



salt shakers

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**REFORMATION DAY
CONFERENCE (YOUTH)**

The Life of Martin Luther by Prof. Hanko

13 November | 2:30 – 5pm | CERC

11 Jalan Mesin #04-00

GUIDED INTO ALL TRUTH



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Hello YOU! Welcome to the 5th issue of Salt Shakers! As you probably noticed, this issue is released in conjunction with the celebration of the 16th century Reformation. If you've not much idea about the Reformation, do read up about it as this was a great and important event that defined the Church of God in this world.

The Reformation was sparked off by the desperation for Truth in the hearts of God's people. The glory that was due to God was nowhere to be found, and in its place were doctrines and practices that exalted man and condemned them at the same time.

The alienation felt by God's flock was felt by the Psalmist too as he said in Psalm 84:2 "My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God." Though the church physically stands, it can be in ruins spiritually, and the faithful saints cry out, "How long?"

On a personal level, we can also be in need of reformation. Do we claim to be Christians but live without the rule of God's Word in our lives? Do we treasure God's Word, but only those parts which are convenient to believe and beneficial to our earthly desires?

There comes a time when the child of God says, "Enough is enough". Where he stands only and wholly on the Word of God and challenges the sickening tide of falsehood that has overwhelmed God's people, even if it puts his life in danger. He would not anymore stand for the doctrine of the wicked, but would rather enjoy the truth of God's Word even if he has to humble himself to great extends. He says, "For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." He decides that a sin would no longer plague him without opposition, as he now belongs wholly to His victorious Saviour who will help him live unto Him.

The decision to reform is for all of us. How desperate are we for Christ's rule in our lives? Do not slack, and do not doubt. It is time for reformation.

Psalm 84:12 O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee.

Christ regardless
paul

What is Deepavali?

>> Bro Ishu Mahtani and Josiah

“Deepavali,” or “Diwali,” (Markiscarali) is a major Indian festival celebrated by Hindus, Jains and Sikhs all over the world. It is also called “The Festival of Lights.” Diwali marks the return of Lord Rama to his kingdom of Ayodhya after defeating (the demon king) Ravana, the ruler of Lanka, in the epic Ramayana. According to Hindu legends, the significance of having lights or lamps lit during this time is to signify victory of “good over evil” for every human being.

This is also a season when many Hindus celebrate a time of good harvest. Especially for the farmers living in the rural areas, it is a time when they look forward to selling their crops and gaining wealth and prosperity. These celebrations were first started in India by farmers after they reaped their harvests. They celebrated with joy and offered praises to their god for granting them good crops after months of toil and hard work.

Deepavali is also a time when families have their yearly family reunion. Colorful outfits are adorned by the young and the old during this time, while homes are lit up with magnificent displays of candles, garlands, and many other decorative items.

The Difference Between Deepavali and Christmas

Someone once commented that “Hindus seem to celebrate Deepavali as Christians treat and celebrate Christmas”. Is this true? What is the difference between the two? During both celebrations, gatherings are held, and songs and music can be heard, and meals are shared. We may hear laughter and see warm fellowship and exchange of greetings (and oftentimes gifts) between people. Yet, great differences do occur between the two religions.

Hindus take this time to celebrate, worship and give thanks to their gods. Sometimes, hindu gods are fashioned in the likeness of certain scared animals like elephants, cows, and monkeys. However, this is wrong and sinful in the eyes of God. As God clearly states in Exodus 20, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God...” Worshiping gods other than the one true God is a sin. Making images of God out of our own sinful imagination is a great mockery of the Almighty God. God’s word tells us why this is wrong in Rom 1:22-23. “Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.” When Hindus turn to images of creation instead of the Creator and say, “I have faith in you”, they corrupt the glory of God.

The festival of lights may seem to be a time of much rejoicing, just like during Christmas. But, Hinduism has nothing profitable to offer mankind. Can man-made gods possibly give anything back to man? Can a soul be saved through the worship of idol gods created from man’s hands? Can we receive the forgiveness of our sins and be saved from the depths of hell through the worship of idols? Psalm 115 says, “Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat. They that

make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them.”

The Hindu's Beliefs in the Light of God's Word

The Hindu believes that god is one, but at the same time he confesses that there are many gods. All gods are representations of the one true god, Brahma, who has the power to create. Also, Hindus believe that the goal of life is to be reunited to god. Every religious practice of the Hindu is directed toward the realization of this oneness with god. To know oneself is to know god. The old and oft-repeated Hindu phrase which expresses this is: “God and I are one.”² This teaching goes beyond what scriptures teaches about us being the image bearer of God to us being God or part of God Himself. Genesis 3, records for us the lie the devil used to tempt Eve into eating the fruit: “ye shall be as gods”. Man is not God; he does not have the right to decide what is right and wrong, what is true and false, and what is good or evil. This only belongs to God, the Alpha and the Omega. Will all kinds of religious practices save us from the condemnation of hell? The answer is “No”. The “Lights” in Diwali sadly does not give true comfort and salvation from one's sins. It does not even speak of it. God's Word tells us that man can never merit anything with the eternal God who created and owns everything. Man must be punished for his sins because God is a just God. No mere man is able to save anyone, or even himself, from eternal hell, nor grant the forgiveness of all our sins. Man, because he is totally depraved and dead in sin cannot atone for the debt he owes to God. Hinduism and “karma” does not and cannot offer salvation from sins. Salvation, God reveals to us, is in the cross alone; the sacrifice of the Son of God for the atonement of the sins of His dear children. Isaiah 53:6-7 speaks of this. “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him (Christ) the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her

shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.” Salvation is in the Lamb of God alone who died a bitter and shameful death on the cross.

Jesus, our True Light

The only light which we ought to look for is the Light of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and He shines in and through our hearts. And, we can look for this beautiful light when we turn to the Holy Scriptures, the Bible. The light which God will shine upon His people, when they look to Him as the true and living God, will outshine all the stars we can see in the skies, never mind the thousands of candles which are lit by mere man during any festive season here on earth. His Word should be the only lamp upon our feet, a light upon our path.

When God sent His only begotten Son to come and die for our sins on the Cross, it was the most important event in the history of mankind. But man refused to believe. We read in John 3:19, “And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” And perhaps that is why mere man turns to the many light bulbs and candles, to try and artificially light up their lives. All these, instead of repenting and running with all possible speed to the cross. John 8:12 “Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”

Conclusion

Christians may seem to celebrate in a similar fashion as Hindus. But the key difference is, while Hindus celebrate the return of Lord Rama after defeating (the demon king) Ravana, Christians celebrate Christmas to remind ourselves of the miraculous birth of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The Son of God came into the world to crush the serpent's head and earn salvation for His people. His people who were once condemned because of sin are now innocent because of Christ. Christ's righteousness is now counted as theirs! Since Christ's righteousness is perfect, God's

children now have a place in heaven and their names are in the Book of Life. Christ says in John 14 “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.” So we read in John 9:5, “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world”. Without this light, we will see nothing, know nothing about Salvation, and only see despair, sorrow and pain.”

Hence, no matter how bright any “Festival of Lights” may appear to us, we must remember that these lights will not last forever, and are of no use to us now and at the Day of Judgment.

Let no other light draw us beloved, but the light which shines forth from the glory of God, so that we may be drawn nigh unto Him each day. May His Word continue to abide in us and may we be His witnesses, in this dark and sinful world. May the people of God, by His grace, shine forth brightly in the world, even amongst those who celebrate Deepavali. Bring them the gospel of grace in love, saying “Repent and believe in Christ who forgives freely!” To live apart from Christ is death and by God's grace, may they come to know the only true and living God, and His Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

May we be reminded of the word which Paul mentioned to the Philippians in chapter 2:15, which reads, “That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world”.

Information and Quotes from:

1. S.P Sharma; Seema Gupta (2006). Fairs and Festivals of India. Pustak Mahal. p. 79. ISBN 9788122309515.
2. Rinehart, R (Ed.) (2004), Contemporary Hinduism: Ritual, Culture, and Practice, ABC-Clio, ISBN 1-57607-905-8

Portraits of Faithful Saints

Book Review

>> Yang Zhi

As we all know, the Reformation Day Conference 2010 has just happened recently to celebrate the Great 16th Century Reformation. Thus, tying in with this joyous occasion, it is fitting that this book is highlighted in this issue of Salt Shakers.

Portraits of Faithful Saints, as the title suggests, tells of faithful saints of God who stood for the Truth in spite of heavy opposition. The author of this book writes about 55 persons. Though some of them did not stand for the exact doctrines we hold today, still they played major roles in developing the Reformed doctrine we know today. All of this rich history is summarized into five parts and fifty-two chapters. This book covers extensively the history after Christ's birth; from the death of the Apostle John to the controversy of common grace in the PRCA.

The book has its limits; the author is not able to go into every bit of detail in each individual's life. Thus, the author gives some suggested readings rather than a bibliography, as he had consulted so many books that he couldn't possibly list them all for us. But still, the author is able to explain to us the major events of the individual's life, ending off each summary with a conclusion that may be applicable to us. This trait makes the book very useful to the reader.

Another unique trait of this book is that it brings out men who worked 'behind the scenes' during the Reformation. When we think of the Great Reformation, many of us tend to link it with Martin Luther and John Calvin. But what about people like William Farel and Ulrich Zwingli? The many men who helped in the Reformation are names we never heard of before. It is wrong to 'conclude that they are of little or no importance in the understanding of the Reformation.' The author states this conclusion as 'a sad mistake.' (Page 168) And it truly is, for without knowing these men, we will not be able to fully see how the Reformation slowly spread throughout the world.

This book is very important, due to the fact that its rich history concerns us as the descendants of our Reformed forefathers. How are we to truly understand the Reformed doctrines unless we know of the history behind it, with all the blood, sweat, and tears these faithful men have shed for us? God has so graciously preserved the influential works of His saints for His own. And thus it is a great gift to receive (and be) the fruit of the Reformation. May we be able to realize this great truth that lies beneath CERC and not be ignorant of this rich history and God's wondrous Works; like the Israelites were in Judges (2:10) which the author speaks of in the ending of the last chapter of the book.

Ending off, I would like to quote from the book. It asks, 'shall another generation arise which knows not the Lord? May God forbid it. (Page 420)' I truly hope that we will not be a generation which knows not the Lord.

Title: Portraits of Faithful Saints
Author: Herman Hanko
Reformed Free Publishing Association,
Michigan, USA, 1999
Hardback, 450pp

The Importance Of Personal Devotions III

>> Prof. Hanko

Introduction

Personal devotions consist of Scripture reading and prayer. Scripture reading ought always to be first, because Scripture is God's speech to us and we need God's speech to us and his word in our minds before we can say anything to him. Our prayers are always a repetition of what God says, or our prayers are firmly based on and influenced by what God says. If we are very troubled, for example, we bring our troubles to God because God says to us, "Cast all your care upon him, for he careth for you" (1 Peter 5:7). And that very verse tells us how to cast our cares on him, for it first says, "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God" (verse 6). If God did not say to us that he cares for us, we would never dare to bring our cares to him, for he who created all things and is so great that he is greater than the whole universe, can hardly be interested in and concerned for our little problems. But he is; he himself says so. And even if it is difficult to imagine how this is possible, we believe what the Bible says.

That is just an example. We will talk more about that when we talk about prayer as a part of our devotions. But now we are talking about reading Scripture. There are some dangers that we must avoid when we read Scripture. Let me list some of them.

1) One danger is that we jump around all over Scripture, every day reading a passage from a different place. This is, generally speaking, not the best way to read the Bible. It is better to read one section or one book. By one section, I mean, for example, the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. Or by one book, I mean Genesis, or Judges, or the Gospel According to John.

2) Depending on how familiar we are with Scripture, we ought to read the simpler passages before the more difficult; and read the more difficult only after we have improved our ability to read Scripture with understanding. It is better to read Acts than Ezekiel, or 1 Samuel than the prophecy of Zechariah. We ought to go from the simpler to the more difficult. Yet, we must not be fooled by what appears to us as something very simple. John's epistles and gospel may look easy, but they are the most profound books in the whole Bible. When I was first in the ministry, it took me so long to make a sermon that I looked for simple texts. John's epistles seemed to me to be exactly what I was looking for. I was thankful to God that I did some work on the epistle before I began to preach on it, for I soon learned that John's writings were not the simplest parts of Scripture, but the most difficult. And so I abandoned the idea of preaching on John's writings. Since then, I have ventured

from time to time into John's writing (especially his epistles), but I never felt very satisfied with the sermons I did preach. I kept thinking: There is a lot more in the text than I can see. In an effort to understand more fully these epistles and John's gospel, I have read them for my own personal devotions. That has helped

3) We must not try to read a large and long passage every day. It is better to read two verses and know what they mean than 50 verses and not really know what they are about. I do not recommend these many programs that tell you how to read through the whole Bible in one year. That program is simply getting someone to read a lot, but understand almost nothing. There is no profit in reading merely for reading's sake; so that I can say, "I read the whole Bible in one year!"

Avoiding those dangers will help us with our reading of Scripture. My father used to tell us, and I found that to be true, that when we are children or young people we like the historical parts of Scripture the best. When we are adults, we like the "meaty" parts of Scripture the best: the epistles and prophets. But when we get old, our favorite is always the Psalms. I find myself turning constantly to the Psalms, and how I love to sing them.

I do not mean that the Psalms are not very precious to any child of

God. They are, indeed, because they are a complete biography of the Christian's spiritual life. There is no single experience of the child of God which is not found in the Psalms. We can see ourselves reflected in them on every page. But be that as it may, there are some rules to follow in reading the Scriptures – if they are to be truly devotional and be a part of our personal devotions.

The most important rule is that we understand what we read. There is not much sense in reading the Bible if we have no sense of its meaning.

Once again, I use as an example from our family devotions. From the time our children were small until they married and left the house, we were careful to be sure they understood what we read at our mealtimes. To do that, I would take the time to explain what we were going to read before we would actually read the passage. Just as soon as the children were learning to read, even if they knew only less than half the words, they would take their turn reading a verse. Throughout the reading, every child was encouraged to stop the reading and ask what something meant. This frequently opened the door to discussions (especially as the children grew older), and sometimes we would only read a verse or two because of the long discussions we would have. In fact, we would sometimes have Bible Dictionaries at hand to look up strange words, such as: what Ed was; what is an acacia tree; what is shittim wood; where was Tyre and Sidon in relation to Canaan; etc.

The point I am trying to make is that understanding is crucial. A very rule in order to understand a text is that we do not, first of all, ask ourselves the question: What does this text mean to me and for me? How does God speak to me? How does this text help me? This sort of approach is self-centered and will not have good results in coming to an understanding of God's Word. The very first question we must ask ourselves when we have read a verse or part of a verse is: What is God saying about himself in this verse?

I cannot emphasize this enough. Are we so self-centered that we are interested only in ourselves and really care nothing about God? If so, we ought to be ashamed of ourselves. If my wife and I have been forced to be separated from each other for a while, and I receive a letter from her, then my great interest in the letter is not: What does she say about me? I can't even imagine reading her letter in that way. I would, I think, skip over it all and try to find those parts of the letter in which she talks about herself: How she is doing? Is she well? How is she keeping busy? Does she have any problems?

If you should ask me why I am so interested in what she says about herself, my answer would be: I love her because God has given her to me to take care of. I want to know how she is doing.

The Bible is God's letter to his church. He does not give us this letter, in the first place, to talk about us; he gives us this letter so that he may tell us about himself. Never forget: Scripture is the infallibly inspired word of God in which he reveals himself to us as he is in Jesus Christ. We cannot properly know what the Bible says about us, unless we know about what the Bible says about God.

How can we know that we are God's people unless we know that God has chosen us eternally in Christ in the decree of election? How can we know we are his people unless we know all about the suffering and death of Christ on the cross? This is so true because I know that I am a terrible sinner and that I cannot be God's child except in the suffering and death of Christ. The more I know about God and Christ, the more I can and do know what I have to know about myself.

Calvin, in his Institutes of the Christian Religion says that there are two things we have to know. We have to know God and we have to know ourselves. But the two are in that order: the knowledge of God first, and only then the knowledge of ourselves.

Let us not be selfish, self-centered, spoiled brats in our reading of Scripture. Let us take our cue from David: "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple" (Psalm 27:4).

The result will be that the starting point of our devotions will be the awareness of the greatness and glory of God. This is important so that we do not talk to God as if he is our next door neighbor. And, not only that, but it will be the way to understand how great God is and how small we are; how great, therefore, is his mercy and love to us poor sinners, and how undeserving we are. Sometimes our devotions will consist of little more than a cry of thanksgiving to God and a song of praise to him who is so great and so glorious. When we attain that height, we have begun to understand what devotions are all about.

I have some more things to say about our reading of Scripture, but they must wait.

Questions for discussion:

1. Why is it better to take our devotions from larger sections of Scripture rather than jumping around from one text to another?
2. Why does a child of God want to know as much as he can about God?
3. Why is doctrine important for our personal devotions?
4. Some Christians read a devotional book (like Spurgeon's Morning and Evening) for devotions. Is this a proper way to have devotions? What is best? To add a devotional book to our meditation of Scripture, or to read a devotional book in place of our meditating on Scripture?
5. Is it permissible and helpful to look up commentaries on a verse we are using for devotions?
6. Is it helpful to make use of Bible Dictionaries or Biblical Encyclopedias to help us understand a passage better?

KNOWING THAT WE ARE HIS

>> Pastor Lau

Introduction

Every human being is born dependent. The sense of belonging to someone and somewhere is most fundamental and important for the healthy growth and development of the human nature. Without this sense of belonging, one lacks the confidence to venture into the unknown.

In the Christian life, there are many new and unknown territories for a child of God to experience. Some of these spiritual experiences can be quite frightening with serious consequences. Fear is not the best place for a normal learning experience. We learn and grow best and confidently in this world when we know that we belong to its caring Owner and Provider.

Thus, the Psalmist commands God's people to know how they are related to their God – "...we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture."

Why We Are Jehovah's

Things belong to each other as they are meaningfully related to each other, and together they function in harmony and unity. Think of the different pieces in a jigsaw puzzle. The curvy sides of each piece fit those of others perfectly, and together they present a beautiful picture. The pieces belong to each other. They belong to each other because they have the same creator who determines their respective shapes and images. Each piece is lost and meaningless when it is not placed where it rightly belongs, according to the design of the creator.

As Christians, we must know where and to whom we belong before we can live meaningfully and happily in this world. The Book of Genesis is the book of beginnings in the Bible, the Word of God. In the beginning,

God created the heavens and the earth, and all things therein. And man was created after the image of God. So we Christians, as human beings, belong to God by virtue of Creation. He did all things according to His own good pleasure and out of His infinite wisdom. We are the way we are because of God's determination. We belong to Him and find our meaningful place in Him. Any form of denial of the Almighty Creator is the forsaking of the proper place to which we rightly belong and from which, alone, we can begin all rightful thinking.

The Jehovah Who establishes His Covenant (friendship) with us is this God, our Creator. He made us, and not we ourselves. We must know that among our many friends in this world, there is one who is the Mighty Creator of all things. And we belong to this Mighty One Who knows us through and through because of His own determination of all things concerning us! What a wonder and privilege to have such a friend!

It is He Who has brought us into existence, both physical and spiritual, and not we ourselves. He creates and redeems us in Jesus Christ. We are doubly His!

The Implication Of Being His

Being possessed and owned by another means that we are not alone, but belong somewhere and to someone. Such a thought of being owned can either bring joy and comfort or it can bring misery and great apprehension. It all depends on who the owner is.

If we belong to the evil one, we are indeed in deep trouble, as he cares not for us but only seeks to use and dump us finally. Oh yes, the evil one will first deceive with his wicked lies

and then show his true colours when we are safely in his hands, doing his bidding. We then become wicked like him and condemned of God to eternal perdition. Here, we have no comfort.

But, on the other hand, to belong to Someone as good as God Almighty Who changes not, there is no greater comfort and joy. This is because He shows Himself able and willing to take care of His own according to His good promises to His own. He is the Sovereign One ruling over all and causing them all to fall out according to His eternal good council which serves our well-being.

That we belong to Him means that He has undertaken to be responsible for us. Whenever something or someone is in trouble, we not only consider the state and condition of that troubled object itself, but also look for any other who may be responsible for its being and well-being. So, when a child is in trouble, we look for his guardian – the one who has undertaken to care for him. An irresponsible guardian may disappear at such an hour, shirking his responsibility. But we may not have such an idea of God. He is never irresponsible like sinful men. When He has undertaken to do something, He will make it good with His whole being.

He has undertaken to make us His people and the sheep of His pasture. We belong to Him as His people to show forth His praise. We belong to Him as His sheep to enjoy His shepherding.

The Blessing Of Knowing That

The word 'know' used in Scriptures can refer to the different depths of perception of things. For example, Adam was said to 'know' Eve and she brought forth a son. The 'know'

used here speaks of intimate, sexual, physical knowledge. But 'know' can also simply refer to being acquainted or familiar or aware.

God wants us to know that we are His in a deep way. In a superficial way, in the messages we have heard, we have come to know this truth that we belong to God. When the Psalmist commands that we should know that we belong to Jehovah, he calls us to an in-depth knowledge of that. We must know that in our experience and, in our soul, be able to rejoice in it. We can ever grow in greater depth of such knowledge. He becomes ever more precious to us as we become more aware that we belong to such a Mighty God.

To be a good and faithful member of a good church is a sure way to know this God and all His glory better. This is so because a true Church not only declares the true Word of God, but also ensures that Its discipline is upheld to the glory and honour of His Name. Such a Church is also very supportive of all who would walk in Jehovah's way.

The more we know of His perfections and our miserable conditions, the more we desire to belong to Him. It is always our lingering doubt of being His that gives rise to problems in our Christian walk. The Lord knows who are His, but do we know whose we are? And do we know how great He is to whom we belong? For the perfect knowledge of such things we must wait for Heaven. And, since God commands us to know them in this lifetime, He Himself will teach us as we go along with Him.

The sure signs of true spiritual growth are: 1. The growth in deeper appreciation of God in His attributes and perfections. 2. The growth in knowledge of our own unworthiness and total dependence upon Him. 3. The growth in confidence that we belong to Him as His people and sheep under His guidance and care.

Conclusion

God created us, and redeemed us in Christ. We are His because He brought us into existence. He is responsible for our well-being because He chose to save us from sins and destruction. Having begun a good work in us, He will perform it until the Day of Jesus Christ.

We must learn to trust Him in all things, and to obey Him, knowing that what He requires of us is only good for us. We can trust our Good Shepherd to help us overcome the many difficulties along the path of obedience.

God will uphold His own good name. He will not allow Himself to be known as a God Who has failed to save His people and His sheep. We must know and understand that, and walk in His way confidently. In that way, we can be happy Christians, come what may.

This is to walk by faith. Whatever is not of faith is sin and we are called to cleanse ourselves of such sins in the Blood of Christ. Amen.

“Know ye that
the LORD he
is God: it is he
that hath made
us, and not we
ourselves; we
are his people,
and the sheep
of his pasture.”
Psa. 100:3

FACEBOOK and

>> Julia Ong

What is facebook?

“Facebook is a social networking website. To flesh out this definition a bit more, it’s an online community—a place where people can meet and interact; swap photos, videos, and other information; and generally connect with friends, family, coworkers, fellow students, fellow hobbyists and enthusiasts, and numerous others in their social network. Facebook connects people within cities or regions, work or school, home or abroad, and so on. Built on an architecture of profile pages that allow individual users to share information about themselves and communicate with others, Facebook seeks to create an environment in which members log in regularly to keep track of what friends and colleagues are doing, share their own activities, interact about interests and hobbies, send messages, and join groups and networks—just to name a few things.”- Introduction to Facebook by Indometric

Facebook can be said to be the most powerful social networking tool in the world’s history. In no other website are lives made so public and information divulged so freely. It is most apt that in this post-modern era, where opinions define truth, a melting pot of ideas and expression has evolved. Facebook prides herself on the fact that there are currently “more than 500 million active users, 50% of our active users log on to Facebook in any given day and people spend over 700 billion minutes per month on Facebook. (Facebook, Press Room, Statistics)”

Even one who has never used the internet in his life would have seen columns in Life! sections of The Straits Times on Sundays having caricatures of notorious celebrities put in Facebook format. Also, the media uses Facebook to obtain information about matters that organisations aim to keep in the dark. Even to the ungodly, Facebook is a vice when used unwisely. At least 5 people have been fired after posting their complaints about their job on their Facebook statuses or on their friends’ Walls. It was also recently reported in The Straits Times (8 Oct 2010) that “Facebook and other social networking tools are being used by sex assailants in the Philippines to lure their victims, contributing to a rise in such crimes.”

“Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.” (Ecclesiastes 1:14)

Truly, much of Facebook can be described by “vanity and vexation of spirit”. There is little significance of the change in relationship status of a non-christian friend from “In a Relationship” to “It’s complicated”. There is even less significance of learning that your friend’s sister’s friend has uploaded a video of herself dancing. It would not harm me if I did not know that my cousin changed her profile picture. All these notifications that clutter my “News Feed” do not matter to me at all, but with Facebook, it has become possible, attractive and almost an obligation to indulge in these visual treats. Yet while we pry into the lives of our friends, our sinful nature in us causes us to subconsciously develop envy of the pleasures that our friends can afford, and we pride ourselves in the things we can afford and we are greedy for more.

“See that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” (Ephesians 5:15,16)

the CHRISTIAN

In reference to the above quote from Facebook statistics, how many hours does one spend on Facebook in a week? In a day? Commenting of a friend's photo takes approximately 10 seconds, and writing on a friend's wall to wish him "Happy Birthday!" takes about the same time (multiplied by all the friends who have birthdays on that day). Moreover, Facebook must surely be credited for the most number of ridiculously trivial games around. Café World allows one to run a restaurant and cook up to 100 types of different foods and can recruit various friends to be assistants in the venture. Mafia Wars allows one to purchase weapons and fight various mafia gangs and to thief from other gangs. All these games have incentives for one to return to them the next day – for instance, "food" at Café World turns rotten if one does not return to serve it on time. All these seemingly benign activities with not much consequence add up and result in wasted time in excess of hours! How much of this time could be spent in the study of God's word? In ministering to the sick and those who are discouraged?

"That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." (Ephesians 4:22-24)

Amidst all the temptations in Facebook, a Christian must exercise much discipline in abstaining from the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. A Christian can and must use Facebook for purposes entirely different from that of the world. Organisation of events has certainly been expedited and Christian events can be publicised to old friends (whose email addresses, telephone numbers or addresses we have forgotten), overseas friends, and loved ones. We must see Facebook as our conversation in life and that our photos, updates and comments are part of our testimony. They should "minister grace" to others and not tempt them to sin. We must carefully choose our friends, that we might not be tempted by their walk in life as well. Lastly, we must examine ourselves: Are our motives for using Facebook truly for God's glory? Or are they for our boastful pomp and show of the places we can afford to go, the things we can afford to buy and the many friends we have?

"All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." (1 Corinthians 6:12)

In conclusion, I would summarise Facebook as being an amalgamation of all forms of social networking and communication into one portal. It is convenient, attractive and unbelievably addictive. Yet as Christians, we must use it wisely and not "be brought under the power" of Facebook.

Family Devotions: A Mark of God's Peculiar People

>> Daniel Teo

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. 1 Pet 2:9

Look back to what you were before your conversion. Whenever you are tempted to be proud of your present standing, remember the horrible and miry clay out of which sovereign grace alone has plucked you. When you are on the throne, recollect the dungeon from which the grace of God uplifted you. When you are in full possession of your spiritual faculties, and are rejoicing in the Lord, do not forget the time when you lay sick, even unto death, until the Great Physician passed that way, and healed you.

What a great change conversion is! And what a great change conversion Works! How wonderful is the effect of regeneration! We had not obtained mercy, but now we have obtained mercy; we were not a people, but now we are the people of God.

How the apostle (1 Peter 2:9) delights to set forth these contrasts between the past and the present of the Lord's chosen people! By remembering what we were, we are made to appreciate and enjoy more what we now are. We may well praise him who has wrought this wondrous change in us. We were not His people, we were sinners of the Gentiles, not the chosen Hebrew race. In times past, we were not worthy to be called a people, but we are now the people of God. We had not obtained mercy, we had not even asked for it; some of us were so blinded by our self-righteousness that we did not

know we needed God's mercy, or did not want it; but now, we have obtained mercy.

Christians are a special people because God has purchased and preserved us for Himself. We are His possession now. We are distinct from the world and we are called to live our lives as people in the world but not of it. Jesus said concerning His disciples, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17:16).

Today, let us rejoice that we are God's peculiar people and victoriously walk in His marvelous light. May our words as well as our actions truly declare His praises!

Are we the children of the Lord our God? Are we separate from the ungodly world, in being set apart to God's glory, by the purchase of Christ's blood? Are we subjects of the work of the Holy Ghost? Lord, teach us from these precepts how pure and holy all thy people ought to live!

Be encouraged today, daily prayer: Father, as we deal with the temporal demands of this day, may the principles that guide us be of eternal origin. We seek not to blend in with the world but to be the salt of the earth. You have made us a peculiar people who are called to be the light of the world. May our light shine for all the world to see so that our good deeds bring praise

to Thy holy name. Amen.

Ye are the salt of the earth: ...Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid...Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. (Matt 5:13-16)

"Give ear, O my people, to my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old: Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done." (Psalm 78:1-8)

For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments: And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not stedfast with God.

Psalm 78 takes us back to Mt. Sinai and the Covenant made with Israel

For thou [art] an holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that [are] upon the earth. Deuteronomy 14:2

there. God promised to be the God of His people, to be their Friend, and God told them that they would be His special and peculiar people. As His peculiar people, they were given the law of God, representing their duty in His covenant with them. Should they break the law, they would be violating the covenant.

These verses tell us that the content of this Psalm is for the children and generations to come. These verses give the goal in teaching our children the testimony and law of God, the biblical history of Israel and God's dealings with them in grace.

As many families know, family devotion is a difficult task. Though many reformed families know its importance, being disciplined enough to have family devotion is very challenging every week.

Along with Sabbath observance and the catechizing of children, family devotion has lost ground. Fewer and fewer households are taking it seriously. We should be persuaded that family worship is as needed today as it has ever been in the history of the church. The reasons we do not and would not do family devotions are as much as the amount of lesser things that fill each day.

In addition to public worship, it is the duty of each person in secret, and of every family in private, to worship God. Family devotion or worship, which should be observed by every family, consists in prayer, reading the Scriptures, and singing praises; or in some briefer form of outspoken recognition of God. Parents should instruct their children in the Word of God, and in the principles of our holy religion. The reading of devotional literature should be encouraged and every proper opportunity should be

embraced for religious instruction.

If there is nothing from Monday morning to Saturday night, the church is left with precious little time in Sunday school and worship to fill the spiritual void of a week of confrontation with the fallen world and our fallen natures.

So how does one become motivated to have "the want to want devotions"? We should make family devotions a "real" priority in our families. It is often a high priority in our families that is not "real". We would rather jog, read mountains of magazines, and have lots of other mediocre excuses for not doing family devotions. We must recognize that family devotions are foundational to Christian living in the home.

Family worship and devotions are a vital part of the thriving Christian family, making time for it should be a priority. If you have to give up some event or adjust schedules, do it! Your family's eternal souls are far more important than soccer games and careers. By establishing a consistent and daily family worship time, you are leading your family to a deeper devotion to God, the Word, His people, and the generations to come. The teaching of our children is important as it touches on every aspect of their being; their mind, their heart and their behavior.

Let me conclude by emphasizing that this is a command and a calling. It comes especially to parents, but also to the whole church. There is a generation arising in our midst. There is a world and a satan out there attempting to draw them away. How will they be kept? Yes, only by God's grace. But grace never means carelessness. On our part, they will be kept only by diligent teaching. God

will use that to continue and preserve His covenant.

Proverbs 4:1-27 Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding... Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil.

For our children, we pray that they will take heed to their father's or parent's instruction during family devotions or family worship. For ourselves, we pray that the Lord will give us the will and the strength to instruct our children in our home. In this way, we show forth the praises of Him who hath called us out of darkness into His marvellous light.

God's Peculiar People & Public Schooling

>> Noelene

I have always been in a Christian school, a Methodist one, except when I was in Kindergarten 2. However, I find no difference between my current secondary school and the other non-christian schools when I came to know of how the Protestant Reformed Schools are like. In this article, I would be sharing my experiences and the benefits and challenges in my school life.

Like any other student in Singapore, school life is very hectic. Teachers always rush through the curriculum and thus we need to try and keep up. There is also a lot of competition in school, especially with regards to grades. Secondary School revolves around getting good grades that will get you into a good Junior College in the future. This sometimes makes me lose focus of my calling in life as a pilgrim in this world. Many times I have wanted to quit school due to the stress but I am thankful to God who always reminds me of my calling as a student. Proverbs 10:4 says 'He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich'. This verse always encourages me to work hard and be diligent because God has called me to be a student and to work for His glory alone.

Being in this world, we are all mixed with the ungodly. Many schoolmates and even teachers use vulgarities and swear and curse loosely. Whenever they do that, it makes me feel uncomfortable. Many of their conversations turn me off too. Recently, everyone is into Korean pop and movies. I always get a very hostile feeling from schoolmates whenever I tell them not to indulge in those things. I believe these situations are tests of my faith. When Paul said "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jews first, and also to the Greek", it presses me on to stand firm in God's law.

I have many Christian friends, but they are mostly Methodist and Pentecostals. We usually share our beliefs, especially during morning devotions in assembly and chapel. I find that the Scripture is often interpreted very shallowly and wrongly and the services I have in school are just like a concert where a band comes in and the pastor tells life-stories or fictional stories. We often argue on the doctrine of TULIP and how a proper service should be like. Though I keep explaining to them, they still do not understand. They find the reformed faith "too holy", traditional and weird. But I believe that it is not my work to transform them but God's, for it is said in Ephesians 2:8 "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourself: it is the gift of God." It is not the work of men which gives salvation, but the work of God.

As a result of school work, co-curricular activities and other activities, it is a struggle for me to do devotions. The nights are usually filled with homework to complete which results in less time for sleep. It is a challenge for me to wake up early in the morning to do devotions; but by God's grace, it is slowly becoming a habit. I have to learn how to prioritize my activities so that I would have time for devotions, both day and night. Psalm 1:2 keeps me going as it says "But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night."

Joshua 1:9 "Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of good courage: but not afraid, neither be thou dismayed for the Lord thy God is with thee withersoever thou goest". Jer 33:3 "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not." These verses tell us that no matter which school we may be in, or where we are, we are to walk in fellowship with God and be equipped to serve Him fully. God puts us in different circumstances, whether it is in a public or home school, for His own purpose. He has the best plan for us to serve Him in our calling. May the LORD lead and guide you wherever you may go. Let us always remember to pray without ceasing and be faithful to our calling on this journey (Psalm 1, Philippians 4:6-8)

SOLI DEO GLORIA

> Prof. Herman C. Hanko

The heart of the tradition which we have received from the Calvin Reformation is the principle of the glory of God. Soli Deo Gloria was the starting point of all Calvin's theology; and it is this basic truth, so completely Scriptural, that has characterized the Reformed faith up to the present. For example, the first question and answer of the Westminster Shorter Catechism reads: "What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever." We insist, and rightly so, that this principle is the heartbeat of all our theology, the essence of all our preaching, the guiding principle of all our life. It is to this subject that I address your attention this evening, in large measure because the truth of this is in eclipse in our degenerate and profane age.

Scripture's use of the concept

I need not spend any large amount of time tonight pointing out to you that the Scriptures are filled, from one end to the other, with this important truth. Every page of God's Word shouts aloud of God and His glory. In innumerable places and in countless ways the Scriptures force upon us the truth that God is, in Himself, infinitely glorious and that all glory must be His and His alone. Scripture is a long and soaring doxology of praise to the God of heaven and earth.

But it is instructive and worthwhile for us to turn to Scripture and discover in what ways this whole idea of God's glory is used. And, if we turn first of all, to the Old Testament, we are told that the most basic meaning of the word "glory" in the Hebrew is "heaviness." That, according to the Hebrew Scriptures, is glorious which is heavy. But the reference is not, as you can readily conclude, to mere physical heaviness. It refers rather to the heaviness of importance. That is glorious which is important and impressive. And this is supremely applicable to God. He is infinitely important and impressive.

There are many different ways in which this idea is developed in the Old Testament. We can mention only a few. It is, in the first place, very striking that Scripture speaks of God's glory, God's impressiveness, in connection with His descent upon Mount Sinai. In that passage, God's glory is spoken of in connection with judgment, thunder, hail, etc. We read:

And the glory of the Lord abode upon Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days: and the seventh day he called unto Moses out of the midst of the cloud. And the sight of the glory of the Lord was like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel. (Exodus 24:16, 17)

The idea is certainly that the glory of God cannot be considered apart from judgment—especially in connection with the giving of God's holy law. Another very important idea of the glory of God is developed in connection with Moses' request to see that glory. It was specifically God's glory which Moses desired to see; not now the glory revealed in fire and smoke and thunder; but the glory of God revealed in forgiveness and grace towards Israel which had so soon turned to strange gods. In answer to this request of Moses, God told him:

I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee. (Exodus 33:19)

This same idea is expressed in the vision which Isaiah saw which is recorded for us in Isaiah 6. Isaiah saw "the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up." The seraphim which flew before the throne cried to each other:

Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. (Isaiah 6:3)

And it is instructive to note in this connection that the result of this revelation is that Isaiah himself cries out: "Woe is me!". Especially the Psalms speak of that glory of God. In Psalm 135:5 the glory of God is called great. In Psalm 24:8, a Psalm which is so completely Messianic, God is called the King of glory—a text

where the genitive is most probably descriptive. Many times in the Psalms the glory of God's name is spoken of. Psalm 66:2 reads:

Sing forth the honour of his name: make his praise glorious. And in Psalm 79:9: Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name.

It is not surprising that, in the New Testament, the glory of God is spoken of in connection with Christ. Already on the hills of Bethlehem the angels spoke of Christ's birth in connection with the glory of God. Christ has some very striking and surprising things to say about God's glory in connection with His passion on the cross.

Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again. (John 13:27, 28) And again: Therefore, when he was gone out, Jesus said, Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God be glorified in him, God shall glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him.

The apostle Paul speaks of the fact, in Romans 6:4 that 'the resurrection of Christ took place through (and the preposition is *dia*) the glory of God. All of this prompts John to exclaim, in the very beginning of his gospel: "And we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)

It does not come as strange therefore, that, when the Scriptures turn to the specific subject of salvation, this is invariably put into the context of God's glory. Paul emphasizes this more than once in that great doxology of Ephesians 1. We are predestinated to the praise of the glory of God's grace. (vs. 6.) We are predestinated according to the purpose of God that we should be to the praise of God's glory. (vs. 12.) And all of it is so aptly summed up in that last vs. of Rom. 11: For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.

In moving through Scripture, and studying various passages which deal with the glory of God, it is very striking that God's glory is spoken of as being manifested in both the work of creation and salvation. But whenever this is done, as it is done especially in the Psalms, the two are always related to each other. Without apparently concerning themselves with the problem of the relation between so-called general revelation and special revelation, the Psalmists speak of the two in one breath. Psalm 104, for example, is a long and beautiful meditation on the power of God revealed in providence. But the concluding words of the Psalm are:

I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live: I will sing praise to my God while I have my being. My meditation of him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the Lord. Let the sinners be consumed out of the earth, and let the wicked be no more. Bless thou the Lord, O my soul. Praise ye the Lord. vss. 33-35

The same is true of Psalm 135 and Psalm 136. In the former, the mighty works of God in creation are spoken of in the same breath with his judgments upon the wicked and His salvation of His Church. Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places. He causeth the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; he maketh lightnings for the rain; he bringeth the wind out of his treasures. Who smote the firstborn of Egypt, both of man and beast. . . . And gave their land for an heritage unto Israel his people. vss. 6-8, 12

Psalm 136 does this in a most masterful way as it sings of the mercy of God. Sometimes one can hardly follow the thought of the Psalmist who sees mercy displayed in the most common works of creation. Sure this is more than a literary device and speaks rather of a profound truth.

To him that by wisdom made the heavens; for his mercy endureth forever. . . .
 To him that made great lights: for his mercy endureth forever: The moon and stars to rule by night: for his mercy endureth for his mercy endureth forever: And brought out for his mercy endureth for ever: And brought out Israel from among them: for his mercy endureth forever.

And in Psalm 148 the Psalmist calls upon the whole creation to join with him in praising the Lord; and then the Church is called to unite her voice in this doxology: for He also exalteth the horn of his people, the praise of all his saints; even of the children of Israel, a people near unto him. Praise ye the Lord.

Surely the idea is that there are not two special ways in which God is glorified: one through creation and one through salvation; and both independent of each other. They are principally the same, for it all points ahead to the new creation with the principle of unity in Christ.

The Nature of God's Glory

From all this we may draw some specific conclusions.

The underlying truth of all this is that God is glorious in Himself. He is glorious in His own divine being. He is glorious in the covenant life which He enjoys in Himself as the triune God. He is glorious in all His perfections, for His perfections make Him what He is. These perfections are unique in Him and create a chasm between God and all the creation which can never be bridged. Scripture speaks of this in no uncertain terms. Psalm 115, for example, speaks of this unique glory of God in contrast with heathen idols:

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake. Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is now their God? But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands." vss. 1-4

And that beautiful chapter in Isaiah (chapter 40) emphasizes this truth throughout. It is all concluded in the stirring words: To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him? vs. 18

But this glory of God, God reveals. We must be sure to understand this point. The determination to reveal Himself comes from God alone. The revelation of His glory is not imposed upon God by any necessity. It is not even done by God to make, it possible for God to gain additional glory to Himself. This revelation is a free choice of His will. The revelation of God's glory is therefore, to glorify God. Revelation is for it's own sake. It is to make His glory known. It is done by God that God may speak of His glory outside His own being. And yet, at the same time, God is pleased that this glory be acknowledged by others.

Thus the revelation of God's glory is through Christ. We must assert, at this point, that the revelation of God through Christ is the highest possible revelation of God's glory. This is in keeping with God's own attributes. God reveals Himself in the best possible way. Especially in keeping with His attribute of wisdom, we must insist that there is no better way for this revelation than through Christ. The meaning of this is that all God's glory is revealed through Christ. This must not be taken in the sense that revelation through Christ is exhaustive. Revelation is always finite. And the finite cannot empty the infinite. But all God's glory is revealed in the sense that all there is in God is made known through Christ. Perhaps a figure will make this clear. There is in a tender sapling all that is contained in a mighty elm tree. Not one element that can be found in the mature elm is absent from the seedling. Yet there is, nonetheless, a vast difference between this tender shoot barely three feet above the ground and a graceful and sweeping elm which reaches its arms towards the heavens. So it is with revelation.

When we assert that all the revelation of God is through Christ, one fundamental principle is implicit in this: that is the principle of the sovereignty of God. The one without the other is an absurdity. All that takes place in all that God created is done by His hand. It is this truth which is so strongly emphasized by that beautiful conclusion to Romans 11. Only because all things are of God, or, more literally, out of God, can all things be also through Him and to Him. And only then can all glory be His forever.

What is implied here is obvious. Creation is God's work. Else the Psalmist could never sing: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork." Psalm 19:1. Providence is God's work. We need only return to Psalm 104 to understand how true this is. But this is all so because all creation points to Christ and is redeemed in Christ. For all things are reconciled to God by the blood of the cross. (Col. 1:20.)

The whole work of salvation is rooted in sovereign predestination. Paul speaks of the praise of God's glory in Ephesians 1 especially in connection with predestination. Isaiah 43:21 sets it all forth in one terse sentence: "This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise." But not only election is for God's glory. So is reprobation. While Paul does not specifically refer to the glory of God in Romans 9, he does state emphatically:

For the Scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. . . . What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared to glory? Vss. 17, 22, 23

Yet the relation must be clear. Election serves God's glory in such a way that through the sovereign realization of salvation a people is formed which consciously acknowledges and confesses—and sings of—God's glory. But reprobation is the dark side, the negative side. According to Ps. 115, God is at war with all human idols and he will not share his glory with another. Reprobation must demonstrate this profound truth.

Our Calling

We live in an age when the plot which the devil hatched at the world's beginning is reaching frightening proportions. There was always this total commitment of Satan to rob God of His glory. But usually the subtle mind of Satan sought to gain this end by means of stealth, subterfuge, subtlety and careful attention to minor details. Satan has evidently conceived of the notion that the times are ripe for a frontal attack on God's glory. All caution, all subtlety is thrown to the winds. The hordes of hell rush madly at the bastions of the truth. It is the last assault.

The fundamental principle of sin is exactly to rob God of the glory due to Him. Men are persuaded to deny God's glory in order that they may gain glory to themselves. And this is rooted in hatred of God and, love of themselves. Sin is a monstrous crime for this reason alone.

In innumerable ways this is done. Principally, of course, this attack against the glory of God is made by denials of various kinds of the truth of God. Man will not and cannot let the truth of Scripture stand. The errors have, over the rolling centuries, been subtle and cloaked in much, camouflage. No longer. The attacks against the truth are open. The disguises are torn away. The Church solemnly proclaims: "God is dead." And yet, and yet. . . Is there not something still very subtle about it all? Is it not just possible that even we have been influenced in some marked respects to depart from the truth of God's glory? I think of the fact that basic to man's error is humanism—using the term now in

its broadest connotation. Is there not a kind of humanism transferred into the very citadels of the Church when even the work of salvation is preached and discussed as an end in itself? or, at least, if we, in thoughtlessness, leave the impression that such is the case?

But to return a moment to the savage attacks which are being made in our day against God's glory. Never, I think, has the world seen such a time when the age is so blasphemous and profane. Perhaps it is not so much that there is more blasphemy or worse profanity—although this too is true. But it just may be that the horror of it all is that the Church joins in the blasphemy and profanity of our time. All that is sacred and holy is mocked. All that pertains to the glory of God is viciously trampled under foot in so many different ways that time fails me to speak of them. No one gives any thought any more to the all-important question: What are you doing to God's glory?

We believe and confess together that God has maintained the truth in our midst. This truth is our dearest treasure, our first love. And then it is certain that at the heart of that truth lies the truth of the sovereignty of God. But this truth, so precious, so glorious, is a truth which points unerringly to the infinitely higher truth: the glory of God. Everything must be subservient to that. Nothing at all is important in its own right. Not even the salvation of the Church of Christ can stand by itself. The glory of God towers above even this. Divorced from God's glory even the salvation of the Church becomes a hollow untruth.

This must be a fact among us both objectively and subjectively. Objectively, the glory of God is maintained by a fearless and courageous defense of the truth of God. It is a defense of the truth, not for its own sake; but because any detraction from that truth is a slur on the supreme glory of God Who revealed it. Any departure is doing dishonor to God. Above all, this must be the constant theme of all our preaching. How hard this is can best be known by those of you who struggle day by day with the Scriptures bringing that Word in season and out of season. How many are the temptations to do less than this are known to you upon whom rests this work. And I can leave no better advice to you who with this evening complete your Seminary work than to remember that this must be the theme of all your ministry. In the final analysis, when everything else is said and done, the battle lines in the battle of faith are drawn here. All untruth denies that glory. The truth fights for it with unwearying courage.

But subjectively this must also be true. This is, of course, difficult to speak about and difficult to define. We are speaking of the deepest motives of our hearts. And it is the easiest thing in the world to identify in our own consciousness the glory of God with motives of personal self-seeking and prideful ambition. It is so terribly easy to cover up personal motives with pious prating of our desire to see God glorified. I think often in these evil days of Moses who, when confronted with the fierce anger of God against Israel's idolatry prayed: "Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written." Exodus 32:31, 32. I commend for your prayerful reading Exodus 32, 33. Or, again, of Paul who wrote in Romans 9:3: "For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." I do not think I have the grace to consider the glory of (God of greater importance than my salvation. Yet this is the thrust of Paul's and Moses' astonishing statements. Elijah put it all in the language which God Himself uses in the Decalogue when, defeated and downcast, he murmured: "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts." I Kings 19:10. This is the deepest motive for all labor in the house of God.

Be assured that God will gain His glory. It cannot be any different. Whether we want this or not, God will gain all glory to Himself. He cannot share it with another. To be of those who acknowledge this glory and labor on its behalf there can be no greater blessing.

SOLA FIDE / SOLUS CHRISTUS Faith in Jesus Christ

“We believe that, to attain the true knowledge of this great mystery, the Holy Ghost kindleth in our hearts an upright faith, which embraces Jesus Christ, with all his merits, appropriates him, and seeks nothing more besides him. For it must needs follow, either that all things, which are requisite to our salvation, are not in Jesus Christ, or if all things are in him, that then those who possess Jesus Christ through faith, have complete salvation in him. Therefore, for any to assert that Christ is not sufficient, but that something more is required besides him, would be too gross a blasphemy: for hence it would follow, that Christ was but half a Savior. Therefore we justly say with Paul, that we are justified by faith alone, or by faith without works. However, to speak more clearly, we do not mean, that faith itself justifies us, for it is only an instrument with which we embrace Christ our Righteousness. But Jesus Christ, imputing to us all his merits, and so many holy works which he has done for us, and in our stead, is our Righteousness. And faith is an instrument that keeps us in communion with him in all his benefits, which, when become ours, are more than sufficient to acquit us of our sins.”

The Belgic Confession, Article XXII

With this article, and continuing through Article XXVI, the Confession speaks of what is generally called “Soteriology” or the Doctrine of Salvation, or more specifically, the doctrine of the application of the blessings of salvation. It should be noted in this connection that the Confession follows a different order than we usually follow. We conceive of the order of salvation (*ordo salutis*) in terms, of: regeneration, calling, faith (conversion), justification, sanctification, preservation, and glorification. The Confession, however, speaks of: faith, justification, sanctification, and good works. Concerning any “order” we must remember that the order is logical’ and not temporal. Further, we must distinguish between what Christ objectively merited for us and the order in which we consciously receive and appropriate these blessings of salvation. That the Confession follows the order which it does is due to the fact that it makes no distinction between faith as a power and faith as a conscious activity. The Confession simply speaks of faith as the “sole instrument” whereby salvation is given and appropriated. Therefore it treats faith first.

We may also note by way of introduction that the Article really sums all the blessings of salvation under one term, “righteousness.” This is proper, for Christ, as the fulness of all the blessings of salvation, is called both in Scripture and in this article, Christ our Righteousness. Furthermore, the blessing of righteousness is the fundamental blessing of salvation. It is that in the sense that all the other blessings of salvation are based upon it. Righteousness or justification is logically before all else.

This righteousness, i.e. all the blessings of salvation, the article emphasizes, are in Christ. This truth the fathers maintained over against the doctrine of Rome according to which one is saved by faith in Christ and good works. The Confession will have none of this. It argues that all things requisite for our salvation are in Christ. Those who possess

Christ through faith, therefore, have complete salvation in Him. The Confession concludes: “Therefore, for any to assert that Christ is not sufficient, but something more is required besides Him, would be too gross a blasphemy; for hence it would follow that Christ was but half a Savior.”

This language also effectively shuts the door to the errors of Arminianism: Arminianism really teaches that Christ is not sufficient, but that something more is required besides Him. Arminianism would say that all of our salvation is in Christ. Arminianism would also say that we are justified by faith alone. The trouble is that Arminianism would also insist that man of himself must believe. Arminianism teaches free will. Every man has the ability, the freedom, to choose for Christ or against Him. Before a man can be saved he must be willing to believe. According to this conception of things faith really becomes another work which man must perform in order to be saved. Then, too, it could never be said that all of our salvation is in Christ. Let it also be clearly understood that if the gospel be an offer of salvation, or if the promise of God be general, then the Arminian heresy of faith as a work of man cannot be escaped. But this the article emphatically denies when it insists that Christ is not half a Savior but that all of our salvation is in Him.

Positively the Confession asserts that all of our salvation is in Jesus Christ. This means that Jesus Christ is a complete Savior. And because Jesus Christ is a complete Savior, faith is the only means by which we may be saved. We are justified by faith alone, *sola fide*. This means we are justified by faith alone and not by works. These two are mutually exclusive. Scripture teaches us: “By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” (Ephesians 2:8, 9) Further, Scripture declares: “And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.” (Romans 11:6) This faith cannot be the work of man but only the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit Who “. . . kindleth an upright faith in our hearts.” Thus it is that we are justified not by faith and works, but by faith alone.

This is not to say that faith itself justifies us. Never may it be said that we are justified on the basis of our faith. Rather, faith is the “sole instrument,” the means by which we are justified. This article teaches that all of our salvation is in Christ. Jesus Christ is our complete Savior. The question becomes, how does that salvation which is in Christ become ours? The answer is, only by means of God-given faith. Faith is the sole instrument by which we are placed in living communion with Christ so that we embrace Him and receive out of Him all the blessings of salvation. That faith is God’s gift to us, it is not “of ourselves”! God saves us completely and finally.

But what is faith? How may faith be defined? What are its elements? Faith is the bond which unites us to Jesus Christ. Although this is not directly stated by the article,

it is implied when it states that faith “is an instrument that keeps us in communion with him.” Faith is the living connection between Christ and believers. Or, it is the channel through which flow all the blessings of salvation. Thus the Scriptures speak of Christ as the vine and His people as branches which live out of that vine. The Scriptures also speak of Christ as the Head of the Body and of believers as the members of that body who live out of the Head, Jesus Christ. By means of faith we are made one with Christ. We embrace Him by faith and receive out of Him all His benefits, life, and glory!

Faith is also a power or faculty. What we mean is that God implants in the hearts of His people the ability to believe even before they consciously believe and before this faith becomes active. Just as a baby has the power to speak before it ever exercises that power, so also do the elect have the power of faith, the power to believe, even before they exercise that power. And that power must be there if faith is ever to be exercised! Without that gift of God no one will believe, no matter how often the gospel is preached to him.

Faith consists of two elements: knowledge and confidence. The knowledge of faith is not merely an intellectual apprehension of the truth of the gospel or the doctrine of Scripture. It is not mere “head knowledge.” It is the spiritual knowledge of God, the knowledge of love, the knowledge which according to the Word of Christ is Life eternal. (Cf. John 17:3) By means of faith the child of God lives in the fellowship of the God of his salvation. He knows God as His God and Father for Jesus’ sake.

But faith is also confidence. On the basis of the knowledge of faith and flowing out of that knowledge of faith is the confidence of faith. The confidence of faith is trust. It is the assurance the believer has that his own sins are forgiven. In the confidence of faith the believer casts himself upon Christ. Nowhere is this more beautifully stated than in Question and Answer twenty-one of the Heidelberg Catechism: “What is true faith? True faith is not only a certain knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in his word, but also an assured confidence, which the Holy Ghost works by the gospel, in my heart; that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness and salvation, are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ’s merits.” That is the true faith by which we are ingrafted into Christ and receive out of Him all the benefits and blessings of salvation.

That faith is active. The article briefly sums the activity of faith in these words: it “embraces Jesus Christ and all his merits, appropriates him, and seeks nothing more beside him.” By the power and gift of faith the believer actively embraces Christ and all his merits. By faith the believer knows his great need, his sin and depravity. He knows that he has nothing in himself whereby he may be saved. By faith that believer also recognizes Christ as the only One Who can supply His need. He knows Christ as the

complete Savior in whom is all his salvation. By faith the believer longs for Christ. By faith the believer embraces Christ and appropriates all His merits. By faith the believer seeks nothing more outside of Christ. He knows, that all of the blessings of salvation are in Christ.

Thus by faith the saints are richly blessed. Faith is the “instrument which keeps us in communion with him in all his benefits.” In living communion with Christ we are assured of the forgiveness of our sins. We know that we have been delivered from death’s terrible curse. We are assured that life everlasting is ours. And we know that all things are for us and nothing can be against us. We belong to Christ and in Him we have the blessed fellowship with the God of our salvation.

SOLA GRATIA

Saved by Grace Alone

>> Rev. Ronald VanOverloop

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.” Ephesians 2:8, 9

Grace. A most wonderful and most humbling truth. Grace saves. It delivers one from the greatest evil and misery and makes him a partaker of the greatest good.

Saved from the greatest evil. The greatest evil is to be spiritually trapped in the powerful grasp of the wages of sin. Sin earns death. Every sin must be punished, and the punishment for each is certain death at the hands of the just and holy God. God punishes sin with death (Gen. 2:17). This is as it ought to be, because sin is always a violation of God. The only correct response the holy and just God can give to each violation of Himself is to punish sin with death. This death is spiritual (the inability to do anything good and the inclination only to do evil), physical (the cessation of earthly existence), and eternal (the endurance of divine wrath in hell forever). This is the greatest evil and misery. Grace saves from this great misery.

And to be saved is to be made a partaker of the greatest good. The greatest good is to be as God and to be with God. It is to be made beautiful as God is beautiful. It is to be able to fellowship with the living God Himself. It is to know God, to hear Him, and to talk with Him. It is to know that God is with you—always—and that thus you are always with Him. It is to be spiritually alive, that is, always conscious of His blessed presence and able to want to please Him. This is the great good. Grace gives us this great good.

The inspired apostle spoke about this greatest evil and this greatest good in the earlier verses of this second chapter of his letter to the Ephesians. He had said that the greatest evil is to be dead in trespasses and sin (Eph. 2:1). He then explains this spiritual death as being physically alive but able only to do evil. He writes that it is to be imprisoned in the constant pressure to walk according to the ungodly world. It is to follow the devil himself, whose power is evidenced in his constantly leading men into disobedience (Eph. 2:2). Spiritual death is the truly horrible experience of doing whatever you can think of (the desires of the mind) and whatever your flesh wants (the desires of the flesh)—and then to be so deceived that you believe that this is wonderful and right (Eph. 2:3). In these verses Paul makes it clear that this spiritual death characterizes not only the heathen (“ye”), but also the Christian (“we”).

The greatest good Paul describes as being made spiritually alive (“quickened”) with Christ (Eph. 2:5). It is to be born again with the very life of Jesus Christ Himself, so that He is in you. Then this greatest good consists of one being raised with Christ (Eph. 2:6). It is to be so in Christ and with Him, that you share in His resurrection from the dead. A spiritual resurrection takes place in believers—they are justified before God. Still more, union with Christ takes believers into heaven with Him. When Jesus ascended into the realm of the heavenly, then those in Him receive spiritual blessings in heavenly places (Eph. 2:6, 1:3).

This is what it is to be saved. How is it possible that those dead in sin can be saved? Paul has already pointed to God for the answer: “But God...” (Eph. 2:4). The possibility of salvation is found either in God or in those who are saved. Paul looks away from the saved and looks up to God. It is the rich mercy of God, which mercy is based on great, divine love (Eph. 2:4). Rich mercy derived from everlasting love.

Now in our text the apostle is inspired to point to another attribute of God at

work in making it possible for spiritually dead sinners to be brought into living communion with God. It is grace. “By grace are ye saved.”

Grace is the attitude of undeserved favor, which becomes an active power to save. Grace is an action of God which arises from His beautiful character. (The root meaning of the Hebrew word for grace is “beauty.”) This beauty of God becomes an attitude of favor and love. When the object of God’s gracious attitude is unworthy and sinful, then it is an unmerited favor and stands diametrically opposed to obligation. If it is by grace, then there is no obligation. If God is obliged to save, then it would not be by grace. Grace is that favorable attitude in action. It is that redemptive power which delivers from the great evil and imparts the spiritual blessings which make beautiful. The objects of divine grace are made beautiful as God is beautiful.

Grace is the fountain out of which God makes the chosen, wretched sinner to be beautiful. Salvation is not God’s response to something in us. It is “not of yourselves.” The word “grace” excludes that. The only reason spiritually dead creatures could now be alive is because of the grace of God. Paul personally experienced that it was by grace, and only by grace, that he was a Christian.

Gracious salvation is entirely of God and in spite of us. We have no right to salvation. When God’s mercy, love, and grace are the source of salvation, then in the ages to come the exceeding riches of God’s grace are shown (Eph. 2:7). God is shown, not man. The first three verses of Ephesians 2 demonstrate clearly that we deserve nothing but eternal hell. The next four verses powerfully exalt God for giving liberally of the exceeding riches of His grace.

Gracious salvation is not God’s response to something in us. The only reason spiritually dead sinners could ever be saved is the grace of God! That one is a Christian gives one no grounds whatsoever for boasting. In truth, it forbids all human boasting. This is precisely the emphasis of this text. It is “not of yourselves.” It is “not of works.” If it were of ourselves or of our works, then we could and would boast. But it is grace, “lest any man should boast.”

Grace excludes boasting! It makes human boasting impossible. “Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? Nay: but by the law of faith” (Rom. 3:27). Salvation comes out of grace, which means that there is absolutely no grounds for being proud of oneself. It is grace alone. If salvation is by anything other than grace, or if anything is added to grace, then there is reason to boast.

Paul presents himself as an example. Prior to his being a Christian he did a great deal of boasting. He was very self-satisfied, self-assured, and self-confident! He writes that he had reason for confidence in his flesh. He was “circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law,

blameless” (Phil. 3: 4ff.)! But Paul came to see that when he became a Christian, then everything of which he was naturally proud became suddenly insignificant. No, worse! He now realizes that those things he would naturally be proud of, he now considers to be worse than insignificant and irrelevant. Now he considers them all to be dung and loss, vile and foul.

All humans are inclined to boast in their works. The root of man’s fall into sin was pride. Man wanted to determine for himself what was right and what was wrong. He did not want God to determine it. Ever since then the nature of all humans is that they want to boast in what they have done or in what they can do. Jesus spoke a parable “unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous” (Luke 18:9). Man always likes to think that he can earn his way into heaven by doing “many wonderful works,” even works supposedly done in Jesus’ name. But the only response Jesus gives to such thinking is: “I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matt. 7:23).

By nature we always tend to think of ourselves in light of what we have done (either good or bad). Human nature makes us compare ourselves to other humans (never to God). We quickly think about our accomplishments, religious or otherwise: sports, business, family, cooking or cleaning, etc. On the basis of our accomplishments we build our self-esteem.

However, the gospel of Jesus Christ denounces any reliance on works, pride in works, boasting about works. “And if by grace, then is it no more works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work” (Rom. 11:6). The gospel of salvation by grace condemns every human. It strips us naked and shows us that we are filthy and vile, that there is none righteous, no not one. To introduce works in any sense is what Paul said was a going back to the law (cf. his epistle to the Galatians). If we try to justify ourselves by our works, then we are to be condemned, because the best works of man are not good enough to earn any merit in the sight of God.

If in our consciousness of who and what we are we think of our goodness or rely on anything we have done, then we deny grace. We must see ourselves as having nothing of merit before God and men. The correct perspective of good works is that God makes us Christians so we may do good works (confer the next verse). Salvation is by grace alone and it leads to good works; good works never lead to salvation. We are saved by grace “through faith.”

Faith is the God-given instrument through which salvation comes to each of God’s elect. First, faith is the bond of living fellowship which connects the Captain of our salvation to each of the elect. Then faith becomes an activity according to which the elect believer experiences his relationship to the Savior. As such it is knowing Christ and trusting in Him for salvation. So salvation in Jesus Christ from the greatest evil unto the highest good is by

grace alone through the instrumentality of faith.

The emphasis of our text is that salvation by grace through faith is the gift of God. In every respect it is a gift, given by God to those given by Him to the Son; never is it a gift of man to God. Salvation by grace through faith is a gift of God. To say that salvation is through faith is to say that it is by grace. “It is of faith, that it might be by grace” (Rom. 4:16).

This is emphasized because human nature always wants to boast of what it has done or can do. So quickly we take the talents God has given to us and glory in them as if they originated in us. We even tend to boast of our faith. Many want to turn their faith into a kind of work. They say that by believing on Jesus Christ a man saves himself. They will still say that salvation is by grace, but they make faith to be man’s contribution to that salvation. Then salvation will be God’s work, but a work of God which ultimately depends on man’s believing to be realized. Others even make faith a condition unto salvation in the covenant. The covenant is established, they say, with every child of believers (elect or reprobate), and the realization of salvation depends on whether the child believes and accepts. This concept of faith makes the covenant a conditional covenant.

In our text the apostle makes it clear that salvation is entirely the result of the grace of God: “and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.” Many are the discussions whether the antecedent to “that” is “faith” or “salvation by grace through faith.” Let it be understood beyond a shadow of any doubt that salvation by grace means that it is all of grace. If it is my believing which saves me, then I have saved myself. The inspired apostle says that it is not of himself. It is “not of yourselves” in any sense. We must never speak of our faith in any way of being of ourselves. Instead we must see faith to be a gift of God (Phil. 1:29). It is God who produces both the will to believe and the act of believing in every believer (Canons of Dort, III/IV,14).

Faith is not the cause of salvation, grace is. Faith does not save us, Christ does. That anyone is a child of God is entirely the result of God’s work of grace. It cannot be anything else but God’s work, in light of what we are by nature, according to the first three verses of this chapter. And in light of what God does to save, according to verses 4-7, it has to be only the gift of God.

Grace. Saved by grace. Saved by grace through faith. It is not of us. It is not because of our works. We cannot and may not boast. Then what? While the text denies us the right to boast in ourselves, it clearly implies that we may and can and must boast in God. And in God alone.

All the glory for salvation belongs to God. God alone is to be glorified for salvation, for grace, and for faith. Salvation by grace—a beautiful conception of God.

Therefore, “blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.”

SOLA SCRIPTURA

The Rule for the Christian Life

There is one rule for the Christian life. That rule is Holy Scripture. Scripture alone is the standard for the faith and practice of the people of God. The Psalmist expresses this in Psalm 119:105, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” Our Belgic Confession of Faith, in Article VII, the title of which article is “The Sufficiency Of The Holy Scriptures To Be The Only Rule Of Faith,” states:

We believe that those Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe, unto salvation, is sufficiently taught therein Neither do we consider of equal value any writing of men, however holy these men may have been, with those divine Scriptures, nor ought we to consider custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity, or succession of times and persons, or councils, decrees or statutes, as of equal value with the truth of God, for the truth is above all; for all men are of themselves liars, and more vain than vanity itself. Therefore we reject with all our hearts, whatsoever doth not agree with this infallible rule

The sole authority of the Scriptures was a fundamental principle of the Protestant Reformation. Through the Reformation the sole authority of Scripture over the faith and life of the church was asserted.

The authority of Scripture was maintained by the Reformers, first of all, over against the Roman Catholic Church. Rome denied the sole authority of Scripture, and taught instead two sources of authority in the church: Scripture and tradition. For Rome, not only did the Word of Christ written (Scripture) have authority, but also the Word of Christ unwritten (tradition). These unwritten traditions, Rome teaches, are the teachings of Christ that He gave orally to His apostles, and which the apostles in turn have handed down to the church through the popes and bishops. The Council of Trent anathematized all those who did not receive and venerate church tradition as of equal authority with the Old and New Testament.

What is sometimes overlooked is that the Reformers’ position on the sole authority of the Bible was a position that they took not only over against the pope and the Roman Catholic Church. Besides Rome there were also the mystics and the Anabaptists, the movement sometimes referred to as the “Radical Reformation,” which also denied the exclusive authority of Holy Scripture.

Like their spiritual descendants today, these recognized the Bible as only one authority and guide for the Christian life. Alongside of and above the Bible they exalted experience and feeling. Their motto was: “Away with the letter that killeth, in favor of the Spirit that giveth life.”

To these spiritualists Luther responded (remember now that Scripture portrays the Holy Spirit as a dove): “Unless you cite Scripture, I do not care if you have swallowed the Holy Spirit, feathers and all.” For Luther the Word and the Spirit belonged together in an inseparable union. The Anabaptists and mystics wanted the Spirit without

the Word. Luther’s position was that the Holy Spirit never works independent of or apart from the Word. Christians ought not to hanker after new signs and special revelations and experiences. The Spirit’s function is to evoke from the Word of God what is already there.

Over against both Rome and the mystics, the Reformers’ position was *Sola Scriptura*, “Only the Scriptures.”

The truth of the sole authority of Scripture rests upon the other fundamental truths concerning Holy Scripture. First of all, only if the Bible is the Word of God, can it “also be the standard for our faith and life. Only if the Bible is the Word of God does it have the RIGHT to be the authority for our faith and life. The authority of Scripture is the authority of God Himself, the only real authority that there is in the world. The authority of the Bible presupposes very clearly the infallible, Divine inspiration of the Bible. This is the seriousness today of the attack on the inspiration of Scripture, as well as the practical result of this attack, that the authority of Scripture is set aside. It is no longer the standard, then, for the faith and life of the people of God. And why should it be if it’s not the Word of God!

In the second place, the authority of Scripture rests on the truth of the completeness of Scripture. Scripture can be the authority for our faith and life because all that we need to know for our faith and life is contained in Holy Scripture. The Reformers maintained the sufficiency of Scripture. All that is necessary for the believer to know, both as regards doctrine and morals, is contained in Holy Scripture. According to II Timothy 3:17, the Scriptures are all that are necessary “that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” There simply is no need for anything alongside of and in addition to Holy Scripture.

In the third place, the authority of Scripture presupposes the perspicuity or clarity of Scripture. By the perspicuity of Scripture we mean that Scripture is clear and can be understood by the individual believer. Rome maintains that the Scriptures are not easily understood, deep, dark, and mysterious. No individual believer can understand the Bible, but only the priests, bishops, councils, and ultimately an infallible pope. Over against Rome, the Reformers taught the perspicuity of Scripture. Paul reminds Timothy in II Timothy 3:15 that already as a child he had known and understood the Holy Scriptures. The perspicuity of Scripture stands closely connected to its authority, for only if the people of God can understand the Bible can it serve as the rule for their faith and life.

In many ways the authority of the Bible is set aside and challenged today. Certainly Rome’s position regarding the Bible’s authority has not changed. Rome continues to deny the sole authority of Scripture and proudly to exalt herself, her traditions, and her pope above the authority of the Word of God.

The sin of which Rome is guilty, is characteristic also of the sects and cults. In fact this is one of the outstanding features of the cults, that they exalt some other authority alongside of the authority of Holy Scripture. Whether that's the Book of Mormon, The Koran, the writings of a Charles Taze Russell or an Ellen G. White, or The Divine Principle makes no difference, these sects deny the authority of the Bible.

The whole Pentecostal movement is a fundamental denial of the sole authority of the Word of God. The Pentecostal exaltation of feeling and experience above the revealed Word make these, and not the Word itself, the authority for the Christian life. The inroads that this movement has made in Reformed and Presbyterian churches is an indication of just how far these churches have departed from their Reformation heritage.

More and more in the churches today there is the denial of Scripture's authority by the elevation of the so-called discoveries of science, the teachings of modern humanistic philosophy, and the theories of modern psychology and psychiatry above the clear teaching of the Bible. The results have been devastating: creation has been thrown out the window; sin becomes merely sickness or the remnants of man's animal ancestry; man's mind and man's ingenuity are heralded as being able to overcome every obstacle and solve every problem, if only man will think positively (no real need of the grace of God).

Society at large puts extreme pressure on the churches today to discard the authority of the Bible. The tragedy is that the churches in many instances have caved in to this pressure. Worldliness is rampant. More and more it comes to it that not the authority of the Word of God, but the will of the majority of the people will dictate the faith and life of the members of the church. And since the majority of the people want dancing, there will now be dancing; since the majority of the people want women in office, there will be women in office; since the majority regard homosexuality as a legitimate alternative life-style, there will be homosexuals in the church.

Although the authority of Holy Scripture is denied in various ways, when it comes down to it there are only two choices as regards this matter of authority. Either the authority of God will be the rule for our faith and life, or the authority and will of man. These are the two alternatives. Every instance of denying the authority of the Word of God is only another instance of promoting the authority of man, whether that be man's writings, man's traditions, man's feelings, man's discoveries, or man's philosophies.

If the Bible is to be the authority for our faith and life, we must know the Bible. Only as we know the Bible will we be able to turn to the Bible as the standard for what we believe and how we live. This is our great struggle! Our great struggle, thank God, is not with papal tradition or the temptation to allow The Book of Mormon a place of authority in our lives alongside of the Bible. But the great struggle for all of us is the struggle against our own apathy

and indifference toward the Word of God and the study of that Word of God. From one point of view that loss of the Word in the Middle Ages can be traced to the people themselves, their own apathy and indifference. In fact the loss of the Word can rightly be viewed as God's judgment on that apathy. In his Table Talks, Luther says this:

Truly, I am less afraid of the pope and his tyrants, than I am of our own ingratitude towards the Word of God; 'tis this will place the pope in his saddle again. But, first, I hope the day of judgment will come.

Do we read the Word of God? Do we study and discuss the Word of God in our families and in the societies of the church? Do we eagerly hear and believingly receive the instruction of the preaching of the Word on the Lord's Day? These things are of the utmost importance if Scripture is to be the authority in our lives.

We echo Luther's sentiments expressed in another place:

No greater mischief can happen to a Christian people, than to have God's Word taken from them, or falsified, so that they no longer have it pure and clear. God grant that we and our descendants be not witnesses of such a calamity.

Prayer & Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving

Thank God for keeping Huishi safe in Australia.

Thank God for blessing CERC greatly with the visit of Prof Hanko.

Thank our heavenly Father for knowing exactly what His sheep need and for giving freely at His perfect time.

Thank God for the steady growth in 2nd service attendance.

Thank God for blessing the PRCA with its sharp reformed preaching; for the fellowship that Aaron has with like-minded reformed believers.

Thank God for Pastor's Lau improvement in his health in recent months as was evident in his increasing involvement in church activities.

Supplication

Pray for wisdom for the organising committee of the CK/CKS year-end camp and that the camp will be edifying and God-centred.

Pray for the spread of the precious truth of the Reformed faith to the people of God in the Philippines with whom Rev. Richard Smit and Rev. Daniel Kleyn are working.

Pray for the youths who will be taking their exams. (e.g. O Level, A Level, University Exams)

Pray for Prof Hanko, that his preaching will be used mightily for the edification and the furtherance of God's Kingdom.

Pray that God will plant the seed of the Reformed Truth in the heart of the newcomers and enrich the lives of the church members through the Reformation Day Lecture.

Pray for wisdom to use the resources that we have (e.g. time and energy) wisely, as pilgrims who are heaven-bound.

Pray for Pastor Lau as he seriously considers writing a series of devotions based upon the Heidelberg Catechism. This is a big project calling for spiritual stamina and perseverance. If the Lord wills it, nothing is impossible. Pray that he may be humble and submissive to the Lord's will in this matter.

Pray for Salt Shakers, that all involved may be found faithful in His service, and that they may be able to publish every issue on time.

Pray that the readers of Salt Shakers may be blessed through the reading of appropriate articles.

Pray that the magazine may serve to unite the people of God to His praise and glory.

Pray for Matthias' safe flight back to Singapore.

Pray for the members of CERC, that we will not take Prof Hanko's labour for granted but be thankful to God for His providence.

Pray that the youth may walk circumspectly as wise men and understand what the will of the Lord is for them.

Pray for the speedy recovery of brother Ishu, and that God's grace may be sufficient for him during this time.

Pray for Madam Loo, that God will grant her grace and strength as she recuperates in Ren Ci Hospital.

Pray that Pastor Goh will continue to be faithful in his preaching and that God will use his messages mightily for the edification of His saints.

CERC'S 23rd ANNIVERSARY



Souvenir



Enjoying the scumptious buffet and laksa



ALL FOR ONE!



Token for hard work



Stuff-the-most-marshmallow-in-mouth contest



Enjoying the picnic



CK AT BOTANICAL GARDENS



No more marshmallows!!



Winner of the watermelon eating contest!

Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church

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

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

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

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