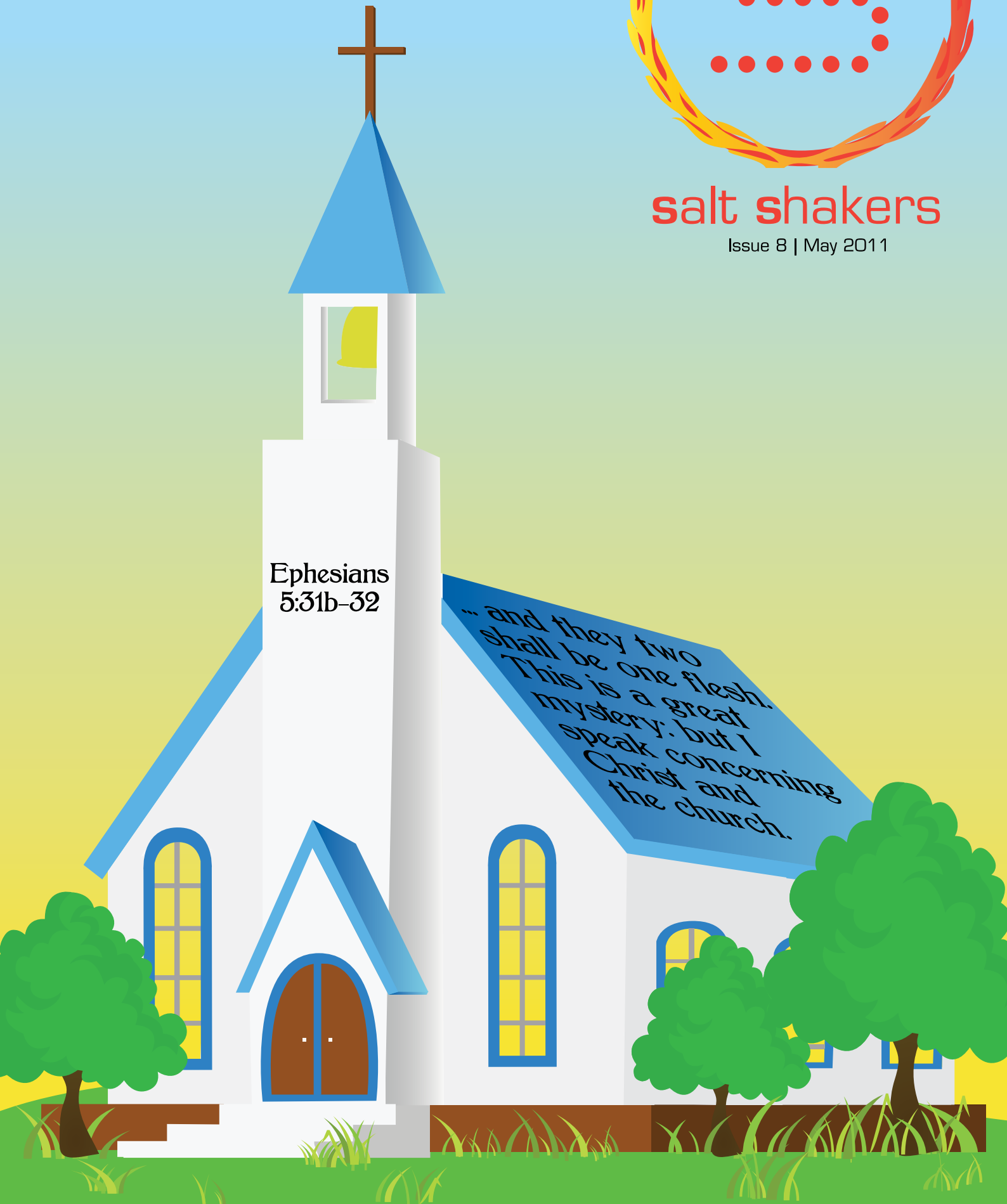


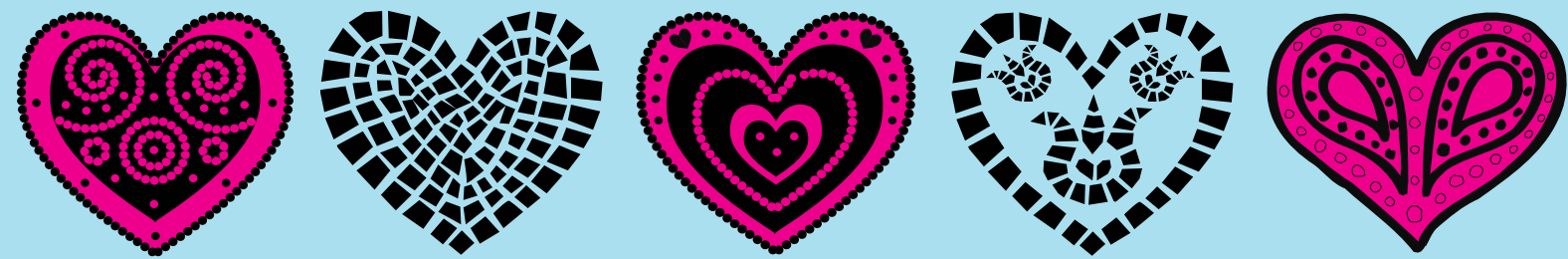
# salt shakers

Issue 8 | May 2011

Ephesians  
5:31b-32

... and they two  
shall be one flesh.  
This is a great  
mystery, but I  
speak concerning  
Christ and  
the church.





Dear readers,

Welcome to the 8th issue of Salt Shakers! This issue has a special emphasis on courtship and marriage, subjects which are of extreme importance for a Christian living in this world. May you be blessed through your reading and meditation on the articles contained within.

**Loving the unlovable**

There is something similar in what is seen, when Jesus looks at us, and when we look at Him. We both do not like what we see. He sees a miserable wretch who spits on Him and screams for His death, a dead and rotting corpse, a pile of filthy and bloody rags – unlovable. We, similarly, see no beauty in Him, nothing worth desiring about Him, a person only fit to be despised and rejected – unlovable.

We look at the many pleasures that surround us, the temptations that cling to us, the paths our wayward feet are so used to walking, and the choice is simple. We do not choose Him. Why should we? He is unlovable anyway. We devise, and delight, to be in our misery. We love pleasures, rather than Him.

He looks at His kingly estate, His royal and heavenly palace, His riches beyond comprehension, the perfect love which surrounds Him, and the choice is shocking. It's probably even foolish. He chooses to love us. Why should He? Why should He ever? We are unlovable. He plans, lovingly, to bear our shame. He loved us, even though we were unlovable. And even though we continue to be unlovable, He continues to love us; because He said He would.

The most ridiculous thing that Jesus asks us to do, as His disciples, is to be like Him. How shall we ever be like Him? We can only love what is lovable. We can only love what is attractive, what brings us joy, and what loves us back. How can we love someone who hates us, someone who hurts us, and someone who leaves us? Even if we said we would, it is impossible!

And, so it is – impossible. Until you find the love of our Husband and Saviour Jesus Christ. It is also impossible to love Him, for He is unlovable. But, He loved us first, with a different love – one that is able to love the unlovable. And with this new love in us, we are able to, in small ways, love Christ who we could not possibly desire before. This love is the answer. Our love is weak and unable; Jesus' love is strong and overwhelming. Where our love fails impossibly, His love works unbelievably.

You can love the unlovable; not with your love, but with Christ's.

*Christ regardless, paul*

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# REVIEW OF PROF'S TALK ON CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

>> Marcus Wee

Christian liberty – two simple words with so many implications. The issue of Christian liberty is a difficult one to say the least. When dealing with it, one can swing to two opposite ends of the spectrum, neither of which is right. We could use it as an occasion to the flesh (Gal 5:13), to fulfil our own desires and use Christian liberty as an excuse to cover it up. Or we could become all legalistic over it, and create many laws that govern the life of a Christian. Christian liberty should be neither of those.

Christian liberty is a doctrine, and an important one at that. It is rooted in the law of God – to love God with all our heart, soul and mind (Matthew 22:37). If we were to successfully keep this Law, we obtain liberty, otherwise, death awaits us. The question is: are we able to do so? Can we by ourselves successfully keep the law of God and merit our own salvation? Romans 3:10, 11 provides the answer: “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.” Ever since the fall of Adam, we have all lost the ability to keep the Law. But there is hope for the elect of God, for Christ, through His atonement on the cross, has kept it for us. Thus, we are now able to keep the Law, and we do so, through Christ alone. The Spirit of God now works in us to keep the Law of God.

We may then ask the question, Why would God give fallen man a Law when He knew they could not possibly keep them anyway (the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai)? Could he not simply save them and have no need for the law? The reason for the giving of the law, which has not changed since then, was not with the intent of saving, but with the intent of instruction. The children of Israel had to learn that they could not keep the law by their own strength, but had to rely wholly on God. And so it is with us today.

Each of us has three offices – prophet, priest and king. As prophets, we are able to seek out and understand the Law of God in the Bible. As priest, we can go directly to God in prayer, through Christ. As king, we are able to be exercise control over our own lives and decide for ourselves what is right and wrong. That being said, this is where we must be cautious. We are only supposed to do so insofar as it agrees with God's word. This is what Paul means when he states in Galatians to “use not liberty for an occasion of the flesh”. We are not to make excuses for what we want to do and use Christian liberty as a means to get what we want.

How are we able to exercise our offices of prophet, priest and king in our lives? This is through the conscience that God gives to all man. Even the wicked possess these offices, albeit that they are in the service of the Devil instead. They have a corrupt conscience, one that is dulled by repeated sinning such that the sins become the acceptable norm. Our consciences become slaves to the sin which has a deathly grip on our souls. The way out of this is by true and sincere repentance which can only proceed from the grace of God. The only way to maintain a pure conscience is to base it solely on the Word of God, through which it can obtain its enlightenment.

Even so, every man's conscience differs. In 1 Corinthians 8, we read of people who freely eat of what is offered to idols while some abstain, thinking it to be sin. Is either wrong? No, if their personal conviction is based on the Word of God. It is important to note that we are not to go against our conscience, and do whatever others do, should we have the weaker conscience, as is clearly stated in Romans 14:23 “And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” Conversely, should we have the stronger conscience, let us take care not to stumble our brethren (1 Cor 8:9).

The underlying principle with regards to the issue of Christian liberty really lies with the two great commandments that Christ gave: first, to love God with our all, and second, to love our neighbour as ourselves. Whatever we choose to do in our lives, we ought not to be constantly thinking, “Am I allowed to do this?” or, “Is it wrong if I push my boundaries this way?”, but rather, the one thought that ought to be on our minds is, “Is this the best possible way to glorify and serve God?” True Christian liberty is a part of the Christian life anchored in the Word of God, something that proceeds out of a heart of love for God. It not a list of Do's and Don'ts, but rather, something positive, as Paul states in the second part of Galatians 5:13, “but by love serve one another”. We use our Christian liberty not as means for our own enjoyment, but for the service of one another, rooted in the love of God and of our neighbour.

On this note, let us always seek to love the saints that God loves so dear, and exercise our Christian liberty for their edification.

# IRRESISTIBLE >> Jemima GRACE

Does our salvation depend on God's grace or on the sinner's free will? Can God's will to save His elect be made void eventually? Can it happen that God's grace can actually be resisted?

These are essential questions, and in this article we shall try to explore these issues.

The doctrine of Irresistible Grace (or efficacious grace) is the fourth point of the Reformed faith which teaches that the saving grace of God cannot be resisted. When God in eternity elects a man, that man is saved. And nothing, not even the devil, can prevent his salvation. However, it is important to note that the crux of the issue is when we say that God's grace is irresistible, we are also acknowledging that God is also indeed irresistible. God is sovereign, and in essence, His will cannot be made void. "He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and none can stay his hand." (Daniel 4:35)

## **Saved by grace alone**

When a sinner is being saved, God calls him first through the preaching of the gospel which is an external calling. However, for the sinner to be saved,

there needs to be an internal call where through the Holy Spirit, regeneration happens in the innermost recesses of the man. God opens and softens his heart and changes him from a dead, unbelieving sinner to a living and believing adopted child of God. It is only the power of grace that can cause this radical change in him.

Salvation is by grace alone! There is no denying this as the Scriptures clearly teach this. In Ephesians 2:8, the apostle Paul teaches, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." This means that our works make no contribution whatsoever to our salvation. Even what we consider as our best works do not merit our salvation because we are already dead in sin and nothing we do can save ourselves. "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6) Moreover, in Titus 3:5, Paul declares, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost." Thus, without a doubt, we can see that the grace of God is indeed the force and energy that converts the sinner's heart and makes it willing to repent and believe in the Saviour.

## **An Irresistible Grace**

The grace that enters our soul and converts our stubborn will cannot be

resisted. There is nothing that can stop God's will and plan to save a sinner. Because God is an irresistible and sovereign God, thus His saving grace is irresistible and sovereign too. Even the most obstinate sinner cannot resist this grace. When God chooses to give saving grace to a sinner, it is by His almighty power that it will triumph in the heart of the sinner. He will definitely be saved. Moreover, when grace is given by God to the sinner, it is already effective before man can act. Hence, man cannot even act to resist it. This grace is so effective that it will work faith in the sinner to draw the sinner to Christ. There are many verses in the scripture which teach the doctrine of Irresistible Grace. God does not merely try to save sinners, depending on how they respond; no, He saves sinners sovereignly, efficaciously and irresistibly.

John 6:37 "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." In this text, the "shall come" shows indication that the sinner will definitely come to Christ when God has chosen him. This shows that when God has chosen him, he cannot resist God's will and the power of God is an irresistible force.

Romans 8:29-30 "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called:

and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified." This text shows that once a sinner has been elected in God's eternal counsel, he will surely proceed to being justified and glorified. Nothing can stand in the way of the sinner obtaining salvation and the final glorification of those being called.

There is no doubt that this doctrine of Irresistible Grace is the teaching of the Scriptures. To deny this doctrine is akin to calling our God an ineffective, weak and powerless God.

### **Practical Importance**

For reformed Christians like us, it is important that we wholeheartedly believe in this doctrine. Our assurance of salvation depends on the truth of Irresistible Grace. If indeed we can resist and lose grace, how can we be assured that our salvation is certain? We would then be living in constant doubt and fear if we will ever be saved. The thought of it is indeed frightening and depressing!

In addition, our belief in Irresistible Grace parallels our confession that salvation is by grace alone, and not by a mixture of works and grace. We know the latter is the false doctrine and hence we need to hold tightly onto this doctrine of Irresistible Grace.

Another point we can note is that by believing in Irresistible Grace, we

can then pray for the conversion and repentance of ourselves and our loved ones. If grace is not irresistible, we do not have the comfort of knowing that a backsliding Christian may one day turn back to God. Our prayers for his conversion and repentance would then be in vain because grace can be resisted and that makes God powerless to do anything. Hence, through the doctrine of Irresistible Grace, we can have the blessed assurance that wayward or straying members of the church can indeed come back to God, through His grace.

### **Relation to the other points of TULIP**

Total depravity teaches that man is totally dead in sin and because of this, we are unworthy of salvation. Therefore, our salvation must be by grace alone. Since man has no good in him, and no ability to do good, this grace must be irresistible.

Unconditional election is the basis for Irresistible Grace. Since election does not occur due to any merit of ours, therefore, our salvation is not by our works. This works parallel to Irresistible Grace.

The teaching of Irresistible Grace preserves the truth of limited atonement. If free will and resistible grace holds true, then Christ would have died in vain. Although Christ died for the man and wants to save him, He cannot because the grace was resisted and the sinner is unwilling to be converted.

Irresistible Grace also guarantees the preservation of saints. Since we cannot resist grace, we also cannot prevent God from ensuring that we are saved till the very end. Those who are brought to salvation by the Irresistible Grace of God are by the power of that same grace preserved in salvation.

# PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

>> Tze Yan

“And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.” John 6:39

This is what the doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints or also known as the Preservation of the Saints, the last point in the Five Points of Calvinism speaks of. Those who are elected by God will never lose the salvation given to them nor fall away. So how is this doctrine a comfort to believers?

## Preservation of the Saints

God by His grace eternally preserves those whose hearts He has regenerated. In John 10:28 “And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.” Without any condition, our gracious God gives us eternal life! Not only that, our Most Highest God pledges that He will preserve His sheep and nothing can stop God from bringing His people to heaven.

In the Old Testament, God didn’t forsake Israel even when Israel turned their backs on God, sinning against Him countless of times. In the book of Jeremiah, in chapter 32, Israel

worshipped idols openly, provoking God to wrath! God called them to repentance again and again but Israel ignored God, the One who had been diligently “rising up early and teaching them”. As a result of Israel’s disobedience and sin, they caused Judah to sin too. But, God who is graciously merciful to His people, promised restoration to Israel and Judah and He will “cause them to dwell safely”. Despite Israel’s and Judah’s sins, God still brings His people back to Him. Why? Because He is their God! And in verse 40, God declares “And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.” God works in the elect sinners’ hearts that we will always go back to Him. The fear that God puts in our hearts isn’t the kind of fear that causes us to be afraid of Him, but it is the kind of fear that causes us to look to Him in awe and in reverence and acknowledge Him as a merciful God. Also, we know we can come back to Him when we sin to ask for forgiveness. We will not continually sin and fall away but come back to Him to seek forgiveness and repent. (Jeremiah 32:29-40)

Here’s an analogy: Our life is like a rock wall. The rock wall has many different kinds and types of rocks mounted onto the wall. There are rocks which are easy to grab on which represents the prosperity in our lives, while there are rocks which are difficult to grab on represents the tribulations in our lives. When we are holding on to those rocks which are easy to grab, we find that ascending up the wall is easy; we are not tired at all. However, when we are holding on to those rocks which are difficult to grab, we find ourselves struggling to ascend. But whichever rock we hold on to, it helps us to ascend to the top of the wall, which is Heaven. As we mount higher, the climbing gets harder. We are faced with strong winds which try to blow us down,

and we start to lose our strength and stamina. The wind blows us hard and our grip starts to slip. This is like our pilgrim journey on Earth. The battle with Satan gets harder each day. At times we find ourselves spiritually down, tired, and at the losing end; we think there is no hope left. However, we are not blown away from the wall; we know we will not fall. Why? Firstly, because we are supported by our Be layer. God is our Be layer! He is always supporting us, making sure that we never fall. Secondly, like the Rope that joins the Be layer to us, Christ death on the cross reconciles us with God. Christ is the Rope! We have the assurance of a sure and steadfast anchor (Hebrews 6:19). What a comfort we have!

We are actually fighting a winning battle! We know we have won because when Christ comes again, God by His great power will defeat Satan once and for all (Genesis 3:15)!

## Perseverance of the Saints

On the other hand, although God sovereignly preserves His elected saints, His people are still responsible to live holy and thankful lives.

In 1 John 3:2-3 “Beloved, now are we the sons of GOD, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.” As children of God, we ought to ‘walk by faith and live in hope’ – taken from Matthew Henry. Walking by faith means trusting and having the assurance that God will deliver His promises – God will give us grace to press on until the second coming of Christ. Living in hope means believing that when Christ comes again, we will be glorified and be brought back to our Heavenly home. We know that our Lord is holy and pure. God and sin

can never dwell together. Therefore, while waiting for Christ to come again, we should strive to lead holy and acceptable lives by using God's word as the principles of our lives and fleeing from sin and temptation (2 Peter 2:11), thus growing in grace and holiness. In addition, the Bible teaches "...Be ye holy; for I am holy." (1 Peter 1:16 and Leviticus 11:44) This is what the Lord commands us to do. As regenerated children of God, we ought to "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;" (Ephesians 4:22-23). Also, we will be inclined to do so (2 Peter 1:10).

In Psalm 119:33 "Teach me, O Lord, the ways of thy statutes; and I shall keep in unto the end." David is certain that when God teaches him His commandments, God will also give David grace and strength to keep them. Likewise, whether in times of prosperity or in times of tribulation, God will always give us grace to keep His statutes. By God's infinite grace, we are able to persevere!

### **Applications**

After knowing the doctrine of Perseverance/Preservation of the Saints, how should we apply it in our lives? We know that we are preserved by God's grace and we are only able to persevere by God's grace too. Every day we are battling with sin. In Matthew 26:41 "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit is indeed willing, but the flesh is weak." We need to constantly look to God in prayer, asking Him for grace to help us say no to sin. Thus, when we pray according to God's word and seek to do His will (Luke 11:9, Jeremiah 33:3), God delivers us and we see His power and glory and His love for us. This strengthens our faith as we trust on Him more. However, this takes time. We have to

continuously study God's Word to seek His will and pray without ceasing. And God according to His sovereign plan will answer us. It is through prayer that God helps us. Therefore, prayer is apt in a Christian's life.

Secondly, by listening and reading the word of God, God preserves His people. In 2 Timothy 3:16-17 "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect thoroughly furnished unto all good works." God's exhortations, admonitions, encouragements, are all used to keep us from straying. Thus, reading of God's word is important. In addition, listening to the preaching of God's word during worship services or through audio sermons is equally important. In John 10:27-28 "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." Therefore the more we should be diligent in doing daily devotions and keeping the Sabbath day holy.

### **Relation to the other four points**

God preserves the elect because He, by His sovereign will, without any condition chose them (The Doctrine of Unconditional Election). God preserves those whom He has chosen because Christ has died for them (The Doctrine of Limited atonement). God preserves them by giving them an efficacious and irresistible grace so that nothing at all can separate them from having eternal salvation (The doctrine of Irresistible grace). They need this grace because without it, they are unable to do any good at all, much less able to obtain everlasting life because they are totally depraved (The Doctrine of Total Depravity). May we guard this truth dearly in our hearts.

### **Conclusion**

Press on! We have this peace and comfort which assures us that by God's grace, He will preserve us and we will be able to persevere in whatever circumstances we face (Philippians 4:7). Psalm 18:49 "Therefore will I give thanks unto thee, O LORD, among the heathen, and sing praises unto thy name." All praise and glory go to our one and only sovereign Lord! *Soli Deo Gloria!*

## THE IMPORTANCE ON READING III: **WHAT A CHRISTIAN SHOULD READ**

>> Prof. Hanko

In the last article, I wrote about the importance of personal Bible reading. In this article I intend to write about reading in general, and the reasons why broader reading is profitable.

Along with Bible reading, one ought to include reading of religious material. There is a flood of it on the market, and very little of it is valuable for a Christian. But one can profitably read what is worthwhile and whatever helps on in his calling to live a Christian life.

Neither does one need to limit himself/herself to reading of books on doctrine. Such reading can be valuable and ought to have a certain priority in the Christian's reading list. But one can certainly read more widely in this field. For example, I have recently read interesting and important books on how the King James Version of the Bible came into existence; of how the Roman Catholic hierarchy operates in various circumstances; biographies of Christian missionaries; etc.

It is also worth one's time and effort to read in the field of church history. There are literally thousands of books written in this field: biographies, descriptions of events and time periods, analyses of heresies and movements, thrilling stories of faithful people of God – such as Fox's Book of Martyrs, and such like books. They are worth our while because they give us insights into that great and miraculous work of God in preserving his church throughout all history. And, they tell us of the struggles of the church against heresies and wicked men who tried to destroy the church.



It is not always necessary to limit oneself to “Reformed” books. One certainly may read books written by authors who are not always in agreement with our Reformed confessions. But one must learn to read discerningly. I am not going to talk about that now, however, for I have a few things to say about that subject, which I am reserving for later.

### Reading Secular Writings

A Christian ought to read more widely even than the fields I have mentioned. He ought, for example, to keep up somehow with events that are taking place in his own country and in the world at large. I consider this to be important, because a Christian must live in the expectation of the second coming of Christ. Christ has given us signs of His coming, signs, which we discussed in our classes on Revelation and in our meetings in the Youth Camp. If we are to see these signs and thus be stirred up to live in expectation of Christ’s coming, we have to know what is happening in the world.

One can read the newspapers available to him. One can read a news magazine, such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, *US News and World Report* or something comparable. I would never advocate watching the news programmes on TV. News reporting is biased enough without the horrendously biased news coverage of TV stations. News clips with carefully chosen pictures and craftily formulated messages cannot possibly give one any accurate description of what is going on in the world.

I read a book a while ago written by Malcolm Muggeridge entitled, *The Fourth Temptation*. Ignoring the reason for the strange but totally appropriate title, I recommend this book for your reading. Mr. Muggeridge served for years as a news reporter for radio, BBC television and *The London Times*. It is the thesis of his book that it is extremely difficult to get the news straight in newspapers; it is still difficult to report news on the radio; it is impossible to report news on TV. Television in its very nature, is unable to report news in any kind of accurate and worthwhile fashion.

It is a fact that the news media are, generally speaking, biased, slanted in their coverage, and frequently under government direction and control to a greater or lesser extent. Nevertheless, news media are the only access to what is happening that we have. And so one must read, remembering all the time that there is much more to the story that is being reported, and that we can only form a general picture of events. But this is often enough for the Christian to be able to see the signs of the times unfolding.

I recently read a book by John W. Dower with the title, *Cultures of War*. While I am sure the writer is as biased and unfair as any other historian, he writes, with excellent documentation of events that took place prior to and during World War I, World War II, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that I had never even suspected – and I lived through them all except World War I, and was an eager listener to every news broadcast I could find on the radio every issue of a news magazine, and every news article in the newspaper I regularly read. If half of what Mr. Dower wrote is correct, my perceptions of what was going on were dangerously wrong.

### Reading History

But there is more that a Christian could and should read. I am aware of the fact that each child of God has his or her own preference in subjects. Some like science, others like literature, still others like history, etc. Perhaps it is because I am a “history buff” that I particularly like to read history. There are some fine, interesting and helpful books out in this field that, while written by secular and unbelieving writers, are every informative. To mention but one author: Barbara Tuchman has written some very fine history narratives. She has written on the Middle Ages in *A Distant Mirror* and on the years preceding World War I in *Twin Towers*.

But, these are only suggestions. I find books on the Civil War in America (1861 – 1865) most fascinating, especially in its questions of slavery and States’ Rights. Well-written books on history

It is not always necessary to limit oneself to “Reformed” books. One certainly may read books written by authors who are not always in agreement with our Reformed confessions. But one must learn to read discerningly.

can help the Christian understand God’s sovereign workings in history. I recall talking once to an expert on the Revolutionary War (1776-1781) at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, where the suffering American soldiers spent a most difficult winter. I mentioned to the gentleman, who was giving information on the war in general and on the winter at Valley Forge in particular, that it seemed to me that there was no earthly or human explanation for the survival of the American forces and ultimate victory over the British. He agreed with me, but looked very taken aback when I suggested to him the fact that God wanted, for His own purpose, America to be an independent nation among the nations of the earth. That is another example of the pleasure of reading history.

But I have written enough for the time being.

## A PROPER PERSPECTIVE

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# CHOOSING

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“God-fearing men  
seek  
God-fearing wives.”

Prof. Hanko

In God’s counsel of election, He chose a specific group of people to be His own. Leaving the rest of mankind to perish in the way of their sin, God chose a group of people unto salvation in Christ. Upon them He sets His favour and love, and reveals to them His ways of eternal blessedness and happiness. These chosen ones enjoy God’s covenant friendship only because the face of Christ is ever set before them. God sees them as a group of sinners redeemed by the accursed death of His beloved Son.

Although God in eternity has determined whom we shall marry, yet in time He leaves some room in our wills to seek that person that He has prepared for us. How God does this is a deep and profound mystery. We may only respond that God in His sovereignty is able to do this, although we never know precisely how. Nevertheless, the small room that God allows in our wills makes us responsible for the decision of who to marry. It is necessary to discuss this responsibility because we are, in the final judgment, accountable before God for whom we choose to be our spouse. Our salvation, in a very great measure, is involved in this choice.

God wills the process of courtship to be the platform for marriage. Since the covenant God is so central in the life of courtship, it is desperately important that the one whom we choose to be our boy or girlfriend is the man or woman of God’s choice. Our duty is to determine God’s will for us when making this choice. His Word must instruct us and His Spirit must guide our hearts to make the right choice. Our prayers ought to echo the plea of the psalmist, “Shew me thy ways, O LORD, teach me thy paths” (Psalm 25:4).

Choosing a spouse is perhaps one of the greatest decisions we will make in our lifetime. Choosing a boy or girlfriend is therefore equally important since courtship is the necessary platform for marriage. All too often, young people are concerned only about the outward beauty, physical attraction, talents, charisma, wealth, social status and personality of a person. Consequently they place these things as necessary qualities for an ideal boy or girlfriend to the injury of their souls.

Covenant young people ought not to be so. They are the people of God, the citizens of the heavenly kingdom, called out of darkness into the marvellous light of God’s fellowship. For this reason they must seek the things of God in courtship. “The child of God”, says Rev. Cornelius Hanko, “is drawn to one who speaks his language in spiritual matters, who enjoys with him the things of God’s kingdom.” As a young person understands the truth that God has chosen him in Christ, so he will seek to find a spouse who, like him, is also a member of the body of Christ. He

## ON CHRISTIAN COURTSHIP II

# WISELY

>> Aaron

will desire a girl who by her confession and life demonstrates true membership in the Church of God.

A covenant young man is attracted to the spirituality of a girl. He is not so much concerned about the outward beauty or personality of a girl but her spiritual-mindedness. How much she loves God and values things of spiritual worth are of chief concern to him. He is concerned about these characteristics because the Scriptures dictate that they are of a great price in the sight of God. A girl who fears God and desires to grow in grace is a virtuous woman whose price is far above rubies (Proverbs 31:10). Rev. Steven Key writes correctly that “the fear of Jehovah is what young men must require in the young women they marry, and therefore in any women they date” (*Far Above Rubies*).

Such is the unique character of a godly person that it is attractive to another. This spiritual attraction is the means by which a godly young man is drawn towards a godly young woman. He finds her attractive because He sees God in her. On the other hand she is drawn to him because she knows that he is a man of God. This is the power that not only draws two young believers together but more importantly sustains their relationship. Ungodly relationships with unbelievers are destructive to the believer because God is not in them. Covenant relationships prosper because God upholds them by His almighty power, keeping and blessing them in His grace.

Scripture is emphatic in its warning against making wrong choices where it comes to relationships. God expressly warns against choosing unbelievers in relationships. The consequences for choosing unbelieving partners in courtship ought to be crystal clear to all covenant young people. There is nothing but spiritual devastation and misery to the soul that chooses an unbelieving partner.

The truth is that courtship is an important process of a covenant young person’s life because it shapes his spiritual

character. In many ways, his thinking and personality are dictated by his future spouse. The bishop J.C. Ryle offers his penetrating words, “Your wife must either help your soul or harm it: there is no neutral. She will either fan the flame of religion in your heart, or throw cold water upon it, and make it burn low. She will either be wings or fetters, a rein or a spur to your Christianity, according to her character.” (*Thoughts for Young Men*) So we see that a young man’s relationship with God is profoundly related to the character of his partner. A girl who loves God will inevitably draw him closer to God as they engage in an intimate bond of friendship.

Such ought to be our choice when choosing partners in relationships. The man or woman whom we date must bring us closer to God in courtship. We must be able to know and enjoy God in fresh and deeper ways. We must be able to grow in the fruits of the Spirit. In a godly relationship, we grow in the knowledge and grace of our Lord, increasing in our love for Him because of the new love He gives to us in our lives.

Only by godly wisdom as derived from the Holy Scriptures and habitual prayer with our covenant God may we make that right choice. This is a choice with eternal consequences upon our soul. This is a choice that will either bring to us joys of salvation or spiritual misery with the one we choose to spend our life with. In the following parts, we shall devote more time to discuss some of the specific qualities that young covenant people ought to pursue and what to be concerned about in the process of courtship.

## Introduction

Marriage, divorce and remarriage are words we use to describe the various, basic human relationships underlying the family life. The proper understanding of the meanings and implications of these words help us to know how we should live in those relationships for a happy family life.

Look at the creation and you cannot help but notice the superiority of the human community over the others, for example, the dog's and cat's. Which living creature in the whole of creation has subdued the earth more and better than what human beings have done so far? Much of the laws of nature have been discovered and are still being discovered by men today. God did fearfully and wonderfully create man capable of investigating and understanding this world even as He commanded them to have dominion over it on His behalf.

It should also be obvious to us that God expected the above task assigned to man to be done through many generations. By the creation of Eve and the giving of her to Adam for his fruitfulness and multiplying, the LORD God was saying to man that his work cannot be done all by himself. He must raise up a godly family to help him with the task.

Many generations have come and gone, but there is still much of this Creation of God that we are still ignorant of. Though we try to understand and describe to the best our abilities, we have not been able to do a proper job after man had fallen into sin. Man is to subdue all things for the glory of God.

But, in his estate of sin and misery (in his condition as a fallen creature) he cannot but sin against God (fall short of God's glory). He is in no position to raise another generation to continue the task, even if he is doing well for himself. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

## On marriage

Just look around, and you will see that this age-old institution of marriage is fallen on hard times. Many busy young people of today do consider the formal marriage (where you need to get registered with the authority) as a waste of time. This is especially so when the time comes for them to get a divorce. There are so many rules and regulations governing such serious actions and so they rather simply cohabit and agree to part ways when the time comes – as simple as that.

On another front, we do come across the gays who insist on their rights to marriage for parties of the same sex – men marrying men and women marrying women. This is nothing but a redefinition of marriage so as to claim the package of legal rights and privileges, for a once forbidden relationship, in a moment. Ungodly people are simply selfish and care neither for God's glory nor the good of the human society.

When we see the Church supporting such erroneous concepts of marriage by allowing them, and worse, accepting gay people into office to conduct the same, we know that this divine institution is being severely attacked! This is the scene of marriage today.

# MARRIAGE, DIVORCE AND RE-MARRIAGE I

## On divorce

Divorce, or the break-up of a family, legally or otherwise, is rampant these days. This seems to be the case in any developing or developed nations, as if growth necessitates such evils.

If the marriage union is necessary for man to carry out his calling to serve God, then divorce and all activities leading thereto must be evil, at least, in the undermining of his basic and fundamental calling as the bearer of God's image and likeness. The depreciation of having and maintaining godly homes demonstrates the aimlessness of men in all their lives. The development of this world without God's grace is a development of a systematic removal of that which truly and rightly binds us together in truth and unity, namely the Triune God. It is of, by, and through the Triune God that all things find their meaning and unity. The world is traveling on the road of separation and ultimate destruction. This road of divorce is what God hates. All things shall end up at the Final Judgment Seat of Christ to see if they are worthy of entrance into the New Heaven and New Earth wherein dwells righteousness.

&gt;&gt; Pastor Lau

**On remarriage**

Remarriage to another other than one's own spouse is a further corruption and confusion of one's own already problematic marriage. Repentance and reconciliation is the solution to a problematic relationship. All holy actions in such a dire situation (including the acceptable divorce) must serve this solution. Remarriage is never such an holy action as it undermines true repentance and reconciliation.

That the world around us is full of remarriages is exemplified by the lives of film stars so admired and worshipped by many all over the world. In fact, they boast about how many times and with whom they were married through their "successful" careers and lives. They are unashamed of their sinful ways, but rather promote them with pride.

When we look to the church for guidance and support, we find shaky floors, pillars and walls. In some instances the waters of destruction are already seeping into the boat. The Church that boasts of being entrusted with the divine ministry of reconciliation, is now providing a place of shelter for people who give up and want to start from the beginning again. This is an easy way out which leads to more problems. The church has failed to be the Pillar and Ground of the Truth for God's people. The heavy hand of the Lord need

not always lead to repentance and reconciliation, but, in some cases, it even justifies a further confusion in a relationship.

**Conclusion**

As God's beloved covenant people, we must address these issues in this world not because we hope to change the world and avoid the inevitable Judgment Day, but because the truth must be testified to the glory of God and the comfort of His people living in this dark and sinful world. As God's chosen people we must live the antithetical life which is not an easy task to perform. We need all the encouragement from our Heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. And there is no reason why He should not address these issues clearly for our good, protection and guidance.

Moreover, these are not problems peculiar to our modern world so that we cannot expect meaningful solutions from the ancient writings of the Bible. The issues involve human relationships as old as the human nature as created by God. It is of the nature of man that he loves and procreates. The family is inevitable. And when man fell into sin, all these sinful issues developed naturally in the development of sin. So, we read of the problem of polygamy early in the history of man. The whole Bible is full of stories related to family life, and thus, to such issues as

divorce and remarriage. To say that the Bible lacks data on such matters to be clear is to suggest that God sees them as trivial. Even discerning social scientists acknowledge that these are serious matters affecting the well-being of nations and their futures. God is not silent on such matters, but we are careless and deceived to have neglected the careful study of His Word for His solution.

Since the rise of the remarriage controversy in First Evangelical Reformed Church until now, the Lord has only confirmed to me that remarriage is a sin to be repented of by God's people as they seek to testify for God and seek His glory in this present world. I am therefore very happy when Salt Shakers asked me to write a series of articles on these issues. Though my health is not the greatest for such a long project, I believe God will enable when He commands it graciously. I do covet all your prayers for me to write to His glory and praise, and the comfort of His great people.

Amen.



We would be focusing our attention on marriage in this article. There is so much that can be said about marriage that we certainly are not able to cover the subject comprehensively in the little space we have here. What I intend to do is to discuss some of the key 'practical' aspects of marriage. But we must remember that all 'practice' is, and ought to be, founded upon doctrinal principles. Read thoughtfully and may the Lord use this reading to help you to be more prepared for the lifelong commitment of marriage.

I would like to begin from the subject of the wedding. The culmination of courtship is marriage. As a couple grows closer to each other through courtship, there comes a time when they decide to join together in marriage. Marriage ought not to be entered into lightly, but to be decided upon only after the couple has sought and discerned the Lord's will through earnest prayer, individually as well as together. It must be entered upon only after honest soul-searching and serious consideration, for it affects not just one, but two persons' lives radically; and not for only a period of time, but a *lifetime*. It is undoubtedly one of the most significant decisions that any person will ever make in his entire life.

When a courting or engaged couple talks about marriage, almost the first thing that comes into their minds is the wedding day. It is my observation that whenever a couple tells anyone that they are getting married, almost the next question that they are asked (after receiving congratulations) is "when is the wedding?" or "How are the wedding preparations?" Virtually no one talks to the couple about life *after* the wedding, or the meaning and significance of marriage. This, I believe, reflects to some extent the prevalent mindset of our culture today, which regards the 'biggest' thing about marriage to be the wedding day. A grand and lavish wedding in no way guarantees a 'successful' marriage. If the marriage becomes cold and acrimonious within months or even

# GODLY MARRIAGES I

after a few years, or worse still, finally leads to a divorce, the wedding means absolutely nothing. If we really think about it, the wedding is only the beginning and a very small part of the whole life of marriage! My point is that the wedding day, though important and significant, is NOT everything that there is to marriage, nor the most important day in our married life. What truly counts is life *after* the wedding - *until* death. We ought not to spend so much time planning and preparing for our wedding that we are left with little time and energy to prepare well and lay a good foundation for the beginning of married life together. Having said all that, I do believe that a fair and significant amount of effort ought to go into planning a wedding to make it special and memorable. Planning for a wedding together is an exciting venture. The couple can and ought to use the opportunity of planning for the wedding to further strengthen their relationship. It is likely to be the first major 'project' that they work on together and it would be a good opportunity to get to know each other even better and grow closer together through the experience.

It is not my intention here to go into the details of planning a wedding, for that can quite easily be figured out, with the help of a wedding planner and friends, despite the mammoth amount of planning and coordination work that is required for that one day. But I want to direct our focus to just one thing by asking this question: **What is the highlight and focus of our wedding?** The celebration of human love? Of an exciting courtship and seemingly perfect match "made in heaven"? I submit that the most important part of the entire wedding proceeding is the **exchange of the marriage vows** [NB : not to say the Word that is spoken on the occasion is secondary, but the Word spoken really focuses the audience's attention on the same thing as the vows do - the significance and seriousness of marriage]. Not the march-in or the recessional; not the lifting of the bride's veil; not the kiss; not the thank-you speech by the bridegroom. Not the special items presented. Certainly not the refreshments after the ceremony. The **highlight** of the entire ceremony is when the couple pledge, with all solemnity and seriousness, before

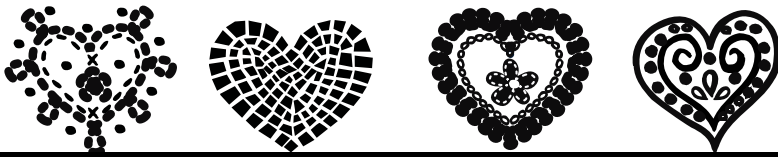


the all-knowing God Who judges their hearts as their witness, that they would give themselves wholly to each other for life. We can forget everything else about the wedding, but we cannot and must never forget the marriage vows we took on that day. To make a vow is a very serious matter. To trifle with our vows is to trifle with God! (Ecc 5:4 "When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed"). God holds us to our vow and expects us to keep it (Deu 23:21 "When thou shalt vow a vow unto the LORD thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it: for the LORD thy God will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee.") We must mean what we say - that we (as husband and wife) will stay together, come what may, till death do us part. This unbreakable bond of marriage is a reflection (though pale and imperfect) of that everlasting and unbreakable covenant of grace that God establishes with His elect in Christ. It is a reminder of Christ's constant, unailing and unconditional love for the Church (Eph 5:31-32). **This glorious truth must be the central theme of our wedding.** All our planning and decisions concerning our wedding ought to be guided by this truth. All the witnesses on our wedding day ought to hear and see this truth unmistakably. They must hear and behold this truth especially in the exhortation by the minister and the exchange of the marriage vows. They must be left without a doubt that this truth is the highlight and focus of our wedding. They must know that the marriage that they are witnesses to is a reflection of the heavenly, spiritual marriage of Christ and the Church.

Too many weddings in our day, even some Christian weddings, put excessive focus on the couple - celebrating and highlighting their love for each other, their courtship, their achievements, their lives, - so much so that any reference to God or the spiritual significance of marriage appears very incidental. The couple is treated almost like movie stars or royalty. Everything and everyone else become secondary to them. No doubt, the wedding couple would be at the centre of attention. We do not shy away from that or say there is anything wrong with that per se. But the question is : what do people see

when they look at the couple? Do their gaze and thoughts remain only on the couple, or are they lifted up and directed towards God, Christ and the Church? If the theme and focus of our wedding is the marriage of Christ and the Church, then the attention on us, by God's grace, would not just dwell on and end with us, but would be turned heavenward to focus on the far more glorious marriage of Christ and the Church.

Additionally, over and against the serious character and deep spiritual significance of marriage, there is a disconcerting trend today that couples want their weddings to be more informal, casual and light-hearted. This tone and mood is diffused throughout the wedding programme, even including the exchange of the marriage vows. The occasion is little more than another social event where the friends of the couple gather with them to have a good time (like a birthday party). The exchange of vows becomes merely ceremonial, and the couple and guests look forward to the other parts of the programme that are deemed more exciting and interesting. So some weddings would include teasing the couple, making them do embarrassing things, getting them drunk, etc. Other couples, to make the wedding programme more memorable, exciting, or simply to do something different, do "out-of-the-world" or outrageous things such as exchanging rings underwater or while parachuting from a plane. I'm not saying that as Christians, we cannot do something special at our weddings to make it memorable; my point is we must not lose focus of the **significance and purpose** of our wedding – whatever we may plan as part of our wedding programme, the activities must not detract from the solemnity and profound meaning of marriage, namely, that it is a picture and reflection of the one true marriage between Jesus Christ and His Church.



“When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for [he hath] no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed.” Ecc 5:4

A wedding is not about the romantic love story of 2 persons who happen to meet and like each other's company very much, feel good about each other and decided to extend this experience for as long as they possibly can. No, no. It marks the beginning, through the making of vows before God and all the witnesses gathered, the beginning of a most intimate and spiritual union of two persons, of body and soul, that involves absolute faithfulness, commitment and whole-hearted devotion to each other, constant self-denial, enormous sacrifices, untiring perseverance, and unconditional love – **for life**. If we bear this in mind, I am certain we would see much more God-honouring, edifying and meaningful weddings.



# REVIEW OF PROF'S TALK ON THE PLACE OF CONFESSIONS IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

>> Daniel Ong

The Lecture entitled "The Place of Confessions in the Life of the Church" was given by Professor Herman Hanko (affectionately called Prof) on 27 Nov 10. It was one of the "What the Bible Says Series" which also covered Christian Liberty and Church Planting or Mission Work. I recommend this lecture to all who are interested to know the place of Confessions in the life of the church. Prof's lecture on this topic is the best I have ever come across. It is available on the CERC website, <http://www.cerc.org.sg/sermonslectures.htm>. Prof emphasized the need to know our Confessions. Two reasons stand out from the rest. First, life, or Christian living flows from doctrines. Second, we will increasingly need to contend for the faith. (Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. Jude 3)

## **Prof also described the character of Creeds or Confessions:**

Confessions are statements carefully crafted that "say with God". Confessions develop scriptures. Confessions are the fruit of the works of the Holy Spirit of Truth. Confessions are officially adopted documents of the church. Confessions express the regular fide (the rule of faith).

After listening to the lecture, I am deeply impressed that Confessions are very important in the life of the church. These Confessions do not come about easily. They remain as Confessions of the church after much struggles and battles by the saints and churches of old. Many fought for the purity of the Truth, and were willing to die for their faith. If you were to study church history, you would better understand how our present day Confessions have developed. Our church, Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church (CERC) holds to the Three Forms of Unity. The Three Forms of Unity are the Heidelberg Catechism (1576 A.D.), the Belgic Confession (1561 A.D.), and the Canons of Dort (1619 A.D.). I encourage you to get a copy of The Three Forms of Unity and study these articles of beliefs.

## **Below is a list of creeds from the early church age till the 17th Century.**

Creeds and Confessions are written summaries of the Christian faith. Different Creeds have different reasons for coming into existence and they don't always agree with each other 100% of the time. However, they divulge the truth of the Christian faith in the essentials.

<http://carm.org/christianity/creeds-and-confessions/apostles-creed>" Apostles' Creed

<http://carm.org/christianity/creeds-and-confessions/nicene-creed-325-ad>" Nicene Creed (325 A.D.)

<http://carm.org/christianity/creeds-and-confessions/athanasian-creed-500-ad>" Athanasian Creed (500 A.D.)

<http://carm.org/christianity/creeds-and-confessions/chalcedonian-creed-451-ad>" Chalcedonian Creed (451 A.D.)

<http://carm.org/christianity/creeds-and-confessions/canons-council-orange-529-ad>" Canons on the Council of Orange (529 A.D.)

<http://carm.org/christianity/creeds-and-confessions/statement-faith-3rd-council-constantinople-681-ad>" Statement of faith of the 3rd Council of Constantinople (681 A.D.)

## **Reformation Confessions**

<http://carm.org/christianity/creeds-and-confessions/luthers-95-theses-1517-ad>" Luther's 95 Theses (1517 A.D.)

<http://carm.org/christianity/creeds-and-confessions/augsburg-confession-1530-ad>" Augsburg Confession (1530 A.D.)

<http://carm.org/christianity/creeds-and-confessions/belgic-confession-1561-ad>" Belgic Confession (1561 A.D.)

<http://carm.org/christianity/creeds-and-confessions/heidelberg-catechism-1576-ad>" Heidelberg Catechism (1576 A.D.)

<http://carm.org/christianity/creeds-and-confessions/canons-dort-1619-ad>" Canons of Dort (1619 A.D.)

<http://carm.org/christianity/creeds-and-confessions/westminster-confession-1647-ad>" Westminster Confession (1647 A.D.)

<http://carm.org/westminster-shorter-catechism>" Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647 A.D.)

<http://carm.org/christianity/creeds-and-confessions/waldensian-confession-1655-ad>" Waldensian Confession (1655 A.D.)

# PREACHING CHRIST CRUCIFIED

>> Pastor Goh

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“But, we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews and  
stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness”  
1 Corinthians 1:23

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Dear Covenant Youths,

Our text begins with the word, “but” which is a contrast. It is a contrast to what the world seeks, namely, the Jews and the Greeks. They represent the world at that time. The whole world could be divided between the Jews and the Greeks or Gentiles. According to verse 22, the Jews seek signs and the Greeks seek wisdom. And contrary to what they seek, the apostles preach Christ crucified. This means that the apostles do not preach to the itching ears of the Jews and Gentiles. The apostles are called to preach the gospel because therein and therein only is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes. The world considers such preaching foolishness. And over against these clamourings of the Jews for a sign and the wicked pursuit of the Greeks for the wisdom of philosophy, Paul insists: we preach Christ crucified. By this emphatic statement the apostle means to say that his calling as an apostle of Jesus Christ is all of one thing: that of Christ crucified. That is the sole content of his preaching to the exclusion of others.

But before we plunge into understanding what is Christ crucified, it would be edifying for us if we would ask a question, what is preaching? When there is true preaching, Christ is preaching from heaven. Christ himself is talking. Now, it is not that a preacher is talking about Christ or does not even that a preacher speaks in the name of Christ but Scripture emphasises that when a minister speaks, Christ himself speaks. In contrasting Himself as the Good Shepherd, to hirelings and thieves, Christ claims that His sheep recognise his voice in the noise of many voices. They recognise his voice because they hear Him. "My sheep hear my voice."

Preaching is an activity that belongs to heaven because the kingdom of heaven is the content of preaching and this is what most of what preachers say. And he uses earthly illustrations drawn from daily life in order to point out heavenly truths. The important thing is not about this earth but the things of heaven. Hence, the purpose of preaching is to prepare a people to live in heaven.

And to accomplish this task of getting people ready to live for heaven, preaching unleashes powers that make the powers of Tsunamis, volcanic eruptions or explosions of atomic bombs seem to be cheap firecrackers. The meditation of this truth cannot but frighten anyone who has assumed the responsibility of preaching. Indeed, oftentimes the only knowledge that compels a minister to mount the pulpit on the Lord's Day is the cry of the apostle: "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel." It takes God's terrible woe to persuade him to preach. The powers that are unleashed through preaching Christ crucified are greater than the powers which brought the worlds into existence as our Canons point out in 3rd and 4th head of doctrine, article 12.

And this is the regeneration so highly celebrated in Scripture, and denominated a new creation: a resurrection from the dead, a making alive, which God works in us without our aid. But this is in no wise effected merely by the external preaching of the gospel, by moral suasion, or such a mode of operation, that after God

has performed his part, it still remains in the power of man to be regenerated or not, to be converted, or to continue unconverted; but it is evidently the supernatural work, most powerful, and at the same time most delightful, astonishing, mysterious, and ineffable; not inferior in efficacy to creation, or the resurrection from the dead, as the Scripture inspired by the author of this work declares; so that all in whose heart God works in this marvelous manner, are certainly, infallibly, and effectually regenerated, and do actually believe. - Whereupon the will thus renewed, is not only actuated and influenced by God, but in consequence of this influence, becomes itself active. Wherefore also, man is himself rightly said to believe and repent, by virtue of that grace received."

"And the Word  
became flesh and  
dwelt among us,  
and we beheld  
his glory, the  
glory as of the  
only begotten of  
the Father, full of  
grace and truth."

Because Christ preaches, the Word of Christ which is powerful, irresistible, spiritual life-giving is a Word that plucks a depraved sinner from the brink of the fires of hell and carries him into heaven; it transforms the foulest sinner into a beautiful saint of God who blesses and praises in song and prayer to Him who dwells on high. Such power can be found nowhere else in all the worlds. Conscious of this awesome power that preaching possesses, the apostle insisted that the only way these things could be true was through the preaching of Christ crucified. How could that be?

Preaching comes in the form of words. These words are the Word of God and God speaks within Himself that Word because the first person of the Trinity

speaks the Word, which is within the Holy Trinity, the eternal Son. And in order for God to reveal himself to His creatures, the triune God speaks the Word outside of His own triune life in Jesus Christ. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:1, 14). That Word became flesh to die on the cross, that Word is, therefore, the one Word of the cross. It is the Word of God in Christ, a Word that speaks from heaven about what God does in heaven through His own Son. That Word is given unto us in written form in the infallible Scriptures, and it is the one and only Word for all preaching. We interpret history according to one reality, that is, Christ crucified. There is no alternative interpretation to history. In the truest sense of the word, Christ crucified was always God's purpose in all that He did from the moment of creation onward. God has freely and sovereignly, from before the worlds were created, determined to reveal His own glorious and perfect life through a Word which He speaks outside Himself. That one Word which He speaks is essentially Christ crucified. The cross is the heart and centre of all God's purpose, so it is in the light of the cross of Calvary that all Christ's work throughout all history can be understood and explained. It is in the Word of the cross that God reveals the infinite perfections of His own perfect life. And that cross forms the heart and focal point of all Christ did and does and shall do into all eternity. In that cross is salvation: it is salvation of a church chosen eternally, given to Christ, saved from sin and death, brought into covenant fellowship with the triune God to live with him, world without end. That cross is what history is all about - in this life and in the eternal history of the new heavens and the new earth.

And all this leads us to what constitutes a Christ-centred sermon. Firstly, Christ-centred preaching is God-centred. Christ is the Word of God in whom is hid all the fullness of the revelation of Jehovah God in all His infinite perfections. God-centred preaching extols the greatness of the glory of God and brings the people of God

to give all praise and honour to him who is enthroned on high. Secondly, Christ-centred preaching is doctrinal preaching. Doctrinal preaching is such preaching that explains, expounds, and develops the truth of the Word of God, which is the full revelation of God himself. And we are to know this God for after all this is eternal life. John 17:3, says, "Eternal life is after all is knowing God and Jesus Christ whom God has sent." In order for it to be true preaching, the truth expounded must be applied to the life and calling of God's people so that God's people can know this God more and more each day. Thirdly, Christ-centred preaching is antithetical preaching. It is preaching of sovereign and eternal predestination in both election and reprobation. Such is the heart of the gospel, which gives to the gospel its life and power. It is the truth of God's eternal purpose to save some and to damn others. This antithesis is realised in the cross on which Christ both attained salvation for his people and brought the judgment of God upon the unbelieving. This antithesis extends to the gospel itself - the contents of the gospel. The gospel is good news to the people of God, for those whom God loves and for whom Christ died. It is good news for those who believe. And it is bad news for those who reject the gospel. It is inevitable that the preaching of the gospel brings antithesis, division and separation. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe, and to them only. Finally, Christ-centred preaching is preaching which leads God's people to the cross. Every sermon must lead God's people to the cross. That is the only place for them to go. That is where they want to go. That is where they hear voice of the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep. There are two reasons why preaching always leads to the cross. Firstly, God's people are very conscious of their sins and they need to find themselves regularly at the cross that they may receive the forgiveness and pardon, for there is redemption in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Secondly, God's people must go to the foot of the cross so that they may find grace and strength to walk as God's people in the world. They need the power of the cross and they must learn to rely upon it alone. In the cross alone lies the power of the new life in Christ.

Will all who hears the gospel come to accept it and believe in it? The answer is no. And one of the consequences of preaching Christ crucified is that it will be rejected by the Jews and Greeks. In speaking of the gospel rejected, the apostle Paul wants to point out two classes of persons that would represent the world who despises the truth in their own ways. The Jews stumble over the gospel while the Greeks consider it foolishness. I shall simply introduce the Jew and the Greek, and let them speak a moment to you and convict you of your sins. Now, let us consider the Jews. To him, the gospel is a stumbling block. The typical Jew is a typical man in his day. His religion is characterised by formality; he went up to the temple very devoutly; he tithed all that he had, even to the mint and cummin. You would see him fast twice a week, with a face filled with sadness and sorrow. He had the law in the black box in between his eyes; there was the phylactery, and the borders of his garment of great width so as to differentiate him from the Gentiles; that no one might even think that he was not a pure Hebrew. He had a holy ancestry; he came of a pious family; he was a right good man. He was not like the Sadducees at all, who had no religion, who did not believe in the resurrection. The Jews stood up for his synagogue and would not have the temple on Mount Gerizim, which was the place where the Samaritans worshipped. The Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans. In the eyes of men, the Jew was very religious, a moralist and who loves the ceremonies of the law. And when he heard that Christ was the son of a carpenter and his mother's name is Mary and his father's name is Joseph, that is enough proof that Jesus cannot be the Messiah. And what does Jesus think of the religion of the Jews? He says, "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites." And moreover Jesus he says that is not by works of the flesh that any man can enter into the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, the Jews thought, "Jesus is a stumbling block to me; I will not listen to him." And so the Jews will not listen to him: he is deaf to the preacher's preaching and will not listen to it. The preaching of gospel is a stumbling block to him.

What is a stumbling-block? The word, "stumbling-block," literally in the Greek is "scandal." This word is translated in

our Authorised Version as “offence.” The Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) uses skandalon for the Hebrew word which means to trap, to hinder, to be the cause of ruin. Why is the preaching of Christ crucified a scandal? There are three reasons: first, the preaching of the cross speaks of sin, of the transgression of God’s holy law, of accountability for these for these sins, of guilt and liability to everlasting punishment. Secondly, the preaching of the cross proves man’s inability to do the smallest thing to save himself. God sent Christ to do what no man could do or even will to. And finally, the preaching of the cross speaks of the grace of God - amazing, unmerited, and powerful! When Christ crucified is preached, there may be no thought of merit, wages or works and no wonder that the natural man is offended with the gospel. The only possible conclusion anyone may draw, having heard the blessed gospel, is that God saves in sovereign grace. He saves through His gift of faith: it is by faith that it might be of grace! And let us remember that they stumble at Christ as the chief cornerstone because they are appointed and to be crushed by Him (1 Peter 2:8). We who believe in Christ finds in Him our soul’s satisfaction now and forever. To the chosen, covenant generations He is precious! He that believeth in Him shall never be confounded.

The Greeks, on the other hand, are a different man to the Jew. To him, the phylactery is all rubbish and the broad hem garment, he despises it. Unlike the Jew, he does not care for the forms of religion. What he likes is eloquence: he admires a smart saying, an unusual expression. He is a Greek, and to him the gospel is foolishness. Such a man is found everywhere: in colleges, schools, and in the office. He is thoroughly wise. Ask him anything and he knows it. As for a wise saying or a nice quotation, and he can give it to you. And if you begin to preach to him about Christ, he will say to you, “stop your preaching. I don’t want to hear anything about that.” The Greeks believe all philosophies except the true one, studies all wisdom except the wisdom of God: he likes all learning except spiritual learning; he loves everything except that which God approves; he likes anything which man makes. And to such a man the gospel, Christ-crucified is foolishness.

Young people, as for you who believe heartily in Jesus Christ, the preaching of the Christ crucified is neither a stumbling-block nor is it foolishness but you confess together with the apostle Paul in verse 24, “but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.” First of all, you are very thankful for the cross. Though the unbelieving Gentile deems it foolishness, you love the cross of Christ because it is through the death of Christ on the cross that your sins are forgiven, you are justified by faith, accepted and adopted as God’s children. In other words, through the cross you receive salvation in Jesus Christ. And you love the cross because this is your response to the great love of God for you. At the cross it magnificently displayed the love of God. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” 1 John 3:1, “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.” Secondly, the cross is the ground for your assurance of your salvation. Do you doubt that you are a child of God? Look not on your ability to live holy lives or your faithfulness at doing your daily devotion, daily prayers, coming to Covenant Keepers meetings or coming to church regularly but look at the crucified Christ with eyes of faith to your Saviour that Christ Jesus has died for your sins and you will be assured that you are a child of God and bound for heaven.

Finally, make it your motto those ringing words of Paul to the Galatians: “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Gal 6:14).



## MUSIC I

Dear Young People,

First of all, the Lord willing, we will soon be seeing you face to face. Although we are scheduled to leave home December 25, we plan to spend one week with Rev. and Mrs. Kleyn in the Philippines. That means we hope to arrive in Singapore sometime November 1 or 2 – I can't remember which date it is. It will be good to see you all again.

We are going to continue our discussion of the antithesis. I finished speaking of movies and other dramatic productions. I want, with this letter, to begin a discussion of music. There is good music and there is bad music; a life of the antithesis takes into account the difference and uses and enjoys only good music.

The first matter that needs our attention is that music is a gift of God. It is something that God has created along with the creation of the heavens

and the earth. It is a gift of God that was present from the beginning of creation and must also be used for God's glory. It is a gift that belongs not only to this earthly creation, but belongs also to the heavenly creation. We are told in Scripture that the angels play harps in heaven (Rev. 14:2). And there is much singing that goes on in heaven, the singing of a choir of saints and angels (Rev. 14:3, 15:3, 4). The Psalms were written to be sung in the temple in the worship of God. And Paul mentions singing in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16.

The point I want to make in this article, however, is the great power music has over our lives. If it is good music, it has a good influence on us; if it is bad music, it has a bad influence on us. I am not talking now about the lyrics only, the words of a song, but I am talking about music itself.

Even the world recognizes this power of music. There is a poem written by Alexander Pope, the title of which is "Alexander's Feast." The reference to Alexander in the title is to Alexander the Great, the powerful leader of the Medo-Persian Empire that conquered the whole known world in the old dispensation from Greece to India.

The poem tells about a great banquet that was held for Alexander and all his generals and sub-rulers. At the banquet a musician played different kinds of music, and Alexander the Great responded to each kind of music with fitting actions. If the music was war-like, Alexander arose from his seat at the table and, pulling his sword out of its sheath, began to wave it about over his head. If the music was sad and played in a minor key, Alexander began to cry. If the music was bouncy, Alexander began to dance, etc. The point of the poem was exactly to show how music affects us.

There are many books written (and we have a few in our Seminary library) that describe the terrible influence jazz, rock, hard rock, and other similar kinds of music has on those who listen to it. Its pounding beat and rhythm, its disregard for harmony, its inherent qualities, all have seriously harmful effects on those who listen to it.

I recently read an article about the fact that bad music can be and is as addictive as drugs. I want to quote from this article at some length. It is found in a Lutheran church paper called, Christian News. The article goes as follows.



“Don Lucarini, a former contemporary worship leader, warns that the rock rhythm affects us like a musical drug. Though it may be subtly introduced, the listener soon develops a craving for it. The flesh demands more and more, just like an addict, and there is no turning back’. (*Why I Left the Contemporary Christian Music Movement* [the author refers to a book he read, HH]) This sets up an inevitable trend away from traditional church music. In chapter 17 of his book, Dan writes, ‘In reality, what happens over time is a steady slide down the slippery slope away from all traditional music into the latest, edgiest contemporary styles.’ I like Dan’s illustration of a slippery slope. I can remember when we were children. We had this particular park where we would go, and it had a very steep grassy slope. And we all had our pieces of cardboard, and with these we would slide down at our own risk. I was probably the littlest of all the kids, and for me it was a pretty scary thing. I remember when you first started off, if you really wanted to stop yourself you could. But if you didn’t stop yourself immediately, then pretty soon you would reach the point of no return, and like it or not you would wind up at the bottom of the hill. That’s exactly what its like when a conservative church once

begins to dabble in CCM (Contemporary Christian Music Movement, HH). Like it or not, they will wind up at the bottom of that hill, and they will get there at an alarming rate. Whether you understand it or not, once you begin listening to soft rock, immediately you begin sliding down that slippery slope to the more aggressive forms of rock. This is because the rock ballad begins to orientate the whole way of perceiving music: around rhythm and away from melody. Your musical interests will change. The hymns and songs of the past that seemed such excellent vehicles for worship will suddenly sound dull in comparison to your newly acquired tastes. It’s a progression I’ve seen over and over again in the lives of Christians. It’s like a downward spiral. It happens to individuals; it happens to families; it happens to churches. The trend is really all that we would expect, because people are only following their idols as they in turn faithfully follow the world and its trend of ever-increasing musical degradation. In the past 50 years in the West, as our culture has become progressively more fleshly, the musical focus of society has been increasingly dominated by complex, sensual rhythm. So here we are in the 21st century with rap, the world’s number-two-selling music

format, almost completely devoid of any melody whatsoever. Over time the musical ear has become disorientated. Once it was attuned to melody, but the addictive, sensual rhythms of rock and roll have carried us swiftly down that slippery slope to the place where our ears are now tuned to rhythm. The church, sadly, has followed this same corrupt trend”

But good music also has many beneficial results. I have many experiences in my life in a busy family and in pastoral work of the truth of this. Let me give you a few examples. My wife’s doctor who delivered our babies told us (and I read articles substantiating this) that the kind of music we played in the home had its effects on babies. Good music could lull them to sleep. Loud, boisterous music could upset them; and so it was. Even if the baby were active before birth, the singing of a Psalm by the mother would frequently calm the unborn baby.

We had children who when barely able to walk would hear band music being played, they began marching around the room as a soldier would march. We had fussy children who were calmed by mother's singing.

More dramatically, my own mother was in a coma for several days before she died. She was extremely restless and needed a nurse at the side of the bed almost constantly. But when my father would recite the old Dutch Psalms to her, she would immediately calm down. The nurses could not understand this. Shortly before she died, my father quoted the last lines of Psalm 68 verse 10 to her. The words go something like this in English: "He can and will and certainly shall give complete deliverance, even when death approaches." To my father's surprise, though remaining in a coma, she said, "Yes, that is right." Now this was only the lyrics of the Psalm, but the tune went through her mind as it did in my father's mind.

In the early years of my ministry a young father of four boys who had only two weeks before been installed into the office of deacon was involved in a terrible truck accident. An oncoming semi truck came over into his side of the road and hit his truck head-on. He suffered irreversible brain damage. He lay in a coma for many days. I visited him every week, but could not get any response from him. Finally, one day, I decided to try singing in his presence, for I knew he loved to sing. I sang Psalter number 203, a Psalter number you all know. When I came to the second verse, "Thy counsel through my earthly way shall guide me and control", he began singing with me. We sang the rest of that verse together and the remaining three verses and he never missed a word. The nurses who heard our singing came into the room and listened to us with tears streaming down their faces. Though his brain damage was so severe that he could never live home again, he came out of his coma and lived a fairly normal life. He came to church twice every Lord's Day and even served out the rest of his term as deacon – although he could not, of course, make diaconate calls.

There was an old man in the congregation I served, often an elder, who, after I became professor had to go to a nursing home in his old age. Most of the people in that home had dementia or Alzheimer's Disease, but there was one old lady, nearly a hundred years old, who had a good mind, loved the Dutch Psalms, could speak of spiritual things, and talked the same Frisian language this member of the congregation I served, talked. They had much in common. But she was dying. And she was also in a coma. The member whom I often visited was saddened by her approaching death and asked the nurse if he could see her one more time before she died. The nurse gave her permission, and he went into the room where she lay near death and in a coma. He said to her in Frisian: "Mem" for that is what he called her; the word means "Grandma") "shall we sing together Psalm 42:1 before you go to heaven?" The old saint sat up in bed and the two of them, with their weak, reedy voices, sang the Dutch version of Psalm 42:1. I often wished I had heard it. But I am sure the angels did. At any rate, when they were finished he said goodbye to her, and she lay back on her bed and died before he was out of the room.

He never told me this story; one of the nurses did. How can we think that music has no effect on a person when such things repeatedly happen? We must understand from the beginning of this discussion that music has a powerful effect on us. This is true because music is a gift of God. The corruption of this gift has a powerful effect for evil.

With our love in the Lord,  
*Prof. Hanko*





Pray for the faithful preaching of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in CERC and that God will be pleased to gather His church in CERC and the Reformed faith may be established. Except God builds the house, we labour in vain that build it.

Pray for the elders and deacons that they may diligently search the scriptures, serve and lead the flock that God has put in their care. Pray that the people of God may obey those who have the rule over them, submitting to them who watch for their souls that they may give account with joy (Heb 13:17).

Pray that God may bless our efforts, as we establish relations with the Protestant Reformed Churches of America, a denomination that is of like precious faith.

God has given CERC many young people who are zealous for the Word. Thanks be to God. Pray for them that they may continue in their zeal for the Lord and in the faith that they have been taught.

Pray for Pastor Lau that God will, in His good pleasure, return him to good health. Pray for those we know who are sick that they may trust and receive it from hand of their heavenly Father who does all things for their good.

Pray for Covenant Grace Church in Penang, that God may bless them with the Word of Truth which they will courageously proclaim.

Pray for the Protestant Reformed Churches that God will continue to use them to preserve and propagate the Reformed truth.

Pray for the older saints in the church that they may grow in knowledge and grace. Remember the translators and those who minister to these elderly saints in our prayers.

Pray for the poor in our church that God will supply their daily necessities through the deacons.

Pray for the various bible study groups, that they may grow in knowledge and understanding of God's Word and in Christian fellowship.

Pray that CERC will be the pillar and ground of the Truth, praying and trusting that God will supply all our needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**Come 20 June 2011, we will set off for CERC CAMP 2011. This year, God has provided us with another speaker from PRCA, Reverend Ronald Hanko, to bring His Word to us.**

**It is important that we prepare ourselves spiritually for the Camp. Let us humble ourselves before God, and pray that we will be attentive and receptive to His Word.**

**Our theme for this year is:**

## **ROOTED IN CHRIST: BEARING FRUIT**

*What does it mean to be rooted in Christ?*

*Are we bearing fruit for Christ?*

*Do we honour and obey Him in our lives?*

**We pray for God's leading hand in all our activities at Camp and that we will hear and heed our LORD. May our fellowship be edifying and serve to strengthen the bond we have in Christ.**

**May we be reminded that the Church Camp is not about the place, the food, or even the activities, but it is about our being fed by the Word of God.**



*Pro Rege,  
Camp Committee, 2011*



# ROOTED IN CHRIST: BEARING FRUIT

CERC  
Church  
Camp  
2011

20-23  
June

Rev  
Ronald  
Hanko

Summerset  
Resort,  
Rompin





In Remembrance of Me



# CK 11th Anniversary



# Celebrations



# CKS 3rd Anniversary



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