the children see the “big picture”. Reach for a commentary when discussing difficult verses, or accompany your reading with a good devotional. Ask good questions of the children. But especially, *apply* the passage personally to the family: struggles, sins, joys, school life, marriage, parenting, discipline, and more. Use this time to encourage openness, especially among the children. Talk to them and ask them about *their* love for God, their struggles and disappointments, the temptations they face, and their life of sanctification. And never forget to bring them to the heart of that Word: Jesus Christ and His cross.

- **Sing the Word.** We want our children to love the songs of Zion. What better way to instill this love in them than by passing *Psalms* around the table and singing a number or two? Worship Him with *singing!*

- **Pray the Word.** Allow the scripture passage previously read and discussed to colour the after-meal prayer. Filling our prayers with scripture makes them fresh from evening to evening. Furthermore, fathers, pray for

each child by name, and especially for the wife and mother in the home. Pray for the church, local and worldwide, so that the children have a love in their heart for the body of Christ. Also, teach the children how to pray. From their early days, we instruct them to say, “Lord bless....” When we judge that the time is right, we should teach them to lead the family in prayer, for their own growth in the discipline of prayer.

- **Integrate sermons.** Saturday devotions can be used to prepare for the Sunday sermons. Mondays are also a nice day to reread the passages of the sermons, and to discuss God's Word that was brought. This serves not only to fortify the connection between home and church, but also further to press upon the heart the messages heard in church.

- **Study the confessions.** We are Reformed. Partly what it means to be Reformed is that we are *confessional*. Family worship is an excellent time to introduce our children to our creeds, especially the ones they may not be so familiar with. For example, open up the Belgic Confession, read an article every day, and briefly explain it. May our homes be places where the confessions are *living* documents!

Family devotions – the pillar of the Christian home! Let us seek God's grace to be disciplined in this necessary worship. “...[B]ut as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Josh. 24:15).

## REFORMED POLEMICS FOR THE REFORMED BELIEVER (I)

>> Rev. Nathan Langerak



Rev. Nathan Langerak is the minister of Crete Protestant Reformed Church in Crete, Illinois.

Polemics is the calling of the Reformed believer. The English word *polemics* comes from the Greek word *poleméu*, which means *to wage war*. That word describes what is meant in the church by polemics. Polemics is the church's warfare waged for the truth over against the lie in which war the lie is defeated and the truth is victorious. In this warfare the lie is exposed as lie and refuted with the word of God. In this warfare the church contends earnestly for the truth.

This spiritual warfare of the church is not the church's warfare first of all, but Christ's. Christ is a warring Christ. This is the revelation of the exalted Christ in Revelation 19:11, "And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him *was* called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war". Such also is the revelation of the stirring vision of Christ in Isaiah 63:1-3, "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this *that* is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Wherefore *art thou* red in thine

apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat? I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people *there was* none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment". Christ himself said about his own work in the world in Matthew 10:34, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword". This warfare of Christ was carried on in the Old Testament through His church. He personally came in the incarnation to wage this warfare and in prosecuting this war suffered on the cross in order to crush the head of the Serpent and to destroy Satan, sin, death, hell, and the grave for His people. He continues this war after His ascension through His church.

The church must be a warring church because Christ is a warring Christ. Christ is not at peace with Satan, but came to destroy all the works of the devil.

Scripture everywhere demands this activity of the church, but nowhere more plainly or emphatically than in Jude 1:3: "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort *you* that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints". Here the Holy Ghost binds on the church the calling to oppose the heresies and false doctrines that aim to corrupt the pure faith of the church. She is called to oppose those false doctrines with all the strength that she

can muster and at all times in order to keep the faith pure and undefiled.

Polemics is a special application of the antithesis. In Genesis 3:15, God promised to put enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. This hatred and warfare between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman in the sphere of doctrine is polemics. Polemics is directed especially against false and deceptive doctrines and heresies directed by Satan against the truth. Satan on his part introduces lies, false doctrines, and wicked thinking into the church. The church on her part is called to expose and refute these lies, false doctrines, and wicked thinking.

The reality of the devil's relentless attacks upon the truth demands polemics by the church. In one of his fullest treatments of the subject of polemics in, *That These Words of Christ, "This is My Body" Still Stand Firm Against The Fanatics*, Martin Luther gives a compelling survey of Satan's efforts throughout history to destroy the truth of Scripture and Scripture itself as the source of all truth. He concludes with this observation, "He [the Devil] must be an adversary and cause misfortune; he cannot do otherwise. Moreover he is the prince and god of this world, so that he has sufficient power to so. Since he is able and determined to do all this, we should not think that we will have peace from him. He takes no vacation and he does not sleep. Choose, then, whether you would rather wrestle with the devil or else belong to him. If you refuse to be his, then grab him by the hair! He won't fail you but will create

such dissension and factions over Scripture that you will not know where Scripture, faith, Christ and you yourself stand.”<sup>1</sup> Here Luther makes plain first of all that warfare is an abiding reality for the church. While in this earth she must be the church militant for the simple reason that she is constantly attacked by Satan. He also makes plain that because of this activity of Satan there are two choices for the church: she can contend with him or belong to him. That makes sharp the necessity of polemics. The church that will not engage in polemics loses the truth and becomes the habitation of Satan.

The activity of polemics by the church is the manifestation of her love for Christ and God. Martin Luther, perhaps the greatest polemicist that has lived since the apostles, wrote concerning this reality of polemics when he was sharply criticized for his polemics. He mentions the criticism of his opponents: “We begin at the point where they write, produce books, and admonish that these subjects ought not be the occasion for rending Christian unity, love, and peace. It is a minor matter, say they, and an insignificant quarrel, for the sake of which Christian love

<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, *That These Words of Christ...Still Stand Firm*, The Annotated Luther, vol. 3, ed. Paul W. Robinson (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016), 174.

**“The activity of polemics by the church is the manifestation of her love for Christ and God.”**

should not be obstructed. They chide us for being so stubborn and obstinate about it and creating disunity”. To this Luther responded, “No, dear sirs, none of this peace and unity for me! If I were to strangle someone’s father, mother, wife and child, and try to choke him too, and then say, “Keep the peace, dear friend, we wish to love one another; the matter is not so important that we should be divided over it!”...Thus the fanatics strangle Christ my Lord, and God the Father in his words, and my mother the church, too, along with my brethren. Moreover, they would have me dead too, and they would say I should be at peace, for they would like to cultivate love in their relations with me”.<sup>2</sup> Here Luther makes the issue of polemics as an act of love for Christ stark. An attack on the truth is an attack on the family of the believer inasmuch as the false teacher attacks the believer’s Father and mother and brethren. It would be a thing incredible if someone would attack a man’s family and he would not defend his family. But this is exactly the kind of wicked counsel that many give with regard to the defence of the truth. Luther’s analogy exposes the total lack of love for God, Christ, the church, and the truth apparent in the attitude of those that will not contend earnestly for the faith. Luther said about just such a man, Erasmus, “He was far from the knowledge of grace, since in all his writings he is not concerned for the cross, but for peace”.

The activity of polemics serves several purposes in the history of Christ’s kingdom. First, polemics exposes false doctrines and the false teachers. They come in as angels of light, as wolves in sheep’s clothing, and as caretakers seemingly concerned for the sheep. These masks must be torn off to reveal

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 180.

the devil, wolves, and hireling hiding beneath. Second, polemics delivers Christ’s sheep from those false doctrines and delivers them into the light and liberty of the truth. The sheep are scattered and oppressed by these false teachers and must be gathered again not only with a positive presentation of the truth, but also by a refutation of the errors holding them captive. Paul wrote about this function of polemics in 2 Corinthians 10:5, “Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to obedience to Christ”. Here the scripture makes plain that only in the way of tearing down Satan’s strongholds of false doctrine are thoughts also brought into subjection to Christ and the truth. Third, polemics serves the development of the truth. The truth of God once delivered to the saints does not develop ordinarily in the ivory tower of the theologian isolated from the day to day struggles of the church of Christ in the world, but the truth develops in controversy. The history of the church gives abundant evidence of this truth. It was in confrontation with those that denied Christ’s divinity that the church in the first three centuries of the New Testament developed the doctrine that Christ is true Man and true God. It was in Augustine’s confrontation with Pelagius that the doctrines of grace were developed. At the time of the Reformation Luther was pushed by his Roman Catholic opponents to take positions that he was not inclined to take. For instance, in his confrontation with Roman Catholic theologian John Eck, Luther saw that the church is the company of the predestinated, and aligned himself with the much maligned John Hus who had been burned at the stake for that position by the Council

of Constance prior to the Reformation. The development of the truth through controversy is not only a principle established by history, but scripture reveals this as one of the purposes of heresy in 1 Corinthians 11:19, “For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you”. Here the apostle says that heresies are necessary in order that the elect of God be made manifest. The heresies are of Satan, but as all evil, serve the good purpose of the salvation of the elect by making them manifest, especially in their rejection of those heresies, the development of their faith, and by the exposure of those that are unbelievers through their adoption of those heresies.

The whole church and not merely one section or group in the church is called to doctrinal warfare. It is the calling of every officebearer according to the Reformed *Formula of Subscription*: “We declare, moreover, that we not only reject all errors that militate against this doctrine...but that we are disposed to refute and contradict these, and to exert ourselves in keeping the church free from such errors”. It is especially the calling of professors of theology according to the *Church Order*, Article 18: “The office of professors of theology is to expound the Holy Scriptures and to vindicate sound doctrine against heresies and errors”. Professors especially are to give themselves to the study of false doctrine and to warring against those heresies that oppose the truth. Polemics is also the calling of the believer according to the Reformed *Form for Confession of Faith*: “Have you resolved by the grace of God to adhere to this doctrine; to reject all heresies repugnant thereto; and to lead a new, godly life?”

The believer may not be surprised that this warfare comes very close to home. Jesus warned in Matthew 10:35-26 that when he brings the sword, “I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man’s foes *shall be* they of his own household”. The Apostle Paul warned the church in Acts 20:29-30: “For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them”. Polemics, being warfare, is a spiritually painful and bloody affair. Inasmuch as this warfare comes into the very family, relationships, and churches of believers it partakes of the nature of the bloodiest and most terrible of all warfare, the civil war. The antithesis of which this warfare is a part cuts along the lines of sovereign grace; election and reprobation run through the sphere of the covenant, and they are not all Israel that are of Israel.

Because of the reality that polemics is hard, flesh-denying work, and often involves the believer in bloody spiritual warfare with his own acquaintances, scripture also warns against a mere appearance of polemics by one who in reality does not do polemics. In Jeremiah 48:10 God warns, “Cursed *be* he that doeth the work of the LORD deceitfully, and cursed *be* he that keepeth back his sword from blood”. The work of the Lord is the work of the sword, the work of polemics against the enemies of God. The word translated *deceitfully* means *lackadaisically*. It is defined later in the verse as keeping his sword back from blood. The man warned in the text will not do the hard and spiritually bloody work of polemics. He will not

point out the heresies that threaten the church, name the names of those that teach it, threaten his friendships, or give up his personal agenda of peace and unity with those that teach false doctrine. The translation *deceitfully* to describe the activity of this man on the field of polemics is also exactly correct. His polemics are a vile deceit. The man cursed in the verse is not merely the one who does not do the work of polemics, but one who makes a great show of bearing the sword. He bears the sword, but he does not use it to shed spiritual blood. He is a man who merely speaks about polemics, defines polemics, and makes a grand show with his polished sword of doing polemics, perhaps even making his way onto the field of battle, but his sword remains unstained in the battle. For all his words about polemics, he does not actually do polemics at all. Luther described such men: “Their writings accomplish nothing because they refrain from chiding, biting, and giving offense”. Such men in their deceitful laziness with the sword of God are cursed by God. Their writings and work will accomplish nothing because God does not bless such a use of his word, but curses it and turns it to nothing. He gave his word in part to destroy the lies of the devil, to defend the truth, and to expose false doctrine. Jehovah Himself sets Himself against all those that oppose Him and His truth as Moses and the children of Israel sang in Exodus 15:3, “The LORD *is* a man of war: the LORD *is* his name”. So must the church and every believer do—not merely speak about—polemics.

## REJOICING AND WEEPING TOGETHER (I): INTRODUCTION

>> Lim Yang Zhi



*Lim Yang Zhi* is a confessing young adult in CERC.

The church is family.

No, don't think about it doctrinally, as a matter of fact. Sure, we in our heads know the church is our spiritual home. Rather, I am speaking more than matters of fact; I am writing about *experience*. Is family life your experience in this church?

The experience of family life is an experience of love. The brother listens; the sister understands; the elder cares.

But is your experience that the brother does not take the time to listen; that the sister does not understand what you are going through; or that the office-bearer does not seem to care about you?

Now, stop right there. Do not point the finger; turn the question around: Are you the one that does not listen, does not try to understand, and does not care?

If you answered *yes*, something is wrong. If we, the church, are family, we should not turn deaf ears to each other. We should listen and put ourselves in others' shoes; we should *love!*

That is where our title comes in. God, who eternally loves us, teaches us how we ought to love one another in the church. God, through Paul, says, *Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep* (Rom. 12:15).

The text has two actions: rejoice and weep. To rejoice means to be full of cheer, joy, and gladness. For a Christian, to rejoice always means to be full of cheer, joy, and gladness *in our salvation*. *We rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory*, because we believe that Jesus Christ delivered us from all our sins (1 Pet. 1:8). When we hear this good news, we are glad, as the Gentiles were in Paul's day (Acts 13:48).

At the same time, we have earthly joys that we experience daily. They are the joys of having our physical needs met—food, shelter, clothing, transportation—and having such things in abundance. They are the joys of having a spouse and children and of having friendships in the church. Over these things, we rejoice (see Eccl. 3:12-13).

But there is weeping too. Weeping is the expression of grief, sorrow, and pain. What a stark contrast to our joy! For a Christian, weeping is always rooted in our sorrow over our spiritual depravity. Listen to the cry of Paul: *O wretched man that I am!* (Rom. 7:24). Or listen to the cry of the Psalmist: *When I kept silence [over my sin], my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long* (Ps. 32:3). Our sorrow over who we are by nature is deep, and it comes out with a loud, audible cry.

There are earthly sorrows that we experience daily. Sicknesses from flus; stresses from schools and jobs; troubles in making a living—in such events, we experience pain to some degree. We can add here, too, anything we respond to with a negative feeling. A train fault that made us late for work (again); breaking the glass jar in the kitchen; getting your hands soiled with your child's foul-smelling poop. As insignificant as these things are, they contribute to the emotional sorrow we experience.

All of us rejoice; all of us weep. All of us have joys; all of us have sorrows. Now the calling is to rejoice *together* and weep *together*—that is, with others in the church.

To rejoice and weep together with someone means we listen to the brother or sister. What is his joy; what is her sorrow? We listen for the joy when the brother tells us. We give our fullest attention when sister breaks down in our presence. Then we try to understand the brother or sister. We picture the feeling of the brother's joy in our minds, so that we know what makes him so happy and glad. We let the sorrow of the sister sink into our hearts, so that we know what makes her devastated. When we listen and understand, then we respond with the same joy and the same weeping. Smiling with the brother, we tell him, "Thank God; that's great to hear!" Weeping with the sister, we gently whisper in her ear, "It is okay; cry your heart out here. I am here to cry with you".

To rejoice and weep together is the reality of the church's way of life.

But how often we lose that reality! When I switch off my mind as my brother shares with me about his day—there's no listening in that! When, rather than giving him my attention, my focus is, "Oh, wait till he hears what I have to say!" I don't even try to understand what he is going through! And when our brother is finished, we dully reply, "Oh". Life in the church, then, is not for the brother and sister; but for me, myself, and I.

Paul, under inspiration, would not have us live that way. Through the first eleven chapters of Romans, he exhausts words to describe the love of God for us, the eternal decree of God's election of His church, and

the power of justification that lies solely in God's grace through faith. Salvation is of God, not of ourselves!

If salvation is not *of ourselves*, can our lives be about me, myself, and I? Find Paul's answer in Romans 12. *Present your bodies a living sacrifice...unto God: Is that about me, myself, and I? Not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think: Anything about us? Let love be without dissimulation: What about now? The texts speak for themselves. Our salvation from God alone spells out a life that gives itself to God and His people; and a life that gives itself to God and His people is a life that loves God and His people.*

And if Paul's words are not compelling enough, listen to apostle of love, John: *If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar* (I John

4:20). You and I are liars if we say, "Thanks be to God!" but do not love one another in the church, much less strive to learn to love.

Again, the question is: are you the one that does not listen, does not try to understand, and does not care? Are you, am I, the one that does not *love*?

The calling in the church is to love. The calling is to learn the proper way to love; and that way to love is to rejoice with those who rejoice, and to weep with those that weep.

How do we do so, especially in our congregation? We have talked about listening, understanding, and responding. But more can be said. Stay tuned, D.V.

## BOLD TO WITNESS

>> Rev. Stephan Regnerus



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The day before his Saviour was killed, the apostle Peter did not have the courage to tell a young girl that he knew and loved Jesus. Strikingly, just fifty days later, the same Peter was suddenly bold to stand in front of the multitudes and preach of the wonderful works

performed through Jesus. What could explain such a radical transformation in Peter? Was he emboldened by drunkenness? "No!" Peter denied adamantly. The explanation given in Scripture was that Peter had been filled with the Spirit of Christ. By the power of the Spirit, Peter suddenly had the courage to testify in a way unlike he had ever had before.

We are not so different from Peter. Sometimes we are bold to witness; other times we have a mouth full of teeth but no words to say. We know that we ought to confess, and yet the good that we would say we struggle to say. In order that we might be "ready to give an answer", let us look at what

witnessing is, examine some reasons why we struggle with witnessing, and conclude by seeing what we might do to improve our witness.

Biblical boldness is having the courage to speak against what is wrong and to defend the truth, even when doing so will be unpopular and perhaps even cause you to be mocked by others. True boldness is having a deep and passionate love for God and the truth of His Word, which love supersedes your personal desires and concerns about reputation. It is speaking of Christ even when no one else dares to do so.

We must witness, for God commands it of us in His word. We confess in Psalm

66:16, “Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul”. The mandate to witness is seen even more clearly in the NT, in texts such as 1 Peter 3:15, “Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear”. Witnessing is so important that Christ warns He will deny entrance into heaven to those who do not confess Him on this earth. Matthew 10:32-33, “Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven”. We must testify of Christ, or we stand in danger of eternal damnation.

Sadly, an honest examination of ourselves leads us to conclude that we are not always so willing to confess Christ before men. We rather easily talk about sports figures or weather or work, but we are hesitant to talk about the wonderful work of salvation that God has performed in our heart through Jesus Christ His Son. Why is it that we are so slow to speak of Christ?

One reason why we might not witness is that we are afraid of the social implications of witnessing. We know that people in the world generally do not speak about Christ in their conversation; it is not “socially acceptable” to speak of Christ in public. We, by nature, want the respect of men and are worried that we will lose their respect if we do speak of Christ. Thus, we keep our mouths shut in hopes of maintaining our social status among men.

Another reason why we might hesitate to witness is our own ignorance

regarding God’s Word. Whether it be a perceived or a real ignorance, we imagine that we are not able to give a coherent defence of the truth. We are worried that we might be “out-argued” by someone more intelligent or logical than us. Or maybe we are worried that we will not have every proof text on the tip of our tongue, so instead of revealing our own ignorance, we keep quiet.

But the ultimate reason why we do not witness is the devil, who is hard at work inside of us. The devil hates Christ, and the devil delights within himself when Christ is silenced. He does not want the Word of God proclaimed, for he knows that Christ is the Word (John 1:1), and when the Word is proclaimed, then Christ is proclaimed. Thus, the devil works to seal our lips. He tempts us to be silent when the co-worker takes God’s name in vain. The devil prompts us to doubt our ability to give a coherent defence of the gospel.

Because the devil is the one who tempts us not to witness of Christ, and because the devil is a liar and the father of all lies (John 8:44), we can rightly say that the reason we are not bold to testify of Christ is because of *sin*. It is because of our sinful nature, given to us by our parents, and which sin we daily add to, that we do not want to witness. And the more we sin, the more we lose the sense of God’s favour. And the less we enjoy the sense of God’s favour, the less likely we are to confess: “Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul”.

Therefore, if we want to become more effective and regular in witnessing, we must start by addressing sin within us. We must search our hearts to see what hidden faults we have. And as God

gives us the grace to see and know our sins, then we cry out for forgiveness, confident that “God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn. 1:9). The key to becoming a better witness is not merely to change our outward behaviour, but to believe the gospel of Jesus Christ. We do not say: “I can do this. I can witness because of my own strength”. Rather, we say: “I believe in Christ who saves me from my sins! And this same Christ who saves me from sin has also given me His Spirit, who empowers me to witness of Him to others!”

But as we do go out and witness, a few warnings must be given against ineffective methods of witnessing. In the first place, a warning must be sounded against inappropriate uses of the internet for so-called “witnessing”. Online argumentation about theological topics is not effective witnessing. Some Christians seem to think that boldness in witnessing means to engage in extended online discussions to defend their particular position. But I have yet to see one person convicted of the truth and led to penitent confession of sin as a result of online argumentation. This is not to say that the internet has no place at all in the realm of witnessing. It does. But the way in which witnessing on the internet is effective is when information about the truth is made available to those who are already seeking the truth. That is, their internet search is subsequent to their interest in the Reformed truth.

Secondly, a warning must be given against the mentality that the best way to witness is to share the gospel with anyone and everyone with whom we have contact. This type of individual

tells the stranger on the elevator about Christ, as well as the person sitting next to him on the bus, as well as the person in the next table at the restaurant. Although this individual may be commended for his enthusiasm about spreading the gospel, he ought to consider a more effective means of promoting the gospel. And a more effective way is to witness during God-given opportunities to those with whom we already have an existing relationship. When the colleague asks why you do not work on Sunday, take

the opportunity to tell of the God who set apart one day in seven for us to rest and enjoy especially close fellowship with Him. When your friend asks about why you dress so modestly, then tell them about your Lord who rules over your body as well as your soul.

As you seek the courage to witness, be encouraged in knowing that the Lord will give you the grace necessary to testify of Him. It is especially through God's Word that we are given the gracious power to witness. Read of God's

goodness in His work of forgiving us our sins, and you will be given a desire to share the good news with others. Read of how heinous and offensive our sins are before the holy God, and you will be given the strength and conviction to warn others against continuing in the path of unrighteousness. Sit under the preaching of the Word, hear Christ speak to you, pray for utterance, and God will equip you to be a faithful witness.

## HOLINESS: A CONSCIOUS CHOICE

>> Elder Lee Kong Wee



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### Introduction

Dear young people, what comes to your mind when you think about a holy life? Do you imagine a priest in religious garb, a monk in his robe chanting, or an ascetic sitting atop a pole meditating? Or perhaps you think a holy life means abstaining from drinking alcohol, smoking, and partying. No swearing, no drugs, and no sex. People who are holy seem to take religion pretty seriously – they go regularly to church, the temple or mosque, and faithfully perform the required rituals and prayers.

It is crucial that we understand what holiness is, and what it means to live a

holy life. For without holiness, no man shall see God (Heb. 12:14).

### It's Real

The idea of holiness is essentially separation, or consecration. When something is holy, it is set apart and distinct from the ordinary and common. The concept of holiness is first and foremost applied to God. He is the Holy One – separate and distinct from all His creation. He is God, and there is none else (Isa. 45:22). He is separate from all sin and wholly consecrated to Himself and His glory. Because God is holy, He calls His people to be holy (1 Pet. 1:16). That means we are called to be separate from sin (to hate and forsake it) and consecrated to God (to love and serve Him whole-heartedly). To be holy is therefore to become more and more like God Himself. But all of us are by nature unholy. We were ugly sinners, spiritually dead and delighting in our sins, and wholly incapable of doing anything to make ourselves holy. Neither do we desire to be holy.

Left to ourselves, we only become more and more unholy, falling deeper and deeper into the snare of our own sins, until we finally perish. We may live an outwardly moral life. We may observe a certain code of conduct and abstain from societal vices. We may not have broken any law of the land and are free from gross sins such as adultery and murder. But for all that, in our unregenerate state, dead in sin and without spiritual life, we are unholy.

If we are to become holy, God must accomplish the work. This work of making us holy, or sanctification, the Westminster Larger Catechism defines as a 'work of *God's grace*' (Q&A 75). It is therefore not a work that we deserve, or that we could accomplish on our own, or in any way dependent on us. But it is wholly attributed to God. Our entire salvation, including sanctification, is of the Lord. It is of His sovereign grace and mercy. We were dead in trespasses and sins, but God Who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, has made us spiritually alive in Christ

(Eph. 2:1,4,5). And the life of faith we now live *is* a holy life. As children of God, chosen, regenerated, justified, a holy life is not a mere *possibility*. It is a present *reality*. It is the fruit of regeneration and justification that *must* happen in the chain of salvation. For we have been chosen in Christ that we should be holy (Eph. 1:4).

### **Live it!**

But that does not mean that we just passively sit around and expect God to zap us with holiness instantly. We are called to work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Phi. 2:12). Paul exhorts Timothy to ‘flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart’ (2 Tim. 2:22). We are called to mortify the old man and quicken the new man in us (Eph. 4:22-24, Col. 3:5). We are to ‘abstain from all appearance of evil’ (1 Thess. 5:22). We must walk as children of light (Eph. 5:8). The Captain of our salvation summons us to ‘put on the whole armour of God and wrestle against principalities, powers,...against spiritual wickedness in high places, that we may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand’ (Eph. 6:11-13). We are to grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3:18).

The life of holiness is marked by two outstanding characteristics: struggle against sin, and faith in Jesus Christ.

Struggle against sin? It seems to us that godly men are hardly troubled by sin. They seem to be above the temptations of the flesh and are not attracted by the world. Aren't they always on the mountain-top of faith, near to God and far from sin and wickedness? But

regardless of how God-fearing and sinless they may appear to be, we can be certain that they *do* struggle with sin in their lives. The Word of God is crystal clear that sin dwells in every human heart, and there is none righteous, no not one (Rom. 3:10) (except Jesus, of course). When we were born again, we died to sin (Rom. 6:2). But sin is not dead to us. The guilt of sin is removed and the dominion of sin is broken in us, but sin is still very much alive in us, i.e. in our old man. Just read Romans 7. Yes, it is the great apostle of the New Testament who wrote that chapter, in which he speaks of the titanic struggle between the old and new man in him. We are called to mortify the old man (HC Q&A 89). We are called ‘Christians’ because we fight against sin and Satan in this life (HC Q&A 32). The very struggle against sin is evidence that we are spiritually alive and striving to live a holy life. The more we grow in grace and godliness, the more we struggle with sin, because we become more conscious of the heinousness of our sins, and how much we have offended God. Even the holiest man in this life has only a small beginning of obedience. A large part of his life involves great struggles against sin.

But the life of holiness is also marked by faith in Jesus Christ. Our very bitter struggle against sin daily drives us to the cross. We realise increasingly our utter inability to fight against sin and walk in obedience. The good that I would I do not. The evil that I would not, that I do. Our only hope is in the ONE power that is greater than the power of indwelling sin in us. When we look by faith to the cross, we know sin has no dominion over us (Rom. 6:14) – that's the motivation to fight till our last breath! Faith that all, ALL, my sins are forgiven me and not one is counted

against me to my condemnation. Faith that I shall at last have complete victory over sin and the grave when Jesus comes for me either at my death, or else at His second coming. This life of faith is sustained and strengthened as we attend to the means of grace that God has graciously given to us – worship, prayer, reading and meditating on the Word.

As we fight against our sins and walk by faith, the Lord conforms us more and more to the image of our Lord Jesus Christ. That is the ultimate goal of growing in holiness. To be conformed to Jesus Christ, the perfection of holiness, for He is God.

### **Blessed!**

It seems that living the holy life is no easy thing to do. Indeed it is. For it is nothing less than fighting a lifelong battle against our sinful flesh. But the blessing is unspeakable. For to live a life of holiness is to live the reality of the covenant of grace: a life of covenant fellowship with the Triune God. In other words, eternal life, which is nothing but the glorious, overwhelming blessing of God Himself as our God in Jesus Christ! Life with God! (Gen. 15:1; Rev. 21:3) What can be more thrilling and blessed than *that*? Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God! (Matt. 5:8).

The holy life is the only life worth living. For it is life with the Holy One. Now and forever. Do we live holy lives?



# News from the Churches

## Singapore

From 19 to 21st December 2017, the annual CK/CKS retreat was held at Aloha Loyang. There were 4 speeches given based on the theme "Examine Yourself" (2 Cor 13:5). Speech 1 was "Basis/Standard of Self Examination" by Rev. Lanning, speech 2 was "Contentment" by Elder Lim Seow Thong, speech 3 was "Antithesis" by Elder Lee Keng Wee, and the last speech was "Love For Church" by Elder Leong Fai Chong.

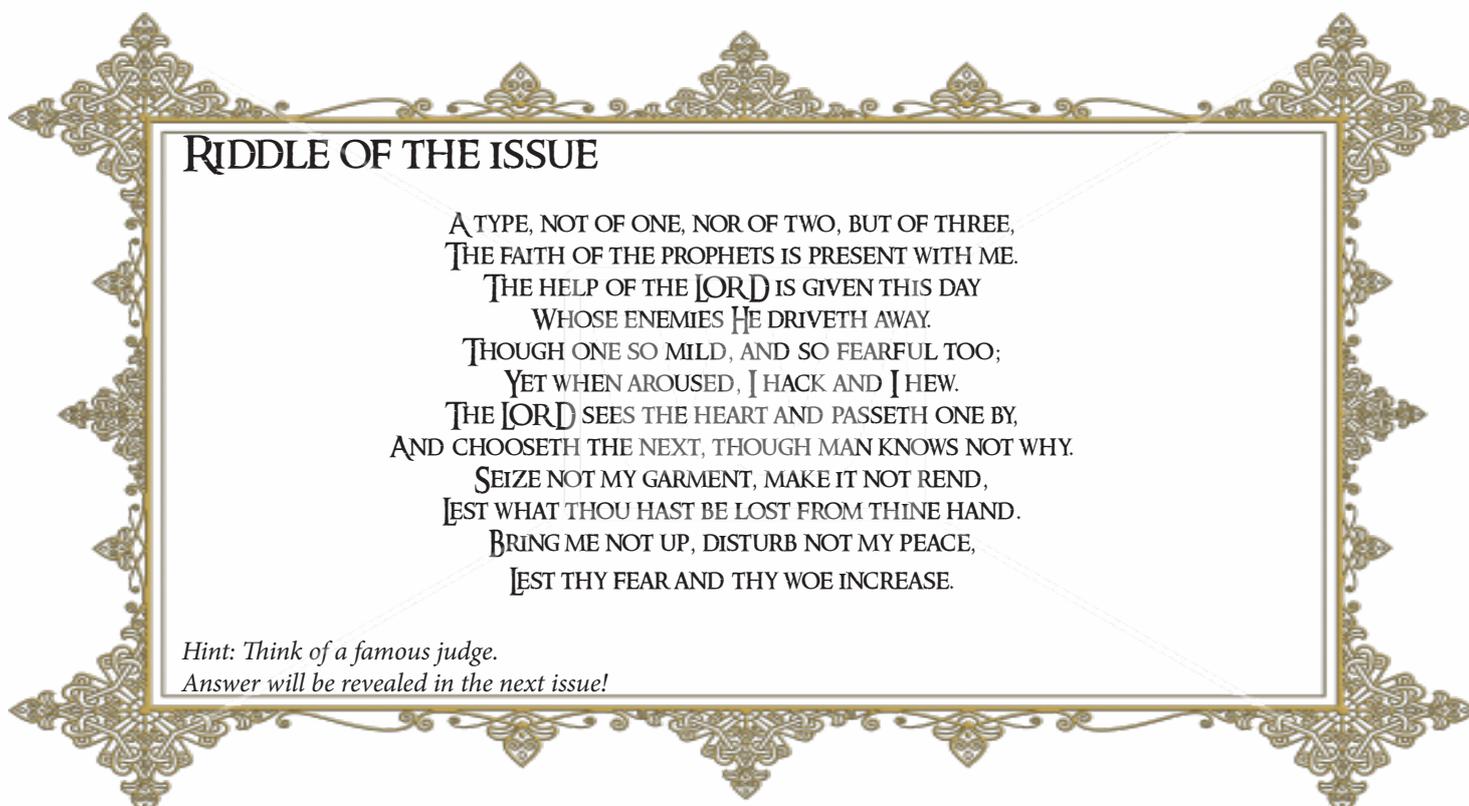
On 23rd Dec, CERC held a farewell for the Rev. Lanning and family who left on 25 December for the US following Rev. Lanning's acceptance of call to Byron Centre PRC. Although we miss The Lannings dearly, God has been gracious to send Dave Noorman and his wife, Carisa followed by Rev. Arie Den Hartog and his wife, Sherry to feed CERC with the Word for the next several months. The Noormans will stay from 29 Dec 2017 to 16 Jan 2018, and the Den Hartogs from January until at least June 2018, Lord willing.

On 1 Jan 2018, CERC welcomed the new year with a New Year Day's outing to explore Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve from 10-2pm. CERC is thankful to God for His providence in seeing us through 2017 and seek His grace for 2018.

## Philippines

A delegation representing Doon PRC and the Foreign Mission Committee plans to visit the missionaries and the mission field from February 16-27, 2018. Coming on this visit will be Rev. Griess and Deacon Joel Van Egdorn.

The Classis of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines is scheduled to meet on Monday, February 26.



## RIDDLE OF THE ISSUE

A TYPE, NOT OF ONE, NOR OF TWO, BUT OF THREE,  
THE FAITH OF THE PROPHETS IS PRESENT WITH ME.  
THE HELP OF THE LORD IS GIVEN THIS DAY  
WHOSE ENEMIES HE DRIVETH AWAY.  
THOUGH ONE SO MILD, AND SO FEARFUL TOO;  
YET WHEN AROUSED, I HACK AND I HEW.  
THE LORD SEES THE HEART AND PASSETH ONE BY,  
AND CHOOSETH THE NEXT, THOUGH MAN KNOWS NOT WHY.  
SEIZE NOT MY GARMENT, MAKE IT NOT REND,  
LEST WHAT THOU HAST BE LOST FROM THINE HAND.  
BRING ME NOT UP, DISTURB NOT MY PEACE,  
LEST THY FEAR AND THY WOE INCREASE.

*Hint: Think of a famous judge.*

*Answer will be revealed in the next issue!*



Eight people making Confession of Faith



Urban Farm outing at Vacation Bible School



A game of ninja tag during CK Camp



Fashion show during CK Camp's special night



A portrait of the Lannings after 5 years in Singapore



Sending off the Lannings at the airport

### Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church

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

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

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

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