



salt shakers

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Hello everyone! Welcome to Issue No. 9! It is our sincere hope that God's Word, as it is brought forth through this magazine, may cause you to bear good fruit in your life. And if not presently, may it be as a seed which hides itself deep in the ground of your hearts, that one day, according to God's will, it may spring forth with new life and become a mighty tree which bears fruit according to the work of the Holy Spirit!

As we grow deeper in Christ, we will sometimes be disappointed and discouraged at the many differences between churches around us as that isn't what we expect the Body of Christ to be. We ask ourselves, "How can we one day in Heaven live together in blessedness when there is so much disunity among us now?" I have an excerpt, for your edification:

"On this earth, however, the sins of the church and its members make institutional unity difficult, even where it is possible. Differences of doctrine and practice, all of which are the result of a sinful failure to understand and obey the Word of God, also separate believers from one another.

Because sin destroys church unity and keeps believers apart, Christians ought always to be doing all in their power to overcome these differences by studying the Word and by speaking to one another of what they believe. They ought not be tolerant of division. Even where ecclesiastical unity proves impossible, they ought nevertheless to keep fellowship with other Christians as much as possible. They ought not to reject them or speak as though there are no Christians besides those in their own group.

Believers may not, however, seek unity at the expense of truth. They are to buy the truth and sell it not (Prov. 23:23). That is where ecumenism goes wrong. It sells the truth for a mess of ecclesiastical pottage that is without value and does not produce true unity.

Seeking and praying for unity, the saints should not forget that this unity is in diversity. The unity of the church does not mean that every believer must be exactly alike. Nor does it mean that every congregation and church must be a carbon copy of the others.

Paul makes this clear in 1 Corinthians 12. Not only is there a diversity of members and gifts, but every member is necessary, something we all too often forget. Only thus is the church the body of Jesus Christ.

Nevertheless, until sin is destroyed, there will be divisions. Because of this, the unity of the church is now largely a matter of faith. Christians believe, as the Nicene Creed reminds us, "one holy catholic and apostolic church."

Believers must, therefore, with regard to the unity of the church, walk by faith, not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). How important this is! Faith will keep them from abandoning the visible church when they see its faults and sins and the divisions within it.

Nor is that faith vain. When Christ returns, he will "gather together in one all things in Christ" (Eph. 1:10) and destroy sin. Then even the possibility of disunity will be gone."

I shall not acknowledge the author as what he has written is far more important than his name. I believe he is of the same mind. May you be blessed richly and greatly encouraged as you read the articles of this Issue! Continue to bear fruit!

Christ regardless
paul

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THE IMPORTANCE OF READING IV

>> Prof. Hanko

Introduction

We were talking about reading in general in my last article, and I was suggesting that reading ought to be a lot wider than just religious material. I want to expand on that a bit.

Reading Literature

It is my judgment that it is profitable for a Christian to read widely in the field of secular literature. I refer particularly to novels and other fictional material. There is a whole field of such literature that anyone who claims to be educated ought to have read; especially teachers and ministers.

This reading ought to include material from earliest history, but especially from the times since the Protestant Reformation. There is excellent literature from almost all Western countries in Europe and some fine literature in America.

Some of the best literature has come from England, but good reading also has come from Russia, France, and other European nations. It has all been translated into English. I can give some good reasons why reading good literature is important.

Number 1 is that, if you want to know the history of a given country at a given time, you have to read the fictional literature of that period. This literature tells more about the culture, the peculiarities, the thinking of the people, the attitude of the citizens towards others, their government, their work etc. than any history book will ever tell you. You cannot understand 19th century England without reading Charles Dickens. Nor can one understand fully the French Revolution without at least reading, "A Tale of Two Cities."

Second, is the fact that a well-rounded education includes a knowledge of these countries because from it you learn their strengths and weaknesses, their relation to the church, their place and importance in God's providential work in all history. How, for example, is it possible to understand modern France without understanding what France did to itself when it persecuted the Huguenots and drove them from their country and homeland? And how can one understand the history of the countries in Southeast Asia (Siam, Burma, Indo-China, Malaysia, Singapore etc.) and their place in history without reading Rudyard Kipling's stories or reading and pondering his great poem, "The Recessional"?

Third, some people of God are given the ability to write. This writing is for the purpose of the truth, the advancement of the Gospel, and the calling to be a witness in a wicked world. One learns how to use language effectively when one is widely read. To this day, if I sense my writing is getting stale, I pick up a book like C. S. Lewis' allegory, "The Great Divorce" and read in it for an hour or so. He was a master at clear, simple, effective English. An hour with him is worth ten hours in a course on C. S. Lewis taught by a professor in some prestigious university.

I had a professor in college who taught a course in Shakespeare's plays. He was a dreamy sort of man of whom you would have thought was almost completely out of touch with the world around him. But he could read "Macbeth" in such a way that one was completely caught up in Shakespeare's genius for the English language. And as a bonus, he taught us that "Macbeth" had profound religious significance, for it taught (to quote this professor of 65 years ago), "the inevitable moral deterioration of the willfully sinning soul."



>> Pastor Lau

Books that are well-written, as, for example, Winston Churchill's "History of the English speaking People" will help any aspiring writer. There is something about good writing that captivates a person. A well-crafted phrase, a perfect use of a different word, a spare, unadorned sentence – all these are like a delicious taste in one's mouth. One likes to read it over and over, not for its meaning, but for its sheer beauty, roll it around in one's tongue, say it aloud and taste its flavour before moving on.

I recall taking with me Churchill's four-volume work to Australia when my wife and I went there on a speaking and preaching tour. I read the last pages of the last volume in O'Hare Field Airport in Chicago, while waiting for a plane to Grand Rapids at 6:00 in the morning. I almost shed a tear that I had come to the end of the set.

Reading good writing gives birth to good writing. Not everyone can and should write, but everyone who is amazed at God's great gift of language can and should enjoy speech and writing that comes close to being beautiful.

Responsibility in Reading

I would be remiss in my writing if I did not remind you that when one picks up a book to read, he assumes an important responsibility before God. The responsibility is no greater, I suppose, than when one switches channels on a TV remote, or when one boots one's computer. But it is a more subtle danger and, in a way, more alluring. It is the danger of forgetting our calling to read with discernment.

By reading with discernment, I refer to our calling before God to evaluate everything we read in the light of the Word of God. I recall that when I first read Dostoevsky's great novel, "The Count of Monte Cristo", I was enthralled with the story. It was a book in which a

man had been unjustly treated by his companions, had been imprisoned for a crime that he never committed, but had escaped and had found a great treasure, the existence of which had been told him by a dying prisoner. The rest of the book is devoted to how the Count spent all his life and his great riches getting revenge on those who had treated him unjustly.

I was captivated by the book and in my own mind cheered the Count on in his revenge-seeking. Later, when my children became teenagers and read the same book, I decided to read it once again. I was appalled at how terrible a life it must have been for a man to spend years and years and oceans of money for no other reason than to gain revenge. The text kept running through my mind, "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord; I will repay." There was one brief sentence near the end of the book in which the Count wonders aloud whether it was worth it all.

I had no regrets about reading the book, but I wished that I had read with more discernment when I was young. In my mind I had cheered on a man that had violated an important principle of Christian conduct. I felt like one who had cheered on a man who had visited a house of prostitution.

Yet I did learn what a sin can do to a man's life when he actively seeks out a sin and gives himself over to it.

I remember another instance that will illustrate the point. There is a book that was written just prior to the Civil War by Harriet Beecher Stowe called "Uncle Tom's Cabin." It was such a powerful book that when President Abraham Lincoln met her, he was supposed to have said, "Ah, here is the lady that started the war."

The book tells of a slave girl who with her baby escaped a cruel slave master

and fled, pursued by her master, other slave owners and vicious tracking dogs. It was a book that pulled at the heartstrings and many who read it cried openly. It did tell a sad story and it did show the cruelty and evil of slavery, but if its impact was only emotional, one had not read the book with discernment. If it did nothing else, it should have brought us face-to-face with the question of whether it was morally right to flee a master when Scripture tells us we must submit to our masters, even to the cruel and evil ones.

It is not wrong to "get into" a book so that one senses something of the emotion displayed, but a Christian is called to do all things to the glory of God. That means that he does all things aware of what he is doing and what he must do to serve God in his activities. This rule also covers the reading of books.

And so I come to the end of what the Bible says about reading. I hope God will use these articles to increase your enjoyment of reading and to encourage you to

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Marriage, Divorce & Re-Marriage II

Introduction

This is my second article for Salt Shakers on the general topic on "Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage" as seen in the Bible.

In our first introduction article, we saw the importance and seriousness for Christians to have the right biblical view on such matters if they want to be good and faithful witnesses for their Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. In this article, we want to plunge right into the fundamental topic on marriage. It is fundamental because without it there would be nothing to write about divorce or remarriage. We must have a clear understanding of what marriage is all about before we can rightly discuss about divorce and remarriage. What then is marriage?

The Essence of Biblical Marriage

Marriage is not a sexual union between a man and a woman. If so, a man having a one-time sexual encounter with a prostitute would be considered as married to her. That such illegitimate sexual encounter does not constitute a marriage is clear in Scripture where we do read of David's affair with Bathsheba. They had sex and the latter became pregnant, but they were not married until after her legitimate husband, Uriah, died and David asked for her hand in marriage (2 Sam 11:26-27).

Marriage is also not a permanent, avowed, sexual relationship between one man and one woman. Some old couples live for many years together

and are happily married without having sex as they are too old for that. Sex, as important as it is in the marriage relationship, is not of the essential elements in marriage. So, what are the essential elements in a marriage? There is no better place to turn to for that than to the first marriage of mankind.

The First Marriage

The first man, Adam, and the first woman, Eve, were created for each other, obviously, in every way. But, they were not created married. That came soon later by the act of God in Providence. In fact, at Creation they were not even created together at one go. Adam was first created and then Eve, out of one of his ribs, to be a suitable help for him. A man may have a help prepared for him, but he is not married until that help is brought into union with him in life. And God was involved in that first marriage – the reunion of an enhanced rib to its owner in a unique way. Once, it only functioned within him; but now, it even helps him externally. What a wonder!

God not only officiated the first marriage Himself, but He was the One who instituted it for the good of the human race. Ungodly social scientists who advocate evolution may imagine that primitive men lived like all other animals and had free sex and reproduced themselves for the survival of the fittest. It was later, according to them, that men instituted marriage for the better, healthier management of families, and thus, for the better preservation of the human species. But that is another lie of the devil to entrench men deeper into will-worship.

Believing that marriage is an institution of God is of paramount importance for determining our behaviour in the marriage bond. If man invented marriage, then men is free to determine

and change the rules and regulations of the marriage bond as he likes from time to time according to his prevailing philosophical beliefs. But as an institution of God, marriage and all the rules and regulations therein are determined by God, before Whom all involved parties are held accountable. Just recently, New York became the sixth state in the USA to redefine marriage as inclusive of same sex marriages. In the first marriage, God set by example what He expects in the marriage bond into which a man and a woman enter.

The Bride Prepared for the Groom

In the first marriage, Eve was created by God for Adam. God explicitly said that it was not good for man to be alone, and He proceeded to make a "help meet" for him. (Genesis 2:18-22) Here we must note that the first marriage took place before the Fall of man into sin. This means that, at its fundamental level, marriage is not sin oriented, though sin did affect that relationship when it came later. So although all subsequent marriages after the first one must deal with the problem of sin, in a marriage relationship, the couple has many positive and good works to perform individually and collectively. Before marriage, Adam was given the work of naming the animals. This work was not a matter of dealing with sin, but it was tough for lonely Adam. A life partner was created to help him all through his earthly life and even through his generations to come. "Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 11:11). I cannot imagine a world with only one sex, either male or female. Can you? It is a sign of God's imminent judgment when such things take place. "For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women

did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet.” (Romans 1:26-27). Certainly, God had in mind the woman when He designed the make-up of the man. They fit well into each other, body and soul.

In naming the animals, Adam saw many wonderful animals in their various unique and fascinating designs - both in the male and female forms. With his perfect understanding, Adam knew that without a female form, he was incomplete. Marriage, therefore, is God’s finishing touch of the human nature in the history of creation. Married people should walk by faith in God that He will bless all faithful couples who unconditionally devote to seek each other’s completeness in the design and plan of God. Marriage is about two becoming one. It is a covenantal relationship. Therefore, it is treacherous when a married couple each has their own idea of things without trying to live in oneness and unity. “Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously

against the wife of his youth.” (Malachi 2:14-15). It is God’s normal way to seek for godly seed from families of faithful, godly couples.

Marriage Has Witnesses Before The Judge

A man and a woman in their private moments together may make all kinds of vows to each other, but all such occasions do not constitute marriage events. A proper marriage is a social event involving the community in which the couple will live their united life as a family unit.

At the first marriage, God gathered the assembly together, comprising of Adam and Eve, some surrounding animals and plants in the Garden of Eden and God Himself, the officiating officer. In that ceremony, God, who raised the Bride, brought her to the Bridegroom before the Judge for the solemn exchange of vows and other public expressions of mutual commitment to raise a new family unit in the community.

At the sight of his Bride, Adam “said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” (Genesis 2:23) Adam’s public acknowledgment of God’s work in giving him a wife was also a vow (publicly declared) to treat her as the unique “bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh”. That implies Adam’s headship over Eve, his wife. He is to love her, seek her well-being and lead her in their united service of Jehovah, their God. Eve’s silence at the ceremony implied

her submission and agreement with the work and plan of God. In that way, also, she vowed publicly to take up faithfully her role as the help most suitable for her husband, Adam.

All these took place before the Governor Judge of the whole universe and in the presence of many witnesses. The establishment of homes for the raising of human beings to replenish the earth from generation to generation is serious business. God wants to impress that upon us with the solemnity in the first marriage which He Himself conducted. Subsequent ones would be conducted by His deputies in the civil courts of the nations. When a home is legally established, the Judge says, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.” (Genesis 2:24). They shall be one to do God’s biddings: “And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.” (Genesis 1:28). All these they must do for the glory and praise of God.

The confirmation of such a union of marriage comes as soon as the couple begins to live together in close intimacy, physically and otherwise. In this unique way, God joins a man and a woman together and says, “Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.” (Matthew 19:6).

Like life and death, the dismantling of the marriage bond is in God’s own hand to bring about. And He does just that whenever the death of any of the spouses takes place. “Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man.” (Romans 7:1-3). So all commitments related to the marriage bond is “so long as we both shall live”, or “till death do us part”.

Legitimacy of Marriages Outside the Church

In a multi-cultural society like Singapore we do come across many marriages which are not conducted in the same way as those conducted in the church. Some of them may even involve the invocation of ancestral spirits to participate in the wedding. Are we Christians to consider such marriages as legitimate and consider the groom and bride as man and wife after their marriage? When such people become Christians, do we require of them to be married again – this time in the Church? Is marriage one of the sacraments of the Church, like Baptism and the Lord’s Supper?

Unlike the Roman Catholic Church, we Protestant Churches do not believe that marriage is a sacrament of the Church. According to God’s Word, marriage was instituted before the Fall of man into sin and therefore was an institution established before the institution of the Church when the “mother promise” of Genesis 3:15 was first revealed. Marriage is indeed an institution of God and therefore holy. However, it was an institution entrusted to the State for its continuance. As the State manifests itself in the different nations of the world, its corruptions are also clearly seen in these nations. The different administrations of marriage in these nations do show their weaknesses and errors in understanding what marriage is according to God’s will and plan. However mistaken, such marriages on behalf of God’s authority do have legal standing before God. A non-Christian marriage is proper when it is officiated by a representative of the State before some mature witnesses, and where the parties involved undertake solemnly to live together as a family for the propagation of the human race. God’s Laws relating to the roles of husband and wife are the same for both Christian and non-Christian marriages. God blesses and curses according to the standard of His own Laws and not to that of the corrupted laws of men. The preaching of the Gospel includes the setting forth of this Law of God to bring men to Christ.

Summary

In this first article of the sub-series on “Marriage”, we have considered what constitutes a proper marriage before God.

No matter what, marriage involves a man (the Groom) and a woman (the Bride). They show their willingness to the solemn union by the vows they make to each other before God and a holy assembly. Such consent is necessary to a marriage. (Gen. 24:57, 58. 1 Sam. 18:20. 1 Sam. 25:41)

The consent of parents or guardians is also important to indicate smooth continuity from single to married life. (Gen. 28:8. Jdg. 14:2, 3) Their presence and involvement at the marriage becomes important as well.

As marriage is a legal transaction, the State must officiate it publicly and orderly for all in the society to acknowledge and help the married couple in the change of their marital status.

When the married couple begin their life together in this orderly fashion, God considers them as one from that time onwards and deals with them accordingly in His Laws.

In future articles on “Marriage”, we will deal with some important dynamics in a married life.

Dear Young People,

In the last letter I sent you I made the point that music, whether good or bad, has a profound effect on us. The question of what music we listen to, play on our instruments or sing, is an important question, and involves an important aspect of our calling to live an antithetical life in the world.

I must admit from the outset that while I enjoy singing and listening to good music, I am not a musician. I have very little knowledge of the theory of music. I have often wanted to study this subject and learn more about it, but it seems as if there has never been time to do this. I have also tried to learn to play the organ, but it soon became apparent that God had not given me this great gift. And so, what I have to say about music is mostly what I have learned from books and have thought out myself better to fulfil my calling, especially with young people, in this area of music.

I do know and firmly believe that there is in God's creation laws governing music. If music is a gift of God, as I firmly believe that it is, music is imbedded in God's world. In a way, this is true of all the arts. Drawings and paintings, to be good art, must obey the laws of colour, perspective, composition, etc. Not every blob of colour on a canvas is a work of art – even though in the world men apparently think so. I have been told (I cannot confirm it) that in an art

show in Philadelphia many years ago one person had a chimpanzee smear colours on a canvas. Lo and behold, that painting won first prize! Works that claim to be art and break God's rules are not art, but a perversion of art.

The same is true of music. Imbedded in God's creation are rules of music: rules of rhythm, harmony, tempo, key (whether minor or major) note harmonics, etc. These rules have to be followed for real music to be the result.

There are those who deny this. I debated the subject once with a musician who claimed that any combination of notes constituted music. But this seems to me to be impossible. A combination of notes can be played by letting one's two hands drop on a piano keyboard. The ensuing combination of notes cannot be considered music.

Further, music, as an art, is intended to convey some idea of some sort. Even the world seems to think this. Outrageous blobs of colour and form are given titles, titles, I presume, that are supposed to be expressive of the main idea of this particular work of art. But no one but the artist himself (maybe) can see what ideas are expressed with a mass of random colours – unless the idea is the chaos and lawlessness of our age.

These ideas expressed by works of art are, however, subtle. They are subtle

because the arts appeal primarily to the emotions. Perhaps because the appeal of the arts to the emotions they are exactly the power they have to affect us. Our emotions play a very important part in our life, and appeals to our emotions have far more influence on us than we like to admit. But somehow, paintings, sculptors, pieces of music must say something to us about God and His world.

I have often wondered whether Adam and Eve knew music in Paradise. I suspect that the whole creation, unblemished by sin and the curse, was together a beautiful song of praise to God. Birds, fish, animals, trees, flowers, stars, all God's creatures joined in a beautiful chorus of praise to God. I have a book in my library. It is a book actually on science. But its title is "The Harmony of the Spheres." The author is an unbeliever, but he is at great pains in the book to explain how all the world, from galaxies to atoms are one harmonious whole. I think he was on to something, but he insisted that all this harmony just happened by processes of evolution. How foolish!

I do know too that there are traditions of music in the world of unbelief and in the church of Christ.

The tradition of worldly and evil music began already before the flood. We are told about this in Genesis 4:21, 23, 24. The Bible says in Genesis 4:21: "His

[Jabal's] brother's name was Jubal: he was the father of all such as handle the harp and organ." Then we are told in verses 23, 24, "And Lamech [the father of Jabal, Jubal and Tubal-cain] said unto his wives, ye wives of Lamech, hearken unto my speech: for I have slain a man to my wounding, and a young man to my hurt. If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold." The words that Lamech spoke to his two wives were written as a song.

It seems as if Lamech, Adah and Zilah had three very gifted and brilliant boys. Jabal, we are told, developed the entire art of husbandry. That is, Jabal learned how to domesticate animals and use them for man's good. He learned to use them in field work and to use them for food: milk and meat especially. Tubal-cain invented metallurgy, the industry of making use of various metals, and even making various alloys. That is, he was an industrialist and learned to manufacture tools, weapons, and utensils for man's use. But Jabal was the musician in the family. He not only discovered music, but invented various instruments to play the music. A harp and an organ are specifically mentioned.

And Jubal's wicked father composed a song to sing to the music Jubal made. The lyrics of the song were terrible. Lamech was, of course, an adulterer. He was the first one we know that corrupted the institution of marriage by

marrying two wives. But, however that may be, he sang a song to his two wives that told of his murder of a child of God. God's people were sorely persecuted at this time. Enoch was taken to heaven without dying because wicked men were looking for him to kill him, for he was a preacher of righteousness (See Heb. 11:5, Jude 14). Lamech was part of that wicked bunch of people who were determined to kill all the people of God. It was so bad that when the flood came, even though the population of the world was in the millions, there were only eight people left in church.

To make the whole matter worse, Lamech composed a song to celebrate his murder, a song which boastfully put to music the murder of a child of God. And in that song he dared God to punish him: "If Cain be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seven and sevenfold."

That was the beginning of music. That was the beginning of a whole tradition of music that is carried out throughout history and of which today's worldly music is a part. It is a corruption of God's gifts of music, in the same way that man corrupts every gift of God and puts it to his own sinful use.

We will continue our discussion of music next time, the Lord willing.

With love in the Lord,

Prof. Hanko

>> Prof. Hanko

MUSIC II



Pamphlet Review On

EVANGELISM AND THE REFORMED FAITH BY PROF ENGELSMA

>> Bro Tian Loong

Evangelism remains a huge emphasis in the modern church world. Examine how it is done and we will see that they are filled with massive campaigns with the emphasis on numbers – the number of people who made a “decision” for Christ. “Alter calls”, coupled with dimmed lights and music, manipulate the emotions of the hearers in an “evangelistic rally” promoting impulsive “decisions for Christ”. Worse still, decisions are seen equivalent to conversions and the “evangelist” returns with a happy report of seeing many “saved”. The underlying doctrine is not-all-that-unexpected – that God (or rather, the god that they believe in) loves every single person and wants to see as many saved as possible. Only that he has done all that he possibly can and is unable to touch the will of the *sovereign* sinner. Sadly, all these are seen as good. After all, who would accuse that the desire to see as many saved as possible is evil? Applause fills the auditorium when reports of thousands upon thousands of decisions have been made for Christ.

While all that is celebrated in the church world, if we are to be Reformed, by the grace of God, we have to measure the popular approach of evangelism against the teachings of Scripture. It is only before long that we realise that the popular approach to evangelism cannot stand.

“Evangelism and the Reformed Faith” is a pamphlet written by Professor David Engelsma of the Protestant Reformed Church of America (PRCA). This pamphlet deals with the topic of biblical and reformed evangelism against the contemporary practice and is discussed under the various sections: Introduction, Meaning of Evangelism, What the Reformed Faith is, The Message of Reformed Evangelism, The Method of Reformed Evangelism

and The Motivation of Reformed Evangelism.

The pamphlet, under the heading of Introduction, introduces the topic by the charge made by some that there is an incompatibility between the Reformed faith and evangelism. Interestingly, the first word of the pamphlet is the word “strange”. In other words, Prof Engelsma states that the charge is absurd. He also states few of the current practices and sayings in modern evangelism. Some sayings include, “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.” He then went on and asserted the duty of those whom God has given the Reformed faith to show the perfect harmony between the Reformed faith and evangelism and thus we must see that they are perfectly compatible.

This pamphlet would define certain things such as the meaning of evangelism. Simply put, this is “evangelism – a Biblical word in the Greek of the New Testament. Evangelism is the activity of publishing, or announcing, the “evangel,” the gospel, i.e., the glad tidings of Jesus the Christ, crucified and risen.”

One thing that struck me was that though many would not see the Reformation as evangelism, the pamphlet explains that by definition, “The truth of the matter is that the Reformation itself was missions - a gigantic, energetic, world-wide mission work, with abundant and enduring fruits. The gospel was proclaimed to multitudes in many nations who were fainting and scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd, perishing in the ignorance and lie of Roman Catholicism.”

Do we not sometimes wonder if the Reformed faith is compatible with Evangelism? One train of thought by those who assert their incompatibility as highlighted in this pamphlet is as

such, “Total depravity does not square with such evangelism (for what good is all this love, atonement, and grace, if the sinner cannot avail himself of it?); and, therefore, it is suggested to the sinner that he has the ability to open up his heart to let Jesus in, or he is told outright that the new birth depends upon his believing.” This pamphlet would therefore answer that erroneous view.

Another reason why one should pick up this pamphlet and study it is because evangelism, if done wrongly, is not a victimless crime. Prof Engelsma writes, “A Reformed preacher would not dare to engage in evangelism of this kind [evangelism filled with unbiblical notions]. He would not, because he fears to stand in the Judgment, having preached a message that robbed God of His glory in the salvation of sinners and that taught sinners to trust for salvation in their own ability and activity. The worst evolutionist, a veritable Charles Darwin, will not be so culpable of despoiling the wonderful works of God as such an evangelist.” And let us not forget that those who hear are also being deceived by that kind of evangelism and that the *evangel* is lost.

Though not every single person is to do the preaching of the gospel but only the ordained minister(s), nevertheless, the church as a whole is responsible for the preaching. Prof Engelsma states how the people ought to live within the church so that the Holy Spirit may bless the work outside the church. Also, it states what the church ought to do to support the minister and the work of evangelism. Since we are all responsible for the preaching of the gospel and since this review would neither do justice to the content nor give a sufficient idea and scope of the meaning of Reformed Evangelism, why not read the pamphlet for yourself?

On a side note, by the time you read this, the Reformed Reading Book Club (RRBC) would have gone through this pamphlet, but you can always join us the next time to study another literature of significant importance to the Reformed faith.

The Unworthy Woman

>> Pastor Ronald Hanko

Luke 7:36-50

³⁷And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, ³⁸And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.’

The story of the sinful woman who washed Jesus’ feet with her tears, dried them with her hair, and anointed His feet with precious ointment, took place during Jesus’ first tour of Galilee and at the home of Simon the Pharisee. It is one of the most touching stories in Scripture both for what it shows of the woman’s love for Jesus, and for what it shows of His love for her.

We are not told the woman’s name or anything about her, other than that she was a sinner, though her sins must have been public and well-known. Simon knew of her and thought in his self-righteousness that Jesus should have had nothing to do with such a woman. That He allowed her to touch Him was proof to Simon that He was not the Messiah.

It is a good thing that we do not know much about her. Not knowing her actual sins or even her name, we who are also sinners are better able to identify with her and to see in her an example of what Jesus, our Savior has done for us. To us, too, as sinners, He has said, “Thy sins are forgiven,” and sent us away in peace.

That God’s Word calls this woman a sinner, does not mean that her sins were not forgiven or that she was no different from Simon. Simon was guilty of showing no love for Jesus, a crime at least as great as the sins of this woman, though Simon thought himself ever so much better than her.

It is of no value, however, to compare the sins of Simon and of this woman. The difference between them is not in the seriousness of their sin - all sin is worthy of eternal punishment - but in their attitude toward their sin. There are really only two kinds of sinners, those who know themselves to be sinners, and those who do not.

The second kind are always convinced of their own righteousness. The first kind know that they have no righteousness and will perish forever if God does not forgive them. The woman is of the first kind, Simon of the second. The first kind are always forgiven, the second kind never are.

The second kind are those who think that God cannot possibly send them to hell because they are decent, law-abiding people, who are helpful to others, who work hard, who do their best to raise their families well, and who do not fall into gross sins. They are convinced that ordinary human goodness is all they need.

The first kind are those who know that “whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23), and that God is not satisfied with our best efforts. They know that in the eyes of God, “there is none that doeth good, no, not one” (Ps. 14:3), and they see

themselves as the chief of sinners. The second kind are those who, like the Jews, think they are better than this woman and others like her, and are always ready to condemn others.

That this woman was conscious of her sinfulness is evident from the story. Her tears show us that, as do the words of Jesus. He knew that she was crying about her sins and was sorry for them when He spoke to her of forgiveness. He knew that she recognized in Him the only hope for herself, a poor and unworthy sinner.

That she knew her sinfulness and saw her unworthiness was the result of God's grace in Christ. There can be little doubt that she was among the people who are mentioned in verse 29, who had heard the preaching of Jesus and seen the miracles which are recorded in this chapter. And through it all her heart had been changed and her eyes opened.

The miracles of Jesus had shown her that she needed a miracle of grace to heal her sin-sick soul – that like the widow of Nain's son, she was dead “in trespasses in sins” (Eph. 2:1) and that only Jesus could raise her. Through the preaching of Jesus she had learned that He was “a friend of publicans and sinners” (Lk. 7:34).

The grace that opened her eyes to her sinfulness was the grace that had already forgiven her sins. Jesus really says, “thy sins have been forgiven.” Though Jesus had not yet suffered and died for the sins of His people, it was the promise of His precious shed blood which guaranteed both her repentance and her forgiveness.

What a contrast her love for Jesus is to Simon's coldness and indifference! He had no reason to love Jesus, since he had experienced nothing of God's forgiving grace and did not even see the need for it. She had seen something of her need for Jesus and of His love for her, and showed her love for Him in the very heart-warming way that is described here.

The ointment that she poured on Jesus' feet may have been a left-over from her previous life, but it was the most valuable thing she owned, kept in an alabaster box. Her love for Him was a love, therefore, that acknowledged that she was not her own, but belonged to Him with all that she had – that He was her Lord.

What a beautiful reminder this is of the need for repentance, for it is our tears of sorrow for sin that show God's grace already working in us and our guarantee of forgiveness! What a wonderful proof this is that a broken spirit and a contrite heart are acceptable to God, not because they are worth anything in themselves, but because they were purchased by the blood of His Son.

What a wonderful encouragement this is to believe that those who see their sins and are sorry for them will never be turned away by the Savior, but can come to Him expecting that He will speak peace and blessing to them! What an amazing thing it is, having heard His word of forgiveness, to go in peace!

What an important Word of God this is for us, showing us that God's forgiving grace always produces in us a love for God and for Jesus that is like the love of this poor sinner - public, unashamed, a love that wants to use what is most valuable for Him and that honors Him with everything it has! It is much bigger than Simon's love because it is the love of God shed abroad in our hearts through the work of our Savior and His Spirit.

⁴⁷Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. ⁴⁸And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.'

CAMP ECHO

Reflections on 1st message, Rooted in Christ >> Bro Paul Ong

This is my first church camp with CERC and it is a great delight for me to be able to write a review on it. First and foremost, I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the camp committee members for organising and planning the camp. Not forgetting, the camp speaker, Rev Ronald Hanko from the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, for

being the camp speaker and bringing the Word of God to us.

I was sceptical when I was first approached to write this review, but I agreed reluctantly. However, after attending the camp, my thoughts have changed and now I am really thankful to God for giving me this chance to share with fellow saints what I have learnt throughout the camp.

On Day 1, Rev Hanko brought us the first message of the camp, which was “Rooted in Christ”. The word ‘rooted’ has a very special meaning. It emphasises a very special way of how we Christians are connected with God. To be rooted in Christ means that we are united to Him by faith with thanksgiving. We have to believe ‘rooted in’ literally.

Faith is not something that comes from us; it is a gift from God (Eph 2:8). To have faith means that we not only hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word, but also have a hearty trust, which the Holy Spirit works in the elect by the Gospel, that forgiveness of sins, everlasting righteousness, and salvation are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits (Heidelberg Catechism Answer 21). To be rooted in Christ also means that we are in Christ. When God saves us, He joins us with Christ in an inseparable union. We are regenerated when God puts Christ in us. (Gal 4) That is what being a Christian is all about – to be in Christ. We share everything that is in Christ. When we are rooted in Christ, we draw strength and nourishment from Him. And as we do, we continue to grow and are built up in Christ. The more we grow, the more deeply our roots take hold of Christ, increasing our yearning for Him.

Apostle Paul warns us of what will happen if we are not rooted and built up in Christ. He spoke of how so many were led astray by opposition that based their teachings on human reasoning: Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ (Colossians 2:8). It is of utmost importance that we stand firm in our

faith, being conscious and aware of our connection with Christ. Living in Christ means trusting His Word and cherishing the forgiveness He earned for us.

Rev Hanko mentioned that he has a friend who has a very peculiar tree which has a variety of fruits on it and how his friend grafted different fruit trees together into just one tree. Next, Rev Hanko mentioned how God grafted us to the same tree through faith.

To be rooted in Christ is important to the Church and in our daily lives. First, we should always live our daily lives as children of God, so that when unbelievers see us, they will see Christ in us. However, we should not only let unbelievers see our lives as Christians, we should also set examples for, and edify, our fellow church members. Having Christ in us also means that we are able to do all things according to His will, and for His glory. We “can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Php 4:13). Secondly, in church, to be rooted in Christ also implies that all of us are brothers and sisters in Christ. Therefore, we should never feel that anyone is not needed in Church; we are a family. You do not feel that a particular member of your family is unwanted, do you? There must also be forgiveness among one another because we are in Christ. Rev Hanko gave an analogy using different parts of our body. When we fall and injure our head, the head cannot blame the leg for falling. Therefore, there should always be forgiveness in the church. To be rooted in Christ also brings forth unity, and this unity will bring us closer to Christ.

On the first day of the camp, I was asked a question, “What do you want to achieve in this camp?” My goal was to get to know the fellow church members better. So, you may ask, “Have you succeeded in achieving my goal?” I believe I did. Now I am able to differentiate between Iva and Isa. I have also got to know more church members. I also hope that with this camp, people have got to know me better, like the correct pronunciation of my name and much more!

With this, I am going to end my review. Thank God for His providence. Soli Deo Gloria.

Reflections on 2nd message, Stablished in Christ >> Sis Wei Choo

To be stablished in Christ is to be stablished in the faith. Like a deeply rooted tree, the firm foundation in our Christian life comes from drawing nutrients mainly from doctrines and teachings in the Word of God. Through the hearing of God's Word through the pulpit, Bible study, personal and family devotions, we grow and are strengthened in our faith. The result is stability, like a house built upon a rock i.e. stable Christian lives, stable homes, and stability in the Church. The opposite is trouble, chaos, and lack of peace and assurance.

In Rev Ron Hanco's message, he explained that a tree does not grow its roots deep into the ground until it has been through many storms. He said that God also uses trials and adversities in our Christian life to stablish us. I think many of us will be able to relate to this point. I recalled that some years back, God taught me about His sovereignty from Bible verses and in particular, Psalms 115:3, "But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased." When I pondered about this verse and its meaning to my life situation then, the Lord humbled my heart to accept His plans and He restored peace in my heart. My head knowledge of God's sovereignty was brought to reality in my life and I am thankful that He has opened my eyes to see these glimpses of truth.

We are also reminded to be a blessing and provide shelter to our brethren. During the camp, some sisters gathered for a "chit-chat" session on the eve of the last day of camp. This was an opportunity for us to share of certain events in our lives and of God's blessings upon us. The various sharings reminded us of spiritual lessons, God's presence, and His goodness. We do need to make time in order to support one another in our spiritual walks, for example, lending a listening ear and praying. Very often, one is tempted to give excuses to skip church activities for a variety of reasons like work overload, discouragements, etc. Do you know of anyone who needs prayers and/or a nudge through SMS (Short Message Service) to be reminded to attend a Bible study or church activity?

May we encourage one another to make use of the various means that the Lord has graciously provided us, to build up and remain steadfast in our faith. And in doing so, have assurance of salvation that does not waver under all circumstances. Jeremiah 17:8 speaks of a man who puts his trust in the Lord. He is like a growing tree, fruitful and without anxiety: "For he shall be a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit." I learnt a new song in the camp. Do we bear the fruit of the Spirit in our lives?

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness.

The fruit of the Spirit is faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

If we live by the Spirit, we will keep in step, keep in step with the Spirit.

Lastly, we are grateful to all campers for your friendship and kindness shown to our aunty, Jane and little niece, Dazzire. This is the first time that they have attended church camp. We thank the Lord for the simple faith in Dazzire. She loves coming to church and singing Christian songs. Also, we thank God for brothers and sisters who have shown patience while explaining the scriptures to our aunty. May the seed grow in their hearts.



Reflections on 3rd and 4th Message, Bearing Fruit and Abounding in Christ

>> Bro Jeremy Ee

Hi everyone!

It has been such a long time since I last attended church camp that I do not even remember when I attended the last one. But I do remember church camp as a time when I had the opportunity to remove myself from the worries of school work, reflect and learn more about God and of course, have a good time of fellowship and catch up with my church friends. The recent CE camp was no different and I hope many of you enjoyed the camp as much as I did. Kudos to the Camp Committee and all those who spent much time and effort in making the camp happen. Nonetheless, I hope that through my short reflection about the recent CE camp, some of you might be edified and may God be glorified.

It was definitely a great joy to see many familiar faces during the camp. Most of you still look the same, especially all the 'uncles and aunties'. You still

look the same from what I remember, but your kids have definitely changed! Well, for those who are wondering how I ended up at the CE camp, here it is. Initially, I wanted to join the FE church camp as it was a rare opportunity for me to get a chance to take leave from work during the June period. However, I later realised that I had an event at work to attend to during the FE church camp week. One Sunday after service, Bak Wei approached me asking if I was attending camp and I told him that I had to miss another year of camp yet again due to work commitments. He then informed me that CE was having camp the week after and asked if I was interested to go. After checking my work calendar I realised that I could indeed go for camp after all! Considering how much I have been missing out over the past few years, this presented itself as an opportunity too good to be missed. I jumped on it. Not knowing anything except that the camp was from 20th – 23rd June. Sheer coincidence or providence of God? You be the judge.

I was really excited to attend camp after all these years, especially since how every camp was a good memory and I always had something good to take away from each camp. Camp this year was no exception. The theme for the camp was "Rooted in Christ: Bearing Fruit". I thought the theme was very applicable considering how life in Singapore is usually rooted in many things other than Christ.

In message 3, Rev Hanco preached on bearing fruit, which was the second part of the camp theme, and walking in Christ. Rev Hanco opened the sermon by saying that it was IMPOSSIBLE for a Christian NOT to bear fruit for the glory of God. The reason is because the same saving grace that God gives to His children would always result in the Christian bearing fruit in Christ. Rev Hanco also made mention of the parable of the fig tree in Luke 13:6-9 in which we see that a tree without fruit would be cut down. Luke 13:7, "Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" Rev referenced how bearing fruit in a Christian's life is all for the glory of God, much like how the owner of an orchard plants fruit trees to bear fruit for his profit. Also, fruits serve as a witness

not only to unbelievers, but also to each other. One of the things that struck me from this message was that repentance for sins is a fruit and that fruit also acts as an assurance of our election. How comforting is that? Another point that I remember quite clearly from the message was that Rev pointed out the difference between "walking with" and "walking IN" Christ. Walking IN Christ is walking in the consciousness that we are absolutely IN Christ in everything we do and we are, realising that the faith is never dependent on ourselves but lies fully on Christ.

In the fourth and final message of the camp, Rev preached about abounding in Christ from two main passages: Ephesians 3:14-21 and the camp theme passage in Colossians. Rev put forward the idea that abounding in Christ really means growing in the knowledge of the love of Christ. "Eph 3:17-19 That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God." And, through this greater understanding of the love of God, we will be more fervent in prayer and glorifying God. One of the points in the message that I am sure spoke to many of us was how a tree must receive pruning to bear more fruit. "John 15:1-2 I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." It is thus a good reminder for us that when God sends us trials and difficulties in life, it is for our good, such that we can bear more fruit for His glory. As such, do not be discouraged when trials come our way. Instead, we must humble ourselves to try and understand the will of God, knowing that God never tries us more than we are able to withstand.

It has been quite awhile now since the church camp has ended. Nevertheless, it was a great pleasure for me to attend the camp to learn more about God's Word and to spend a good time of fellowship with all who attended the camp! Hope what I wrote was useful for you! Soli Deo Gloria

'For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth.'

Ah yes, the fruit of the Spirit! The wonderful fruit of the Spirit!

Do you know why the fruit of the Spirit is so wonderful? One reason is that it is the amazing work that God is performing in you. The Spirit of Jesus Christ, who lives in your heart, produces fruit. And the fruits that He produces in you are the spiritual qualities that characterize the sons and daughters of God. Galatians 5:22, 23 says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law." Amazing, that these marvellous spiritual gifts are given to you!

Another reason the fruit of the Spirit is so wonderful is that it demonstrates the sovereignty of God in salvation. Where do true love, true joy, true peace, and all of the rest come from? They certainly do not come naturally to a person. Nor is it possible for anyone to produce these things on his own. Rather, they must come from God. They are, after all, the fruits of the Spirit. They are of Him, they come from Him, because God is sovereign in salvation.

Wonderful, isn't it? The fruit of the Spirit! Let us take a closer look at this fruit of the Spirit by asking three questions. What is the fruit of the Spirit? How is the fruit of the Spirit displayed? And what is our calling with regard to the fruit of the Spirit?

What is the fruit of the spirit?

In the first place, it is the fruit of the Spirit. The One who produces this fruit in us is none other than God Himself. This brings up one of the most amazing aspects of our salvation: God lives in us! That is such an amazing truth because of who God is. He is the infinite God, who cannot be contained even by the heaven of heavens (1 Kings 8:27). And yet, this infinite God lives and dwells in the finite hearts of His chosen people. Not only is He infinite, but God is eternally blessed (Romans 9:5). He does not need us for anything: not for His own joy, not for His own blessing, not for companionship, not for anything. And yet this perfectly self-sufficient God makes us His sons and daughters and comes to live in us. Not just with us, but in us!

But then, why does Ephesians 5:9 focus on the Spirit? The Spirit receives the emphasis because God makes His dwelling in us by His Spirit. The Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity, who was given to Jesus Christ at His ascension, and was poured out by Jesus upon His church at Pentecost. By His Spirit, God dwells in the hearts of all of His people. As Romans 8:15 says, "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father."

As He dwells in our hearts, the Spirit works. His work is to make us new creatures in Christ. He does that by uniting us to Christ so that there is a real, spiritual connection between Jesus in heaven and us on earth. So close is that union that we are one plant with Christ. He is the vine, we are the branches (John 15:1-5). The Spirit also takes out our old, dead heart of stone that hates God, and replaces it with a new, soft, living heart of flesh that loves God (Ezekiel 36:26). And the Spirit applies to us all of the blessings of righteousness and holiness that Christ earned for us by His death and resurrection. As the Form for the Administration of Baptism puts it, the Holy Spirit applies "unto us that which we



Fruit of the Spirit Eph 5:9

>> Rev. Andy Lanning,
Faith PRC

have in Christ, namely, the washing away of our sins and the daily renewing of our lives"

The result of all of this work of the Spirit is fruit. The fruit of the Spirit! Think of a citrus tree. When that tree grows from a living root, it will produce good fruit. That is exactly how it is with us. The Spirit unites us to the living Root, Jesus Christ, and the result is good fruit. And abundant fruit! Galatians 5:22, 23 list love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance as the fruit of the Spirit.

Before we go on, we ought to note that the doctrine of God's sovereignty in salvation is clearly taught in this verse. The fruit is fruit of the Spirit. That word of means that the fruit comes from Him and is performed by Him. This is so striking, because all of these fruits are works that we are active in performing. We love, we rejoice, we are gentle, we believe, and so forth. God works in such a way that we perform these works. And yet, even though we are active, they remain the fruits of the Spirit. Our activity is due to and directed by the sovereign power of the Holy Spirit. Many today teach that man has something to contribute to his salvation. But the truth is that even the fruits in which we are active are fruits of the Spirit.

How is the fruit of the spirit displayed?

The next thing for us to consider is the demonstration of the fruit of the Spirit. How is the fruit of the Spirit displayed? Or, to put it a different way, What does the fruit of the Spirit look like? This is an important question, because the work that the Holy Spirit performs is invisible and internal. With our physical eyes, we cannot see the new life that the Spirit puts in our hearts. Nevertheless, that invisible, internal work of the Spirit always has external, visible effects. In this respect, the work of the Holy Spirit is like the wind. We cannot see the wind, but we can see the effects of the wind. When the wind blows, the trees bend and the leaves rustle. For exactly this reason, one of the signs on the day of Pentecost was the sound of a mighty, rushing wind (Acts 2:2). And so we want to know, What are the visible effects of the Spirit's invisible work? What does the fruit of the Spirit look like?

Here is the answer, from Ephesians 5:9: "For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth." When people see you live a life of real goodness, real righteousness, and real truth, then they know the Spirit is working in you. That goodness, righteousness, and truth are a visible demonstration and display of the Spirit's internal and invisible work.

This explains the meaning of the little word in. That word is unexpected, and not so easy to explain at first. Perhaps we even read right over that little word, so that we thought the verse said, "For the fruit of the Spirit is all goodness, righteousness, and truth." But in reality, God says, "For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth." That word in simply points out the way in which the fruit of the Spirit is made visible to the sight of others. We may read the verse this way: "For the fruit of the Spirit is displayed in all goodness, righteousness, and truth." Or, "For the fruit of the Spirit is seen, demonstrated, made visible, made evident in all goodness, righteousness, and truth." We use the word this way, too. When a man speaks lovingly of his wife, we might say, "His affection is in his voice." We mean, "His affection is displayed in and evident in his voice." So also the fruit of the Spirit is plainly seen in a life of goodness, righteousness, and truth.

This understanding helps us identify exactly what goodness, righteousness, and truth are. The Bible sometimes uses these words with a little different emphasis. For example, sometimes the word righteousness refers to our legal, judicial state before God the Judge (Philippians 3:9). Other times, the word righteousness refers to a life of good works (Acts 10:35). Which is meant here in Ephesians 5:9? Remember that the text is referring to the demonstration of the Spirit's work. Therefore, it must be referring to the holy life of good works that we live, since those good works are visible displays of the Spirit's invisible work.

With that in mind, we can briefly examine each of these three graces. Goodness is the moral excellence that makes God's people stand out from all that is base and evil. To be good is to delight in all light and virtue. Paul made mention of that in the preceding verse when he wrote, "Walk as children of the light." The man

who is good is not concerned only with himself, either. A good man is determined to do good to his neighbour. Sometimes that might be through showering him with kindness. Other times it may be through a rebuke to warn him from the evil way. But always it is motivated by love for God and the neighbour.

Righteousness here refers to the performance of all good works that are in harmony with God's perfect law. It is the righteousness, or uprightness, that characterized Job. "There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil" (Job 1:1). God's law is the law of love. The first commandment is, Love the Lord thy God! The second commandment is, Love thy neighbour as thyself! The entire law is a law of love. Therefore, righteousness is especially the works of love for God and the neighbour. It is especially here that we must remember that we are not talking about righteousness in the sense of our legal standing before God. Our legal righteousness refers to our justification before God. That justification is not based on any work of ours at all, but only on the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. But that legal righteousness results in our desire to do works in harmony with God's law as a means of expressing our thanksgiving to Him. It is those works that are in view here, for it is those works that demonstrate to others the fruit of the Spirit within. However, our life of righteousness is never the basis of our justification, never a cooperation with Christ; but only ever the fruit of Christ's work for us.

Truth is a life of honesty and integrity that abhors hypocrisy and lying. The man who is truthful is a man of his word. People can trust him and be confident that he means what he says. The truthful man also has a high regard for the Truth, the revelation of God in His Scriptures. His faith and his life are based on that Word, and he endeavours to conduct himself according to it. His honesty is seen not only in the true words that he speaks, but in a life that is regulated in all things by the truth of the Word.

Thus, the fruit of the Spirit is revealed in all goodness and righteousness and truth.

What is our calling with regard to the fruit of the spirit?

All of this brings us to the point that Paul is making in this verse. His main point to the Ephesian Christians, and to us, is the command he had given immediately before: "For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light" (Ephesians 5:8). The Ephesians had undergone a radical and fundamental change. They used to be darkness. Not just in darkness, but they used to be darkness itself. That is, they were utterly without the Light of the world, Jesus Christ. They were utterly without the life and salvation that He alone can bring. After their fundamental change, which was their conversion, the Ephesians were now light. Not just in the light, but they were light itself. That is, the Light of the world, Jesus Christ, dwelt in them and shone through them. Remember how Jesus had said, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12), and therefore, "Ye are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14). Because the Ephesians were now light, they were to walk as children of light.

It is at this point that Paul introduces the idea of the fruit of the Spirit with the word for. "For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth." The point is that their holy life of light would be a demonstration of their radical change. Their life of goodness, righteousness, and truth would be a proof that they were now light in the Lord, because the fruit of the Spirit was made manifest in this kind of life. The truth of the fruit of the Spirit would serve as an incentive to the Ephesians to live in harmony with their new identity as the children of God.

The same word comes to us now today. You have been changed! You were darkness, but you now are light by the grace of God. Walk as children of light, for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth.

Ah yes, the fruit of the Spirit! The wonderful fruit of the Spirit!



THE IMPORTANCE OF CATECHISM INSTRUCTION

>> Bro Yang Zhi

'Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.' 2 Tim 2:15

The teaching of Scriptures to the next generation is of much importance in the church throughout all ages. The purpose of this article is to further stress the importance of Catechism Instruction (or CI, as we call it) and the dangers to both the individual Christian and the church for not seeing its importance. This article is not only meant for teachers and parents to read and know why Sunday Schools are important, but also for the students themselves to know. If the child does not see the reason to learn, the teaching is in vain. It takes both the student's and teacher's effort to have a fruitful class.

What it is

First, we must understand what CI classes are. It is helpful to first understand what Catechism Instruction IS NOT. CI is not just a normal class, where you just learn about the Bible's teachings and memorize its teachings. CI is also definitely not like one of the classes you attend every day in the public school.

Rather, Catechism is far more important than what we learn in public school. CI is the authoritative instruction of Scripture, in which we must pay close attention to what God has to teach us from His word. 'Instruction' in the dictionary means, 'to furnish with knowledge.' And that is what CI classes

are. They furnish the students with the knowledge of God's Word. CI classes are also for us to refresh our minds with the Word of God. We need that constant teaching of the Word of God in our hearts and minds.

The necessity

After knowing what CI classes are, we move on to see its necessity. There are five reasons why CI classes are necessary.

CI classes are important in the church as it brings up the next generation of the church with the Word of God. Right now, the adults are the ones holding on to the Reformed truths of our forefathers. But once this generation of adults pass away, who is to carry on the work of preserving the Reformed doctrines? The answer is simple: the children! Children of the families in church are going to bear the responsibility of preserving the church and its truths; there is no doubt about that. However, for them to do so, they must first be firmly grounded in the truths of Scripture. And this important start goes all the way back to their youth. From learning simple children's songs like 'Jesus loves me!' to learning the fundamental truths taught in TULIP, all these build up their knowledge of Scripture, no matter how minute it may seem.

The second reason is for the church to have discernment between true and false doctrines. As the years go by, many have twisted Scripture to make it sound rather 'pleasant' to the sinful nature of man. An example of this twisting of Scripture would be the doctrine of man's free will advocated by Arminians. This doctrine states that man has the ability to choose salvation or not because man, not God, is sovereign over his own salvation. This false teaching has attacked the church all the way from the 17th century during the Synod of Dordrecht, and it will continue to do so

without end. This is one of the ways in which Satan corrupts and tries to destroy the church of Christ. So, to prevent such a thing from happening, the church must be, as above mentioned, firmly grounded in the truth. Paul states, or rather commands the church, in 2 Timothy 2:15, to 'study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.' When the church is firmly grounded on the truths of Scripture, the church would not be tossed about by false doctrines coming from every corner (Eph 4:14). With sharp Catechism taught to the next generation, the church is able to withstand strong, widely-accepted false doctrines. The Belgic Confession implies this in Article 29 concerning the marks of the true church. It states, "We believe that we ought diligently and circumspectly (that means, to be watchful or prudent) to discern from the Word of God which is the true Church, since all sects which are in the world assume to themselves the name of the Church." We ought to ask ourselves in this statement, 'how do we discern?' or, 'what do we base our discernment on?' Of course, that will be on the Word of God. But, where do our children learn how to be discerning? A big portion of that comes from the Catechism Instruction that we receive. Without the instruction of the Word of God, we as the church are in a very vulnerable position.

The third reason why CI is necessary is because it gives the child an opportunity to start learning the truths of Scripture from a rather early age. Catechism Instruction cannot start any later! We might think at times, 'Oh, learning this can wait as I still have a long way to go, and so I have no need of studying such topics at my age.' That is a terribly wrong view! If we have an opportunity to learn any truths revealed to us in Scripture, we must grab that chance

to learn something new. Also, it always takes time for man to learn doctrines. Proverbs 22:6 says, 'Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.' Solomon is admonishing, not only for the parent to teach the child the Word of God, but also for the child to learn as much as he can in his youth! Solomon's words are indeed wise. God has made it such that a child has a mind that can soak up knowledge like a sponge. Should we faithfully heed God's Word and make the study of God's Word one of utmost importance, the spiritual maturity and knowledge of a child of God will surely develop rapidly. And, if he has passed this phase of life without learning God's truth, it is extremely difficult for him to pick it up in his adulthood.

The fourth reason why CI is necessary is because it is one of the fundamental ways the church can be rooted in Christ. The Instruction teaches us the truth of God's Word. Paul says in Colossians 2: 7 that we are 'rooted and built up in Him, and stablished in the faith...' being stablished means deeply and firmly rooted in the faith, or in Christ. And we are stablished in Christ through learning the Word of God. This is done partly by Catechism Instruction.

The fifth and final reason why CI is necessary is because the child today faces an almost unstoppable tide of worldliness and CI stems that tide. Most of our children in Singapore attend public schools, where the ungodly influence of others surround them and try to lure them away from God. Children are certainly in a heated battle with Satan and his host! Thus, it is of great importance for them in every Lord's Day, to be refreshed with the Word of God, and armoured to face the world once again for another week.

The dangers of not seeing the importance of Catechism Instruction

As we try to understand the importance of Catechism Instruction, we can look at it from a different angle, to see what happens when CI is deemed as 'unnecessary.'

The danger of not having Catechism Instruction is simple yet utterly harmful to the church. Without CI classes, the church in time to come would be in a vulnerable position where they are

likely to fall into the false doctrines of the Devil. If the church does not stress the need of having CI classes, the members and children would see no need for it. They will be, like what the Apostle Paul says, '...tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning...' (Eph. 4:14)

The next danger of not seeing the importance of Catechism Instruction is extremely detrimental towards the child. If the child is not refreshed by the Word of God, and thus is not armoured to face the world, he is in an unstable position once he steps into school. The world shows no mercy to Christians, especially children. They would use means that are cloaked with lies to lure the child to sin. I remember myself being lured by my classmates to the things of the world, as I was not able to defend myself with the truth as a result of not taking CI classes seriously. I was indirectly rejecting the Word of God. Indeed, Hosea's words in chapter 4, verse 6, 'My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge...' are very apt for our doctrinally-apathetic generation.

The other causes of not seeing the importance of Catechism Instruction

This subheading is not to accuse anyone of this mistake. But rather, the reason of having this portion of the article is to warn each other of this sin, and to look into the possible reasons of why children do not see CI as important.

Since the reason concerning children has been covered in the previous section, I shall focus now on parents. Parents at times do not emphasise the need for CI classes. The church may have Sunday Schools, but if the parents do not constantly remind their children why they need to, for example, memorise the verses assigned to them in the classes, the children would see that task as unimportant. Again referring to Proverbs 22:6, when Solomon states that parents are to teach the child, it also includes the responsibility of reminding the child why it is important to have Catechism Instruction or, to be more general, why it is important to learn the Scriptures.

Even if both the church and parents see the need of having Catechism Instruction and are thoroughly convinced

of it, it is still of no use unless the child grows in spiritual maturity to see the need of Sunday Schools. I experienced this myself. As I mentioned a few paragraphs ago, when I was in primary school, I did not take Sunday Schools seriously. This was because I thought, "what's the use of it?" I did enjoy having those classes, but saw no need for it. And now looking back, I realise that I was not mature enough to see the importance of the Instruction. Only when God grants us sufficient maturity are we able to see the importance of Catechism Instruction. As immature youths, we tend to take such classes lightly. Thus, we must pray that we would have ardent desire and ability to squeeze out everything we have learnt from the classes and apply them to our lives.

Conclusion

Ending off, I urge ALL youths and children to study the Word of God with all diligence. Sunday Schools are never like the Math or English classes you go for in school during the weekdays. It is a class where you are able to joyfully learn the truth of God's Word! So we, including myself, must not take CI classes for granted but cherish each and every Sunday when we come together to feed on God's truth.

The Story of the English Bible I: John Wycliffe

>> Stephen Mulder

The King James Version Bible is celebrating its 400th anniversary on May 2nd, 2011. This version is probably the one we are most familiar with, as many of us have grown up hearing it read at home and at church. Yet, many of us do not know the history of how the English Bible came into existence. Therefore, in order to mark this historic occasion it will be our intention to provide a history of how the English Bible came into being; in a time when Roman Catholic heresy and superstition dominated England. It was a period in history when the only version allowed to be read was the Latin Vulgate of Jerome. We will see in our study that the only way that men such as: John Wycliffe, John Purvey, Nicholas Hereford, and William Tyndale; could translate the Bible, was by God's grace alone; for the Roman Catholic Church persecuted anyone who translated and even read the Bible in English. Therefore, the story of the English Bible is a wonderful and beautiful story of the grace of God in the hearts of the men who translated His Word.

To begin the story of the English Bible we will start with a man named John Wycliffe; being a pre-reformer, he has rightly been given the name "The Morning Star of the Reformation." For, he opposed many of the false doctrines of Rome and in doing so; he laid the groundwork for the reformation in England.

John Wycliffe was born around 1328 in North Riding, Yorkshire. His father was a wealthy squire, who had the funds to send his son to university. Therefore, in September of 1345, Wycliffe was admitted into Merton College, in the town of Oxford. He remained in Oxford for thirty-five years, being both a student and a teacher. During his studies, he obtained degrees from several colleges, including: Merton, Balliol, and Queens.

His course of study was quite normal for the time. It included the seven liberal arts (grammar, rhetoric, logic, music, arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy). He also studied the three philosophies (natural, moral, and metaphysical). In addition, he studied Latin literature and Aristotelian philosophy. His theological courses took eight years to complete. Four of these years were spent studying the Vulgate, two years were spent studying Sentences by Peter Lombard (this is a middle age textbook on Scripture), and the last two years were used giving lectures and speeches on the Old Testament and the New Testament. During this time, he also engaged in public lectures and debates. Although his course load was heavy, he was regarded as an excellent scholar.

Much happened to Wycliffe in the period from 1361 to 1372. When he was thirty-four, he was appointed to the priesthood and on May 14, 1361, he was given a parish at Fillingham, Lincolnshire. This simply means that he received the pay of a priest, without doing any of the work associated with the office of priesthood, and could continue his studies without any hindrance. However, Wycliffe would from time to time preach a sermon there. In 1365, he became warden of Canterbury Hall. Around 1368, he left his Fillingham parish and went to one at Lugershall, which was closer to Oxford. He obtained a Bachelor of Divinity in 1369 and in 1372, he became a Doctor in Divinity at Oxford.

God worked by His Holy Spirit in the heart of Wycliffe by means of several notable men. The first was Augustine of Hippo. Like many of the reformers, Wycliffe respected Augustine on many issues including, the difference between the visible and invisible church and predestination. The second was Robert Grosseteste, who was a contemporary of John Wycliffe. Grosseteste hated the corruption of the church and placed a large amount of authority on the Bible. He also knew Greek and Hebrew, which was a rarity for his day. The third man was Thomas Bradwardine. He led Wycliffe to the truth of the sovereignty of God's grace. He taught that man has no freewill and even applied this doctrine to election and reprobation.

Wycliffe did not agree with the levels of office in the Roman Catholic Church, and rather than basing his beliefs about this on the history and traditions of the church, he based them solely on the New Testament; in which he found only two church offices: elder and deacon. He also taught that the priest's office should be only, to preach the Word and that the priest's payment should be supported solely on the people's willing contributions. He criticized the clergy who let secular offices get in the way of their spiritual labours and condemned the large wealth that the church had acquired. Wycliffe also utterly despised indulgences and taught that God alone could forgive sin.

It is important to note that around this time, ideas concerning the church were changing drastically in England. There are several factors included in this, the first is Rome had replaced the preaching of the Word and Biblically based worship, with the worship of images and pompous ceremonies. The reading of Scripture was extremely rare, even for the clergy. In fact, it was only necessary for the priests to know: the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and Hail Mary. The lack of knowledge the clergy had and their immoral behaviour caused seeds of doubt to be planted in the minds of the people. The second factor is that England was developing a new patriotic spirit and this had a great impact on many of their views. For instance, the English government was beginning to defy the Roman Catholic Church, which at the time was mainly controlled by France. Thus in 1371, the parliament made a decision to keep the clergy out of government and secular office. In addition, the government began filling church offices with men

of their own choosing, rather than men appointed by the church. Also due to this patriotic spirit, the government authorities wanted a share in the church money that was collected on English soil and the monarchy was beginning to challenge the pope's authority. All of these new ideas were causing problems with the Roman Catholic Church and in 1374, John Wycliffe was sent with a government embassy to talk to papal representatives about the growing differences between Rome and England.

It was because of his reforming views that Wycliffe was asked in the winter of 1377, to appear before the bishops at St. Paul's Cathedral to answer to the charge of heresy. So, in February, with the support of Gaunt, (who was Wycliffe's main protector and chairman of the Royal Council at the time) he appeared before the bishops surrounded by a Royal Guard. The commotion caused by this entry angered the bishops, but an even greater argument broke out when Lord Percy, who was Gaunt's ally, invited Wycliffe to sit down. This small invitation turned into a roaring argument, between the bishops and the government, as to whether Wycliffe should sit or stand. (The reason for this argument was because a prisoner had to stand before the bar, but a doctor was allowed to sit in order to defend his arguments.) Because of their petty arguments, Wycliffe was not tried at this time, nevertheless he was later called to appear before the bishops in April 1378, but this time the government ordered the bishops not to condemn him and thus he was saved from martyrdom.

Nevertheless, this was not the end of Wycliffe's persecution. On May 22, 1377, the pope issued five papal bulls (a papal bull is a letter by the pope which would be sealed with a leaden bulla) against him, in which he stated "We have learned to our extreme sorrow, that John Wycliffe, rector of the church at Lutterworth, of the diocese of Lincoln, a professor of holy writ - would he were not a master of errors! - Has been impugning received doctrine." (Quoted in Dahmus, The Prosecution of John Wycliffe p.39) The pope would go on to rebuke the English clergy for not condemning the heresy and for allowing his doctrines to go unchallenged. The pope also ordered Oxford University to assist the authorities and not allow any

of Wycliffe's teachings to be taught. However, Oxford refused to condemn him, since it would show that the pope had authority in England. Yet, they still wanted to seem cooperative, so the vice-counsellor of the university ordered a group of theologians to examine Wycliffe's work. After going over his works, the bishops found them to be Orthodox and although some stated they "sounded poorly to the ears" (Quoted in Trevelyan, England in the Age of Wycliffe, p.85) he was still allowed to teach them. Therefore, the Lord once again upheld and preserved his servant and the truth from the persecution of Rome.

Soon after this, Wycliffe began a very systematic attack of the teachings of Rome. From 1378 to 1380, he wrote seven new tracts against the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. The names of these papers are: On the Truth of Holy Scripture, On the Church, On Apostasy, On the Eucharist, On the Power of the Pope, and On the Office of Kings. We can see amidst all the persecution that Wycliffe was receiving for his views, he did not stop speaking out against Rome, but continued by the grace of God alone, to fight.

Since England was not able or did not want to deal with Wycliffe, the Pope ordered him to come to Rome. Wycliffe was unable to come and declined the invitation due to his failing health. After suffering two strokes, he died on December 31, 1384. However, he was so hated and feared by Rome, that they would not let him rest in peace. On October 8, 1427, by the command of the Council of Constance, (the same council which would order Jan Hus to be burned at the stake several years later) John Wycliffe's bones were dug up, burned, and his ashes scattered on the river Swift.

The Translation Work

Wycliffe desired that the common people should be able to read the Bible. In fact, Wycliffe thought that the Bible was the highest standard of all writings, and stated: "Were there a hundred popes and all friars turned to cardinals, their opinions in matters of faith should not be accepted except on so far as they are founded on Scripture itself." (Quoted in Wild, The Romance of the English Bible, p.41) It is not clear as to how much of the actual

translation work Wycliffe did, because the translation of the Vulgate, known to us as the Wycliffe Bible, comes down to us in two different translations, (Nicholas Hereford did the first and John Purvey did the second). This has led some to say Wycliffe translated part of the Old Testament and did the whole New Testament. Others say that he only translated the four gospel accounts. It is known that the first translation was done under his supervision though. Having considered all this, it was the lack of knowledge the people had, as well as Wycliffe's belief on the authority of the Bible that a translation was begun under his leadership in 1380.

As mentioned above, Nicholas Hereford did the first translation, under the leadership of John Wycliffe. Hereford's translation went from Genesis up to Baruch 3:20. (The Book of Baruch is in the Apocrypha, which was included in the Vulgate.) He had to stop at Baruch, because he was no longer able to do the work and he let others finish the work. It is because of this that some people believe that Wycliffe took over the translation and finished it. One interesting thing to mention is that Hereford's translation is believed to be, not just from the Vulgate, but also from a French translation, which was done in the twelfth century. This is believed to be true because a new idiom was found in Hereford's translation that was not found in the Vulgate, but in the French translation.

Considering that Hereford's translation of the Vulgate into English was the first of its kind, it had several flaws that did not make it very popular for common use. The first and probably most noticeable flaw was its close rendering of the Latin syntax. This extremely literal translation into English did not make it easy to read or understand. A second problem with Hereford's translation was that the English language was changing drastically at this time making it very difficult for the Bible to be translated into comprehensible English. The reason for this change was because the three main English dialects (Old English, Old Norse, and Anglo Norman) were starting to mix.

Therefore, in order to improve the first version, John Purvey did a revision of it. This revision took place around the 1390's, after John Wycliffe's death. The

"Wycliffe began a very systematic attack of the teachings of Rome. From 1378 to 1380, he wrote seven new tracts against the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church."

principles of his work at translating are set forth in the prologue found at the beginning of his Bible translation. In it, he insists that everyone should become acquainted with the whole Bible. Below is part of the fifteenth chapter, in modern English, where Purvey speaks of all the work involved in the translating of the Bible:

"For these reasons and other, with common charity to save all men in our realm, which God would have saved, a simple creature hath translated the Bible out of Latin into English. First, this simple creature had much travail, with divers fellows and helpers, to gather many old Bibles, and other doctors, and common glosses, and to make one Latin Bible some deal true; and then to study it anew, the text with the gloss, and other doctors, as he might get, and specially Lyra on the Old Testament, that helped full much in this work: the third time to counsel with old grammarians and old divines of hard words and hard sentences, how they might best be understood and translated; the fourth time to translate as clearly as he could to the sentence, and to have many good fellows and cunning at the correcting of the translation."

The first step, according to Purvey, was to find a faithful copy of the Latin Vulgate. It was very hard to find copies that were exactly alike because books were not printed, but copied out laboriously by hand. Copying manuscripts out by hand often lead to errors and mistakes. Thus, it was imperative that translators search and compare old manuscripts of the Vulgate, to find the most authentic and true version.

The second step was to understand the text that the person was translating, in order to translate it properly. Therefore, in the task of understanding what was being said, Purvey got help from Nicholas of Lyra, who wrote a Bible commentary called the Postilla Litteralis. Although this commentary was very helpful to Purvey, it would also lead to some flaws in his translation, which is made evident when we look at Psalm 8:4. In the first translation by Hereford the verse was translated "or the son of man for thou visitest him," however, in the second version it was translated "either the son of a virgin for thou visitest him." The phrase, "Son of a virgin" was not found in the Latin version, but it was found in Lyra's commentary on the Psalms. Lyra says in his commentary, "the son of man" means "the son of a virgin."

The third step in translating was to look at grammar books and dictionaries to find the meaning of odd words that were not often used. After all these steps were completed, they could translate the text, not just a literal translation, but a translation that takes the meaning of the text and renders it according to what it meant in the original language. Once the translation work was all done, Purvey had men read his translation over and correct what they thought needed to be revised. Below for the purpose of comparing and contrasting are two selections of passages from both editions of the translation. The first is Luke 5:1-3 in modern English and the second is Psalm 46:1-2 in the Old English.

Hereford:

Christ stood beside the standing water of Gennesaret, and saw two boats standing beside the standing water; and the fishers had gone down and washed nets. And he went into a boat, that was Simon's, prayed him to lead again a little from the land; and he sitting taught the companies from the boat.

Purvey:

He stood beside the pool of Gennesaret, and saw two boats standing beside the pool; and the fishers were gone down, and washed nets. And he went up to a boat, that was Simon's, and prayed him to lead it a little from the land; and he sat and taught the people out of the boat.

Hereford:

Oure God refut, and vertue; helpere in tribulaciouns, that founden vs ful myche. Therefore wee shul not drede, whil the erthe, shal be disturbed; and hillis shul be born ouer in to the herte of the se.

Purvey:

Oure God, thou art refuyt, and vertu: helpere in tribulacions, that han founde vs greetly. Therfor we schulen not drede, while the erthe schal be troblid, and the hillis schulen be borun ouer in to the herte of the see.

Although only 170 manuscripts of these translations exist today, the translation of the Vulgate into English had a very important effect on the church in England. It was because the Lord used John Wycliffe to be a morning star, that England would begin a reformation; a reformation that would eventually lead to our King James Version Bible. This occurred by the spreading of the Bible around England and although reading of Scripture was condemned by Rome, many people held secret meetings where they read the Word. Another thing that they did is memorize large portions of Scripture since books were so expensive. Many of these people were persecuted for going to these meetings and hearing the Word, but as Tertullian said in the second century, "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." Therefore, on this anniversary we should thank God for His wondrous work of grace in the heart of John Wycliffe and all the saints who were brought to the truth by the translation of the Vulgate Bible.

Christian spiritual unity

“God in His wisdom brings together two young people who are sufficiently alike, yet also sufficiently different, that they complement each other, forming one whole, forming a balance wheel for each other as well”.

Rev. Cornelius Hanko

The covenant of God is unity. It is the unity between the perfectly righteous One and fallen, elect sinners in the cross of Jesus Christ. It is a unity of extreme opposites, the reconciliation of enemies by the atoning blood of the Saviour. Precious is that blood and powerful is that work of reconciliation to transform enemies into eternal friends. Fallen man called into covenant friendship with the living God. What blessed unity!

As the covenant is unity, so covenant courtship demands unity. The God who calls His people into unity with Him likewise demands unity amongst them. The relationship between two young believers must be established on the basis of their common unity in Christ. This is important because all other basis for unity is false and can only lead to spiritual destruction in any relationship.

Spiritual unity in courtship means that a Reformed believer seeks to find a partner who is of the same mind of Christ as he is (Php 2:5). He is deeply attracted to one who shares the same spiritual mindset and convictions that he does. Covenant courtship insists that we be “likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (Php 2:2). The common knowledge and love for God grips two believers so strongly that it is often the manner in which godly relationships begin.

Of utmost importance is to understand that spiritual unity means unity in the Word of God. A couple that is to grow in Christ must firstly be grounded in a common conviction concerning what the Word teaches. The cardinal truths of Scripture must be deeply impressed upon their souls to the extent that it is the foundation for a couple's relationship. Since the confessions of the Reformed church are the expression of unity amongst members, they also ought to be the expression of unity in courtship. As a general rule I believe that covenant relationships must be established upon a common conviction on the 5 points of Calvinism and the Three Forms of Unity (Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dordrecht). These are strong foundations for unity in a relationship and we may only be deeply thankful to our Reformed fathers for establishing such strong foundations for us today.

A couple who establish their relationship on strong foundations in the Word will enjoy a strong relationship. Like the wise man who built his house upon the rock, their relationship will not be easily swayed because of its sure foundations. Consequently they will be able to prosper in godliness and service to God who unites them in the same knowledge of His Word.

When a covenant couple love each other in the LORD, they express spiritual unity. The common knowledge of their sinfulness and salvation in Christ alone provokes them to love each other in the love of God. They seek to out-please each other because they are precious in each other's eyes. They are brothers and sisters in the household of God and fellow members of the body of Christ. Marriage counsellor Dr. Ed Wheat writes that love is always doing the very best for the object of one's love. Covenant courtship raises this love to a higher level because love is deeply exclusive in courtship, given only to a specific person.

Being spiritually united also implies possessing the same hope for their lives together. As pilgrims on this earth they seek the blessed hope of the new heavens and the new earth together. Their affections are not set on the things in this world, whether it be their studies, careers or achievements, but are set on the things of the heavenly kingdom. Unlike the people of this world, they seek for the blessed coming of their Lord and Saviour who has prepared a place for them in glory.

Service to God in the church is another expression of a couple's spiritual unity. When the Lord brings two individuals together in courtship, He desires their united worship and service to Him as a spiritually united couple. Together they learn to function as one in reverential worship and service to God. In their own specific place and calling in the church they serve the Lord God with a profound knowledge of their unity. As they do this they will be a tremendous source of blessing to their brethren in the church. Their loving and happy relationship is an example for other godly couples to follow because Christ is powerfully displayed in it. Such unity in courtship also serves to promote the greater unity of the church as Christ calls it to.

Finally their unity is demonstrated in the couple's totally selfless love for each other. In heart, mind and soul they surrender to each other as God calls them to. They care for the other's good more than their own. When they surrender to each other their wills merge as one. This is where they experience the miracle of growing to be one flesh in the Lord. Rev. Cornelius Hanko writes that “their life is a giving to each other, even as God gives Himself to us, to the extent that He brings us into His very heart, into His fellowship, into the intimate communion of life with Him, reflecting His glory”. Bound by the same truth, love, service, hope and mutual submission, there is indeed true spiritual unity.

Courtship III >> Bro Aaron & surrendering

CERC is placed in a unique position in Singapore, where the Reformed community is relatively small in number. Our young people face the temptation of indiscriminately dating professing Christians from other denominations. We thread dangerous waters when we do this because we may be tempted to sacrifice the distinctive edges of the faith that we possess. A relationship built with Christians of other faiths is a compromise to our Reformed faith. Our faith is a biblically distinctive faith, built by our fathers with sweat and blood. The truths that they have delivered to us must be carried on with all their power and sharpness even as we engage in courtship. How else are the Reformed truths of sovereign predestination and particular grace to be passed on to our children and their generations if couples are not doctrinally united? How else is the church to grow as the pillar and ground of the truth if covenant couples are not united in faith?

May the Lord so grant that we strive for spiritual unity in our relationships to the end that they may be powerful expressions of our unity with Christ!

Surrendering

In the covenant of grace, God extends His friendship to sinners who are by nature totally depraved. He does so by His Spirit, accompanied by the preaching of His Word, drawing His elect people out of darkness into the marvellous light of His fellowship. And although the hearts of His people have been transformed to the image of His Son who died for them, yet while on earth they still retain their sinful natures. Throughout their entire lives the people of God struggle with their sinful natures which are at enmity against Him, crying for deliverance. In earnest expectation they seek the blessed hope of Christ's coming where their sinful natures will be fully destroyed and transformed into perfectly glorious bodies.

As much as courtship is a time of great excitement, it is also a time of profound

humility. This is because the two young believers who are brought together in the providence of God realize that they are ultimately nothing but sinners saved by grace. They understand that they still retain their distinctively sinful natures and are prone to sin against God and each other. They know that only the grace of God could have brought them together in covenant courtship and that it is the only thing that will sustain their relationship.

Sin is present in any relationship, be it in the home, with our colleagues or friends. When we approach courtship with a spiritual frame of mind, we see the motions of sin working in the relationship. We see sin working powerfully and expressing itself in the form of pride, lust, jealousy, anger and self-centeredness amongst other sins. A covenant couple may not be guilty of all of those sins but they carry with them specific sins according to their characters. This struggle with sin carries on not only in courtship but also in marriage and all through their lives as one flesh. The Form of Marriage at the back of the Psalter confesses accurately that “married persons are generally, by reason of sin, subject to many troubles and afflictions”.

Sin has the potential to destroy a couple's relationship. When sins are committed in the process of courtship and are not repented of, they grieve the Spirit that unites both believers in the bond of love. This grieving draws the couple away from each other, and consequently their personal relationship with God is also affected. They are unable to enjoy God's favour and each other's love for a season because sin has separated them.

The tendency to sin against each other in courtship is far greater than in normal friendships because of the closeness that the couple shares. Ironic as it may be, this closeness can sometimes have a contradictory effect. On the one hand it is the cause by which a couple

devote themselves to each other, care for and love each other deeply. Yet on the other hand, this closeness makes them deeply aware of each other's flaws and sinful tendencies. This awareness may sometimes cause a couple to sin against each other wilfully or to tempt the other to sin.

A couple's knowledge and experience of sin in their courtship must finally bring them to the foot of the cross of Jesus Christ. Above all things, they must acknowledge their sinfulness which provokes the holy God to wrath and anger. As they pray for forgiveness and submit themselves to Him in repentance, they understand that they need God every moment of their relationship. God must reconcile them to Him and to each other. Only then will they experience His favour again and enjoy the blessings of His friendship with each other.

When a couple submit themselves to God, then they will be able to submit to each other. The ability to confess individual faults to each other, to seek each other's forgiveness is evidence of the Spirit's work in their hearts. Pride hinders us from confessing our faults, and the devil is ever quick to stroke that pride when believers sin against each other in a relationship. Sometimes the hardened heart finds it agonisingly painful to humble itself in repentance.

Nevertheless, the powerful grace of God, working in the lives of His covenant children, will break down that sinful pride, enabling the couple to surrender themselves fully to each other. As they are reunited to each other in humility they experience the peace of God which passes understanding. This peace gives them the assurance of their covenant friendship with God who alone works out all things for the good of His people.

“Submit yourselves therefore to God”. Jas 4:7a



Thanksgiving

Thank God for the June camp where our members could listen and know more of how to live our lives in accordance to God's will and Word.

Thank God for giving health, strength and courage to Uncle Ishu as he went through his physical and psychological illnesses recently.

Thank God for His infinite mercies, love, and grace shown towards the church of Christ.

Thank God for the leaders of the church who continue to persevere in CERC.

Thank God for the various cell groups as they grow in understanding of His word through their Bible studies.

Thank God that Uncle Suan Kiat has found a new job at City Square.

Thank God that Aunty Kah Pik has also found a new job. Pray that she will be able to cope with the new environment.

Supplication

Pray for Uncle Robert and family, that they will grow in understanding, love and concern for one another and continue to abide in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Pray for the church in Penang that they will have spiritual growth and abide in God's Word.

Pray for our youth, that they can bring their friends and neighbours to worship in CERC.

Pray for mission work in our neighbouring countries. Pray that the members of CERC will continue to witness to their loved ones and family members and share with them God's Word.

Pray that the church will remember our session members in prayer as they shepherd the flock.



CK RETREAT



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CHURCH CAMP



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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