



salt shakers

joel 3:16 matthew 5:16

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SALT
SHAKERS
TURNS

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YOUNG PEOPLE'S FORUM (III.13)

Dear Readers

Welcome to Issue 13, and we are so, so, thankful to God that we are 2! It is truly of His merciful and loving hand that He has preserved us thus far. We are indeed prosperous in the Lord, and it is our blessed privilege that He continues to guide and use us to bless and comfort His people through good Christian articles that confess Scriptures alone!

For myself, I humbly admit that Salt Shakers does me more good than I it. I am prone to be lazy in reading good Christian articles (the battle is real!), but I thank the Lord (so much!) for giving me this opportunity to serve Him where I "need" to read every issue carefully. And ever so often, as I "correct" the articles, they in turn correct me with God's Word, warm me with God's show of faithfulness, and minister to me the comforts of Christ. And I'm not just talking about the articles written by Professors and Pastors; even those written by the younger ones are full of God-glorifying confessions and words that come from the loving hearts of little prophets, priests and kings! I dare say from my own experience, that the only way you fail to benefit from Salt Shakers is if you fail to read it.

We thank God for our committee who struggle together as many incapable people who hope to put something useful together for our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We firmly believe that except the Lord builds the work, we labour in vain that do it. Do pray for us, that we will be given strength and courage to carry on with this little work, and that we may persevere come what may, only for the glory of our God and the love of His Church.

We thank God for our many writers, young and old, great and simple, who are willing to render their minds, time, and keyboards for their Lord's use. May they be blessed in writing, as they seek to bless those who do read.

Last, as we are Salt Shakers, we long to be out there and making all the difference wherever we are! That's what salt does – it brings out the best when it is added, and... it makes the person eating thirst for water! We want our magazine to teach Christians to be the best that they can be according to the Bible; and when the lost look at them, may they thirst for the living water! How wondrous to be used in such a way – that when others look at us, they long to have a loving Shepherd like ours. So readers, to join us in this work, please pass the Salt Shaker(s)! It's really no point in your cupboard or bookshelf if you have already read it. And ESPECIALLY if you haven't read it yet! Oh yes, we do have softcopies, so don't worry about helping us archive them at home. If you could just pass your issue on to a Christian friend or to a non-Christian you know at school or work, God may use it to strengthen a weak saint, or even speak to His unsaved child! This magazine is free, so pass it on freely! =]

May the Lord grant us strength in faith and knowledge, with a Christ-like compassion for the lost sheep, that we may be always humble, loving, and useful as His servants.

On behalf of Salt Shakers, paul

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Dear Young People,

Some objections that have been made against the Psalms for singing in the corporate worship of the church is that there are no Psalms to sing on special Christian holidays. The church usually commemorates the birth of Christ on Christmas, the death of Christ on Good Friday, the resurrection of Christ on Easter Sunday, the ascension of Christ on Ascension Day, and the outpouring of the Spirit of Christ on Pentecost Sunday. There are hymns that are written especially for these days, but, so one says, there are no Psalms. And so, the conclusion is reached that the Psalms are not enough for the church.

Now, there is a certain truth to that if one thinks of Psalms that sing of special events that surrounded these parts of the life of Christ. But the meaning of these events is clearly set down in the Psalms. In the last article I pointed out that there are even certain Psalms that speak, though rather distantly, of Christ's birth.

But the present Christmas carols that we sing are not all that great either. In fact there are only a few that are even true. "We three kings of Orient are" for example, is full of mistakes. There were not necessarily three; the Bible does not tell us how many came. They were not kings, but more likely teachers in some school in the area that is now Iraq. The star that appeared in the East did not lead them to Canaan; it apparently disappeared after the wise men set out on their journey and did not appear again until these men were leaving Jerusalem, when it appeared, filled them with joy, and led them to the house where Jesus was staying with his parents.

The same is true of the favorite carol, "Silent Night, holy night." There is a line in that carol that says, "No crying he makes." But this is not true. Scripture tells us that Christ was like us in all things except for our sin. He too cried when he was hungry or uncomfortable. We must be careful that we do not deny his humanity.

I am not fond either of some of the "carols" in our Psalter. Particularly, the Son of Simeon is one I cannot sing. It is not a versification of Scripture at all,

and some of its lyrics border on wrong theology.

Jesus! The vision of thy face

Hath overpowering charms!

Scarce shall I feel death's cold embrace,

If Christ be in my arms.

When flesh shall fail, and heart-strings break

Sweet will the minutes roll;

A mortal paleness on my cheek,

But glory in my soul.

I can't sing the song in divine worship. Apart from the sentimentality of the last verse, it is not even true that Christ is in my arms. I am in Christ's arms, and that is my salvation. Or, at least, as John 10 says, I am in his hands, but most emphatically he is not in my arms. He never was and he never will be. The thought of it is repulsive. He is, after all, Lord of lords and King of kings. High above us, He powerfully rules over all.

I do not think it is a sin to sing some of the Christmas carols. But I find them in appropriate for divine worship on the Lord's Days. And so, if some in the congregation "go carolling" that is good; but let us sing with discernment and not just mouthing the words.

The Psalms are full of Christ's suffering. That Christ himself is often speaking in the Psalms of his suffering is plain from the fact that two of the seven crosswords were taken directly from the Psalms. The fourth crossword, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" is taken from Psalm 22:1. "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit" is a direct from Psalm 31: 5: "Into thy hand I commit my spirit." That Christ could take these quotations from the Psalms was possible because he was himself speaking in the Psalms, although through his servant, David.

There are Psalms that speak directly of Christ's suffering, and do so in such prophetic accuracy that one cannot help but think that Christ himself was speaking through the Psalmists of his own suffering. Read Psalm 22:1-21 in which passage the text even speaks

of the soldiers who gambled over Christ's clothing. Psalm 69:1-21 even speaks of the drink that was given to Christ while he was on the cross. Psalm 41:9, while it speaks of Ahithophel's treachery against David in the rebellion of Absalom, also speaks of the betrayal of Christ by Judas Iscariot.

These are specific and concrete prophecies of Christ's suffering. There are many more places that speak of Christ's suffering as depicted in the life of David and the other Psalmists.

There are also references in the Psalms to Christ's resurrection, Psalms that can be sung when the church commemorates that blessed event. Perhaps the clearest is in Psalm 16:5-11. In fact, Peter, in his great Pentecostal sermon, quotes this Psalm as proof that the Old Testament Scriptures speak of Christ's resurrection (Acts 2:30-32). While Psalm 17:15 does not speak directly of the resurrection of Christ, the verse implies and presupposes this resurrection.

And so we sing Psalter numbers 27 – 31 on Easter, and that includes the last verse of Psalter number 31:

When I in righteousness at last

Thy glorious face shall see,

When all the weary night is past,

And I awake with thee

To view the glories that abide,

Then, then I shall be satisfied.

Nor ought we to forget that Christ's resurrection is proved by Paul to the Jews in Antioch of Pisidia by quoting Psalm 2 (Acts 13:33: "God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.

But the resurrection of Christ is included in the Psalms that speak of Christ's ascension to heaven and his glorification and exaltation at God's right hand. The Psalms are many and definite.

But we shall wait for this until next time, the Lord willing.

In Christian love, Prof

YOUNG PEOPLE’S FORUM (III.14)

Dear Young People,

In the last forum article, I was talking about how the Psalms are really sung by Christ. This is true, not only because Christ inspired them in the Psalmists of Israel through his Holy Spirit, but also because many are prophetic of Christ and his work here on earth.

I was saying that Christ’s resurrection is often spoken of in the Psalms that speak of Christ’s ascension and exaltation. In our studies of Reformed Doctrine, we really do the same, although we do make a distinction. We speak of Christ’s state of humiliation (which includes his birth, his suffering in which he suffered the anguish of hell, his death and his burial). But we also speak of his state of exaltation (which includes his resurrection, his ascension, his exaltation at God’s right hand, and his coming again at the end of the world). And so both his resurrection, ascension and exaltation all are part of Christ’s glory.

I was going to show why the Psalms identify Christ’s resurrection and Christ’s exaltation. The clearest Psalm is Psalm 2. It would be well if you would read the whole Psalm. It is one of my favourite Psalms.

The Psalm is speaking, historically, of all the enemy nations that surround Israel, and how they plot to destroy Israel. But, says the Psalm, God laughs. This always sends the chills down my spine. The wicked are, in their own eyes, very powerful and they think that they can easily defeat small Israel. God doesn’t defeat them only – although he does that too, but he laughs at them. And he laughs because he has set his son on the holy hill of Zion.

That means that God laughs not only because God is sure of victory through his servant David, but that he even uses the raging of the heathen and their wild attacks against Zion to save Zion. They think they are fighting against God, but all they are doing is accomplishing God’s will.

It is like an army in the field, fighting the enemy. But at the headquarters of the enemy sits one, directing the battle, who is really on the other side, and gives orders that will guarantee the

defeat of the forces he is directing.

But this is prophecy and it refers to Christ, the Son of David, of whom David was a type. God’s Son, Jesus Christ, is set by God on the true Zion in heaven at God’s right hand (Hebrews 12:22). He did this wonderful work when Christ was raised from the dead (Acts 13:33, Rom. 1:4). And, at the same time, Psalm 2 refers to the crowning of Christ as Lord of lords and King of kings. At God’s right hand Christ rules also over the wicked and makes them serve his purpose.

But the Lord will scorn them all,

Calm he sits enthroned on high;

Soon His wrath will on them fall,

Sore displeased He will reply:

Yet according to My will

I have set My King to reign,

And on Zion’s holy hill

My Anointed I maintain.

This His word shall be made known,

This Jehovah’s firm decree;

Thou art my beloved On,

Yes, I have begotten Thee.

All the earth at Thy request

I will give Thee for Thy own;

That Thy might shall be confessed

And Thy foes be overthrown. (Psalter 3)

Psalm 47 speaks of the ascension of Christ. Psalter numbers 129 and 130 both sing of it. The Psalms speak of God, not Christ, but God has done all that the Psalm says through Christ, and Christ is God.

All nations clap your hands,

Let shouts of triumph ring.

For mighty over all the lands

The Lord Most High is King.

Above our mighty foes

He gave us power to stand,

And as our heritage He chose

The goodly promised land.

With shouts ascends our King.

With trumpet’s stirring call;

Praise God, praise God, His praises sing,

For God is Lord of all.

O sing in joyful strains,

And make His glory known;

God over all the nations reigns,

And holy is His throne.

Our fathers God to own

The kings of earth draw nigh,

For none can save but God alone,

He is the Lord Most High.

There is one more Psalm that I want to refer to. That is Psalm 68. David wrote this Psalm at the time he took the ark of the covenant out of the house of Obbedom to Jerusalem. David, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, saw this event as a type of the ascension of Christ. And so he wrote Psalm 68.

O Lord, Thou hast ascended

On high in might to reign;

Captivity Thou leadest

A captive in thy train.

Rich gifts to Thee are offered

By men who did rebel,

Who pray that now Jehovah

Their God with them may dwell.

Sing unto God, ye nations,

Ye kingdoms of the earth;

Sing unto God, all people,

And praise His matchless worth.

He rides in royal triumph

Upon the hea’ns abroad;

He speaks, the mountains tremble

Before the voice of God. (Psalter 183)

It is sometimes said that the Psalms do not speak of those events in Christ’s life that are important to us. But this is not true. And the Psalms speak of these events in a far more beautiful way than any of the hymns.

Cordially in Christ, *Prof*

A

**R E F O R M E D
M A G A Z I N E**

>> Prof David J. Engelsma
In Singapore

Congratulations to the young people of the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore on the second anniversary of the magazine, Salt Shakers!

The existence of a Reformed, Christian magazine anywhere in the world is worthy of congratulations. All the more worthy of joy and gratitude is that such a magazine is in Singapore, where Christianity is the religion of a minority and where those who confess the Reformed faith, that is, pure, sound Christianity, are even fewer.

The fact that Reformed young people produce the magazine is cause for even greater joy. This bodes well for the future.

The joy at this occasion is rooted in the acknowledgment that it is the risen Jesus Christ who has produced the witness of the magazine, working through zealous young people of Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church. The gratitude at the second anniversary of the magazine is recognition that the Lord Jesus has maintained this witness.

Joy in Christ and thanksgiving to Him for His work in Singapore by means of this magazine are worthy causes for celebration.

Do not underestimate the importance of a Reformed, Christian magazine.

In the history of the Reformed churches, to say nothing of wider Christianity, magazines have played a powerful role in witnessing to the triune God and Father of Jesus Christ as He reveals Himself in Holy Scripture. Of course, the members of the church are called to make such a witness (1 Peter. 3:15; 1 Thessalonians 1:8)

By magazines, faithful witnesses have set forth, defended, and developed the pure doctrines of the gospel for the benefit of the members of the church themselves. By magazines, believers have contended for the faith against heresies and errors, which corrupt the truth and lead men and women astray. By magazines, diligent writers have sounded out (in the language of I Thessalonians 1:8) the faith and life of Reformed Christianity to people outside the church.

I think of the magazines in which the faithful ministers in the small, despised, persecuted Reformed church in the Netherlands in the early and middle 1800s—the men of the “Secession”—confessed, defended, developed, and spread abroad throughout that country, the pure gospel of salvation by grace alone.

I think of the magazine in which Abraham Kuyper and his colleagues promoted the

historic Christian faith, according to the Reformed understanding of it, in the Netherlands towards the end of the nineteenth century.

I think of the magazine, begun by Herman Hoeksema, in which Protestant Reformed writers have witnessed to the Reformed faith and life for more than eighty years in North America. The witness of this magazine reaches to the ends of the earth.

As the editor myself of a magazine for many years, I know the worth and benefit of the witness to the truth of magazines. I also know something of the difficulties of coming out regularly with a solid, God-glorifying, and edifying issue.

Let the worth of the witness to the gospel by a magazine be encouragement to you, to continue the work of producing the magazine into its third year and, if God wills, many years beyond.

My advice to you concerning the future of Salt Shakers is simply that you continue to give a clear, sound, bold testimony to the Lord Jesus Christ as He is known, rightly, according to the Reformed faith.

The risen, ascended Lord Jesus, at the right hand of God, deserves your praise. As redeemed and sanctified by Him, you desire to praise Him. “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive... honour... Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever” (Revelation 5:12, 13).

Also in and by the Salt Shakers magazine! Praise Him in the magazine. Do this in the following ways.

Give good instruction—doctrinal instruction.

Demonstrate how sound doctrine produces a holy life, by the grace of the Spirit of Christ Jesus.

Defend the faith, wisely, but uncompromisingly, against errors, whether doctrinal or moral, that are a threat, especially in Singapore.

The content of your magazine must always be Scriptural. Basic to the Christian faith, according to the Reformed understanding, is the inspiration and, therefore, infallibility of the Bible. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God [literally, in the Greek original, ‘God-breathed,’ that is, the word breathed out of the mouth of God], and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

In the evil days in which we live, as the apostasy prophesied by the apostle in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 speeds up, there is widespread doubt about Scripture, and even daring criticism of it, not only in churches known to be liberal and unbelieving, but also in churches that have the name of being Reformed.

Confession of the authority and reliability of Scripture, that arises from a child-like faith concerning the book, and work with Scripture, that obviously is based on this child-like reception of the holy book as the inspired word of God, are required, and may well be beneficial in strengthening the faith of many.

The sure guideline for the continued witness of Salt Shakers is the Reformed confessions – the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession of Faith, and the Canons of Dordt, as well as the church’s ecumenical creeds.

These are priceless treasures for Reformed Christians in Singapore, as in North America and, indeed, everywhere in the world. They systematize and summarize the faith that was once delivered.

Your magazine will not go astray, or lead people astray—dreadful thought!—if it hews to the line of the creeds.

And thus you carry on the great traditions of the Christian and Reformed faith. Against the tide of falling away, forewarned in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, you will, and must, “hold the traditions which ye have been taught” (II Thessalonians 2:15).

Once more, heart-felt congratulations!
And the prayer for God’s blessing on
your important work!

Are **CCAs** more important than **church** **youth group meetings?**

>> Jemima

Co-curricular activities, which are also more commonly known to us as CCAs, are non-academic activities that were made compulsory by the Education Ministry for all Singaporean students to take part in. This policy was introduced as a means to enhance social interaction, leadership, healthy recreation, self-discipline and self-confidence. But, as Christians and pilgrims in this world, are these worldly character traits of a person more important than seeking the kingdom of God?

As a student who has joined very “heavy” and time-consuming CCAs, I have been guilty of missing a few CK/CKS (CERC’s Youth Group) meetings due to CCA commitments. Up till now, it has always been a constant struggle to forgo CCA activities if they fall on a Saturday which clashes with a CK/CKS meeting. I am reluctant to forgo activities on a Saturday for fear of incurring the wrath of my CCA instructor and fellow team mates. In doing so, I incur the wrath of God instead as I would rather serve man than God in these instances. In the end, what do I gain from CCA activities? Nothing more than sheer physical and mental exhaustion due to the vigorous nature of my CCA and having my mind filled with worldly chatter of my school mates. How do these help us in our spiritual life? They do not. In fact, they do more harm than good. What better ways to spend Saturdays than having godly fellowship with fellow saints and studying the Bible during CK/CKS meetings? CK/CKS meetings through the years have benefitted me spiritually and they are also a haven for me to seek spiritual refuge after having spent the whole week in school. I know that some of us have similar struggles when it comes to deciding between going for CCAs and CK/CKS meetings on Saturdays. In fact, I might not even be a worthy person to write this article and encourage youths that CK/CKS meetings are definitely more important than CCAs. Nevertheless, I would like to direct us to Biblical instruction concerning this. May they act as a timely reminder to all of us, myself included, that learning more about His Word and seeking His kingdom are paramount in our lives on this earth.

First, let us look at Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Therein are great truths about laying treasures in Heaven and not on earth. In Matt 6:19-21, Jesus instructs us not to lay our treasures on earth as they are all material and one day, they will all eventually rust and be destroyed on judgment day. While it is certainly not wrong to want to do your best for your own CCA, putting in the extra practices on Saturdays and forgoing CK/CKS meetings just to achieve the first position in competitions are all just vanity in the end. The sweet success of victory will linger in our minds but for a moment. After that, all will be forgotten and we, in fact, will not find true happiness in it. Therefore, material success such as this is all but temporal

and cannot be compared to the treasures which are laid up in heaven which is for eternity. In CK/CKS meetings, we learn essential Biblical truths about our doctrines which will help us counter the evil temptations that we face in the world. In fact, true happiness is found when we are redeemed by the blood of Christ and made righteous in God's sight. In verse 24 of the same chapter, we cannot serve two masters. In this instance, God is our one and only Master, and not man. While it is important for us to still honour our CCA commitments, we have to forgo CCA activities when it comes to CCA taking us away from spiritual activities. We are reminded that we have to serve God rather than man.

The second passage we can look at is 1 Timothy 4:8. Over here, the apostle Paul states that

'bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of life that now is and of that which is to come'.

There are no truer words than these especially when it comes to deciding between whether to attend CCA or CK/CKS activities. Taking part in CCAs will undoubtedly help us hone our leadership skills or build up healthy bodies. But what profit does it do to our souls since these activities fail to mortify our sins? On the other hand, the gain of godliness is worthy for our lives as we enjoy the promises that come with it. These promises are filled with spiritual and eternal blessings. These blessings are definitely much better than the temporal physical benefits we gain from our CCAs. Therefore, let us exercise ourselves unto godliness instead of bodily exercise; and we can start doing this by attending CK/CKS meetings regularly to be spiritually fed.

Another text in 1 Timothy that we can look into is in chapter 6:6-7. It is said that 'godliness with contentment is great gain'. A Christian's gain is great as compared to the wicked who seek the gains of this world and take delight in the worldly advantage that they have. In verse 7, we can see that since we brought nothing into this earth, we can bring nothing out when we die. Therefore, all that we have achieved and learnt in our CCA will come to naught as we cannot bring them with us when we die. All things earthly will remain on earth and will be destroyed by fire in Christ's second coming. We can then see how important it is that we seek the things of heaven as they are eternal. A slight earthly advantage will certainly not bring us the eternal advantages of heaven.

Finally, I would like to take this time to encourage all of us to put God first in everything we do. Though it may be difficult due to our sinful, totally depraved nature and peer pressure from our school mates, let us continue to press on in this spiritual battle! Let us continue to pray for strength and wisdom from God.

Nothing should hinder us from seeking the pearl – that is the kingdom of God. Getting into the kingdom of heaven at all costs is certainly worth it! (Matt 13:45-46)

>> Prof Hanko

A Comparison of the Liberated and PRC Covenant Views (I)

When we were in Singapore ministering to CERC in the months of November and December, 2011, Salt Shakers asked me to write a series of articles on the differences between the views of the covenant held by the Liberated Churches and the Protestant Reformed Churches. The Liberated Churches include the Gereformeerde Kerken (Artikel 31) in the Netherlands, The Canadian Reformed Churches in Canada, the American Reformed Churches in the United States, and the Free Reformed Churches in Australia. There are other Liberated Churches as well, for example in South Africa, but the ones I mention are the ones with which we are most acquainted.

I gladly do this, for this controversy over the doctrine of the covenant is one that has bearing on many great truths of God's word. The truth of the covenant runs like a golden thread through the whole of the Scriptures. And the differences between the Liberated view of the covenant and the view held in the PRC are important and significant. The fact of the matter is that the view held by the PRC is historically the Reformed view and has the imprimatur of the Three Forms of Unity.

A Bit of History

While all the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, from the time of the Reformation, were agreed that the Scriptures required the baptism of the children of believers, there was dispute in the churches over the question of the grounds for infant baptism. What does Scripture teach concerning the reason why infants are to be baptized as well as adults? The question took on a measure of urgency when it was also frankly believed by all that baptism is a sign and seal of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to his people. If Christ's righteousness becomes our righteousness by faith, how can infants receive that righteousness?

And, all admitted, not all the children of believers are actually saved, for the lines of election and reprobation run through the lines of the covenant. Jacob was saved; Esau was not – though both were circumcised as a sign of the covenant. The majority of the nation of Israel was not saved even though all were circumcised. All admitted that God established his covenant in the line of generations, that is, with believers and their children, but the fact is that not all the children of believers are brought into God's covenant. Why should all the children of believers receive the sign of the covenant when they were not actually saved by God and brought into the covenant?

Different answers were given to these questions, and the answers that were given shaped the doctrine of the covenant that each church held.

The Views of Professor William Heyns

At the beginning of the twentieth century a Christian Reformed professor who taught in Calvin Theological School came up with what was actually not an original idea, but was one that he popularized and that became the view of the Liberated. His name was William Heyns.

It is interesting that Rev. Herman Hoeksema, who did much to develop the Biblical doctrine of the covenant, studied theology under William Heyns and was taught the view that later became the view of the Free Reformed Churches as well as other Liberated Churches. Rev. Hoeksema, himself a student in the Seminary, said to his professor, "I do not know what the correct view of the covenant is, but I am

The covenant of grace is not established with the elect only, but with all that are baptized.

sure it is not your view.” It is not surprising that the development of the Biblical view of the covenant was high on the list of priorities in Rev. Hoeksema’s ministry.

William Heyns made the following points in his doctrine of the covenant:

The covenant of grace is not established with the elect only, but with all that are baptized. (William Heyns, Manual of Reformed Doctrine Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1926, p132)

There are two senses in which covenant is used. One is an outward establishment of the covenant with all who are baptized; the second is the actual bestowal of the covenant blessings. (Ibid., 133-134)

Though all baptized babies are in the covenant outwardly, only some are in the covenant inwardly. Those who are inwardly in the covenant are those who, when come to years of discretion fulfil the conditions of the covenant. (Ibid., 134-135) He believed in a conditional covenant.

Those who do not fulfil the conditions that bring them the covenant blessings in actual possession are “covenant-breakers.” To be a covenant breaker implies that one was once in the covenant, but is no longer.

A special grace is given to all who are baptized, which, while not saving, does make it more likely that the one baptized will fulfil the conditions. (Ibid., 136)

The covenant is much like the preaching of the gospel as a gracious and well-meant gospel offer. The gospel, which comes to all men, does not necessarily impart salvation, but gives one who hears it the warrant for accepting it. He has the right to the blessings the gospel promises.

But he will receive that salvation only when he accepts it as his own. Thus he will receive salvation only when he fulfils the conditions necessary. (Ibid., 137)

On this foundation laid by William Heyns, the Liberated built their doctrine of the covenant. There is little difference between what Heyns said about the covenant and what the Liberated say. The Protestant Churches differ radically on almost every point.

Questions for discussion

1. What two problems did the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands face when they held to the doctrine of infant baptism?
2. Why were these problems such difficult ones for the church to answer?
3. William Heyns and the Liberated Churches hold to a conditional covenant; What does the word “condition” mean?
4. Is there a good sense in which the word “condition” can be used? If your answer is “Yes,” what is that good sense?
5. Why is the view of William Heyns almost the same as the error of the gracious and well-meant gospel offer?

The Sufficiency of God

>> Matthias Poi

Habakkuk 3: 17-19

17 Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls:

18 Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

19 The Lord God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds’ feet, and he will make me to walk upon my high places. To the chief singer on my stringed instruments.

How many of us have trembled when met with news of imminent doom? One can almost smell the dread within students during the weeks leading to their final exams, or hear the thumping of a man’s heart when he steps into the big boss’ office for a review. Forecasts of hurricanes and tsunamis spell terror to those in their paths. The word ‘cancer’ coming from the doctor’s lips can mean heart-wrenching fear and grief. Be it from possible or certain, avoidable or inescapable doom, all of us would have undoubtedly experienced feelings of utter despair and trepidation at some point in our lives.

Imagine how the prophet Habakkuk would have felt when the almighty God showed him the vision of the Babylonians plundering Israel and leading them to captivity! In Hab 3:16, we read of his fear:

“When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself.”

Surely no dread can be worse than that of knowing God’s impending judgment; yet Habakkuk’s response must be one of the greatest and most beautiful expressions of faith in the bible.

Habakkuk starts by painting us a vivid picture of complete hopelessness:

“Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls’’. (Hab 3:17).

Notice how he goes through nearly all the food groups. He lists fruit, vegetables, oil, dairy (obtained from cows/goats) and meat. Now, in our day and age, we have the convenience of supermarkets and refrigerators. The people of Israel did not have that luxury. They had to live off the produce of the land. Their survival depended on it. In times of drought and famine, they could not depend on neighbouring countries for help as their neighbours would only be too glad to exploit their situation, leaving them to die of starvation and then appropriating their resources and territories.

What devastating consequences would result from this hopeless situation! But note how Habakkuk reflects a resolute spirit grounded in faith in the sovereign will of God. He essentially declares in verses 18-19, “In spite of such helplessness, I will rejoice. I will rejoice solely in God who saves. In Him alone will I put my trust, for He will give me strength to face the trials and temptations that will inevitably come hard and fast, and He will cause me to tread lightly through the seeming convolutions of life on earth.”

Have you ever seen the way a deer moves through the forest? Despite the dense undergrowth of the jungle, the deer is able to move with such grace. It bounds

“And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.” Romans 8:17

effortlessly and avoids the snares of vines and other vegetation capable of trapping and tripping another. Just as the deer moves around the forest, Habakkuk was assured that God would navigate Him through life with confidence and joy. How easy it is for us to behold the messy crisscrossing of threads on one side of the tapestry of life and despair at its meaninglessness, when in reality the reverse side is a work of unfathomable intricacy and beauty by the hand of God.

From this confession of faith, we can learn a truth of paramount importance: God is SUFFICIENT. Many will readily acknowledge the sovereignty of God, but hesitate to rejoice in the sufficiency of God. It is easy for us to proclaim in times of peace, “God is in control and in Him alone I can trust,” but when the rubber hits the road, we immediately find ourselves running to all sources of material comfort and pragmatism except God.

Is God sufficient for you? Can you say, “Although I may lose my job, my house, my family, my health and my friends, I will trust and rejoice in God”? Or would you say, “I will trust and rejoice as long as I have God and...” And what? What else should we need to supplement God? Would you rely on your network of friends to support you? A hope in some lingering material thing or a reversal in fortunes? As long as God does not take EVERYTHING away, it will be alright? As long as God will provide some sort of relief I’ll trust in Him? Dare we place a condition upon God? Banish these conditions and doubts! God is enough! Let us proclaim with such joy and faith as Habakkuk essentially did, “Lord, if it must be that we lose everything and suffer for your sake, then let it be, that all glory and honour be Thine! We will rejoice even with nothing, for in thee we have everything.”

Yes, dear reader, we are most blessed to have everything, for through Jesus Christ we have everything and more! Habakkuk could not witness the complete realisation of God’s salvation then, but he nevertheless found sufficiency in God. How much more then should we find sufficiency in the love of God that has been ultimately manifested through His beloved son Jesus Christ! Salvation is found in Christ, and Him alone (1 Tim 2:5; Acts 4:12). In Christ we have everything! What more do we need if we are ‘joint-heirs with Christ’ (Rom 8:17), recipients of the love, favour and blessings of God which can be found only in Christ? Christ is everything to the saved soul, and we should rejoice in none other. The Apostle Paul himself wrote in his epistle to the Philippians:

“Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice...in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content...I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me”. (Phil 4: 4-13)

As Spurgeon wrote, “Cheerfulness is the support of our strength; in the joy of the Lord are we strong.” In the face of trouble, we must learn to be a prayerful people and cast our cares on Him who will grant us peace (Phil 4:6-7).

Let us conclude from the book of Romans:

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?...For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Rejoice and be strengthened this day, for nothing can separate us from the God of our salvation. Are you bogged down by worries and stresses of life? Look not within dear reader, but put your trust and faith only in what Christ has done, and not in any other conceivable thing. Only then can we rest in the sufficiency of God; and we shall be rejoicing and praising Him as Habakkuk did in the face of trouble.

Wrestling with the old man of sin

>> Sis Daisy

“The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint; from the sole of the foot even unto the head, there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises and putrefying sores.” Isaiah 1:5,6

Since the fall of Adam and Eve, we, human beings, are all conceived in sin. From birth till death, every one of us reveals our sinful nature in our thoughts, attitudes, speech and actions, ever so naturally and spontaneously. The Bible calls this nature the “old man of sin”. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

God is most just to condemn the whole human race to the judgement of death. But thanks be to God, out of His mercy, love and grace, He chooses to redeem a people to be reconciled to Himself. He bought us with the price of His own blood through the death, resurrection and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. For those of us who have been called by Him to repentance from our sins and to faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, God has regenerated us and given to us a new spiritual life, the “new man”. As a new creature in Christ, we have to continue a spiritual battle (wrestling) of the new man against the old man of sin in us. This is a battle of faith to be fought with the sword of the Spirit which is His Word (Eph 6:17), all through our earthly life, till we meet Him upon our death or at His coming again.

• Our Enemies

“We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places (Eph 6:12).

Our enemies are our very own sinful nature – the “old man of sin” (SELF), much ungodliness among people (WORLD) and the devil and his hosts of fallen angels (SATAN).

• Our Instrument – the Word of God / the Sword of the Spirit

Scripture exhorts us to:

“put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and holiness” (Eph 4:24).

“put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph 6:11).

“put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof” (Rom 13:14).

“fight the good fight of faith” (2 Tim 4:7)

“endure hardness as a good soldier of Christ” (2 Tim 2:3)

All these verses and more tell us that this fight is no easy task. We are not able to win this battle with our own strength. We need to depend on our Lord Jesus Christ, as the Captain of this battle. We need to fight by the power of His Word and of His Spirit. We need to constantly and consciously “put off the old man” and “put on the new man”. When we exercise ourselves in godliness, God Himself will strengthen the “new man” and grant us victory over the “old man of sin in us”. We will experience dominion over sin, self, world and Satan.

• Our Sure Victory

Thanks be to God; He will always cause us to triumph in Christ (2 Cor 2:14). We triumph in Christ when, by the power of God working in us, we are able to:

- Overcome SIN in our lives – we willingly deny all ungodliness, we flee youthful lusts, we abstain from all appearance of evil.

- Love not the WORLD and delight ourselves in the Lord – As far as the Lord grants us godly wisdom, we walk in truth, righteousness and holiness in all aspects of life wherever we are, at home, at school, at work, at play and at all times.

- Resist the DEVIL and instead continually praise and thank our gracious God in the face of all forms of trials and tribulations in our earthly life, be it sicknesses, persecutions, ridicule of the world or even death itself.

As we fight on in this battle of faith, we will experience that God is changing us from glory to glory (2 Cor 3:18). We will experience God strengthening our “new man” and weakening the “old man of sin within us”. We will taste the blessedness of being spiritually minded (Rom 8:6). We will experience eternal life, peace and joy deep down in our soul. “Faith is the victory that overcomes the world” (1 John 5:4).

MY WORK AS A PASTOR

Ps. Ronald Van Overloop

A very important part of the calling of the minister of God's Word is to be a pastor to the congregation he is called of God to serve. That this is true is evidenced in that the Scriptures frequently refer to this office as that of "pastor" (cf. Ephesians 4:11). The word "pastor" means "shepherd" or "to feed as a shepherd." Jesus used this word when he commissions Peter: "Feed my sheep" and "Feed my lambs." (John 21:15,16,17). The idea is that he is to tend or care for the souls of God's people as the sheep of God.

Even as the duty of a shepherd is to feed and protect his sheep, so it is for spiritual shepherds (pastors). Elders too serve as pastors for Paul tells the elders of Ephesus (Acts 20:28) to "feed the church of God," he is speaking of the duty of being a shepherd to them. The idea is that the people of God on earth have needs. First, their needs arise from the fact that they are very much like sheep, i.e., dependent, having the tendency to wander, incapable of caring for themselves, and without natural defences. Second, their needs arise from the fact that God's people are in a constant battle against sin, this present evil world, and the devil with his whole dominion.

The idea is as follows. It is God's good pleasure to sustain and nourish spiritually His people with the means of grace. The means of grace are the green pastures and the still waters of God's truth as set forth in His Word. It is the knowledge of divine undeserved love (grace) that strengthens and equips God's people in their earthly pilgrimage. The Word of God instructs concerning grace, making the sheep wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. The Word presents the truth, it reproves and corrects and it instructs in righteousness.

Second, it is God's good pleasure to communicate His nurturing and sustaining grace to sheep through the instrumentality of men whom He calls and ordains into the gospel ministry. The "Form of Ordination of the Ministers of God's Word" declares that our heavenly Father "doth by a particular mark of His favour use the ministry of men." "The pastoral office is an institution of Christ." The Form further states, "as it is the duty of a common shepherd, to feed, guide, protect and rule the flock committed to his charge; so it is with regard to these spiritual shepherds, who are set over the Church, which God calleth unto salvation, and counts as sheep of His pasture. The pasture, with which these sheep are fed, is nothing else but the preaching of the gospel, accompanied with prayer, and the administration of the holy sacraments; the same word of God is likewise the staff with which the flock is guided and ruled."

My work as a pastor begins with the preaching of the Word. Listen to the Ordination Form again. The office of pastors and ministers is "that they faithfully explain to their flock the Word of the Lord" and "apply the same as well in general as in particular to the edification of the hearers: instructing, admonishing, comforting, and reproving according to everyone's need." A little further the Ordination Form teaches that Paul "proposes himself as a pattern to pastors, declaring that he hath publicly, and from house to house, taught and testified repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ;" for to pastors has been given "the ministry of reconciliation." The Word of the Lord (not the person or the personality of the pastor) is to be brought in general and in particular, publicly and from house to house.

What a powerful explanation of proper preaching by a pastor! Open or expose the Scriptures so the sheep can understand. The faithful administration of God's Word is to be, not for the display of the preacher and his abilities, but for the edification of flock. Thus Jesus spoke in parables "as they were able to hear it" and when He was alone with His disciples "He expounded all things" to them (Mark 4:33,34). My work as a pastor definitely begins with my preaching. Preaching is an authoritative proclamation of the King, but it is the King's message to His subjects. It is not abstract. The King will communicate His message to the people in the clearest possible way. This the pastor must have in mind as he opens and applies the Scriptures.

The catechism classroom is also where I as a pastor explain God's Word to the edification of the Great Shepherd's sheep. In the catechism classroom the pastor has the lambs of the flock. Jesus specifically told Peter to "Feed My Lambs." The pastor must take into consideration that they are the lambs of the flock (not the adult sheep) and he must be aware of the differing ages and abilities of the lambs when he explains and applies the Word of God.

The same thing takes place when the pastor faithfully explains the Word of the Lord in particular, that is, to the sheep in their homes or in his study. To do this faithfully, the pastor must first listen in order to learn the particular situation and circumstances of the sheep. Then the Word of God is to be explained to them in particular, "instructing, admonishing, comforting and reproving according to every one's needs."

It may be a sheep who is hospitalized. Or a young couple who are planning to get married. It may be a family whose loved one has died. Or it may be a young person struggling with temptations or with knowing his calling. Or it may be a couple needing to be reminded of their marriage vows. It may be one who is struggling with the agonies and loneliness of depression. Or it may be a sheep struggling with

renewed memories of past sins either committed against them or by them. It may be aged sheep who are struggling with their increasing infirmities or with their inability to attend the worship services.

For the best performance of his work as a pastor, the under-shepherd pastor must develop certain attributes. Of primary importance, I believe, is a good working knowledge of the Scripture. He must resist giving his personal opinion, judgment, or convictions. This is true no matter how well he has been equipped for this task by the seminary or by experience. He must bring the Scriptures. It must be obvious to the sheep that the pastor is bringing only God's Word. It is only to God's Word that the sheep must bow and obey (not the word of a man, even if he is a minister). It is only about the Word of God that we can and may say that it sheds light upon my path. It is only in the Scriptures that the truth is found. It is the application of the truth to the lives of God's people which alone helps them in their afflictions and to carry their burdens/crosses. Also, in the Scriptures are so many helpful examples of saints who have faced the common temptations and trials of believers.

A faithful pastor's knowledge of Scripture is greatly aided by a good working knowledge of the creeds. The creeds of the Reformation are an excellent organized presentation of the truths of Scripture (obviously written mostly by men who were pastors). While I am not as familiar with the Westminster Standards, I have found the Heidelberg Catechism and especially the Canons of Dordt to be so helpful in applying the truths of Scripture to the lives of God's people.

Also a godly pastor must have wisdom. He must constantly be developing this virtue and praying to God for it. In explaining and applying God's Word one must be wise to avoid certain things, namely, "foolish (senseless) and unlearned (ignorant) questions, knowing that they do gender strifes" (II Timothy 2:23). Instead, seeing himself as a servant of the Lord, the pastor "must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves (return to soberness) out of the snare of the devil (set by the devil), who are taken captive by him at (for to do) his will." (II Timothy 2:24-26). The devil is very much involved in the lives of God's people, constantly setting snares around God's sheep, as he did with Peter (Luke 22:31). Given the frequency that the devil attacks the flock and individual sheep, pastors must be busy instructing in order to equip the people of God in right knowledge, correcting them when they go astray in their thinking and living, and comforting them as they recover out of the devil's snares.

Wisely must the word of God be brought to the flock and to the individual sheep. The right word must be brought to correct both the blatant and the subtle lies of the devil, and to show that God's truth is the only source of right thinking (especially over against one's feelings and even one's own thinking). Wisdom implies the ability to identify the kind of snare the devil has set. And wisdom understands the past experiences which play a role in making a sheep so vulnerable for a snare of the devil. Wisdom is so important in the work of a pastor. We serve our Lord by instructing the flock, i.e., chastening them with words, teaching, always teaching.

As important as is the qualification of wisdom, so is the qualification of love for the flock. This love for the sheep and lambs arises out of a love for their Great and Good Shepherd (cf. John 21:15-17). Paul's love for Jesus, the Bridegroom, is what made him declare to the people of God in Corinth that he was "jealous over you with a godly jealousy" (II Corinthians 11:2). A pastor who does the work without genuine and deep love for the sheep creates a paradox. The sheep and the lambs must know that he cares greatly for their spiritual well-being. As a type of the Shepherd, the sheep must know that the under-shepherd really does care for them – that it is not a job, but a labour of love.

The duty to watch for their souls (Hebrews 13:17) requires that the shepherd knows the sheep and the lambs. The Good Shepherd knows His sheep and is known of them (John 10:14). So the pastor must know them as best he can. He is to live among the people of God (not above them). He is to talk and walk with them, the old and the young. This true knowledge of the sheep arises from a true knowledge of himself. If he truly understands himself as the chief of sinners saved by grace alone, who must constantly be putting off his old man and putting on the new, then he will truly understand the sheep. If he is constantly aware of his liability to fall into the snares of the evil one, then he has much reason for daily personal humility before God, for flying always for refuge to Christ crucified, for adoring the depths of God's mercy, and for rendering grateful returns of ardent love to Him Who first manifested so a great love toward him. Then he will know the sheep and lambs of Christ. If he truly understands the teachings of particular grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, only to the glory of God, then he will know the lifestyle which harmonizes with and flows from those teachings (Titus 2:1). The grace of God that brings salvation is to be believed and lived, and it is this which the pastor must keep on speaking and exhorting and rebuking with all authority (Titus 2:11,15). The snares of the devil are set in the area of faith (what is sound doctrine), but also in the area of life (how the sheep of God are to live and walk in this world). A pastor must love the sheep for Christ's sake.

Every man who is a pastor must always remember this one thing: I am only a man. I cannot bring about any changes for good in any of the sheep. The power which helps, heals, assures, imparts knowledge, and edifies is that of the Good Shepherd. Only He is able. Because only the Spirit of God can bring about changes for good, the pastor is freed from thinking that he has to work a change in the sheep. As a direct result, every pastor is to be a man of prayer. Before, during, and after each opportunity to open and apply God's Word in general or in particular to God's sheep, I must cry for help from Him Who only is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that I can ask or think!

Pray for your pastor. Your prayers are greatly desired and needed. Ask God to give him good knowledge of His Word. Ask God to give him wisdom to know the flock and each sheep and how best to apply God's Word. Ask God to give him love for the sheep.

Our God-Centred Confession (Belgic Confession 1a)

(Continued from the previous section, “Different Views on the Centre of the Faith”, in Issue 12)

The Reformed Faith Is God-Centred

Over against all of that, the Reformed faith, and the Reformed faith alone, is God-centred. Read John Calvin or Francis Turretin or Herman Bavinck (though his common grace led him astray in some areas) or Herman Hoeksema. B. B. Warfield, in his writings, is particularly clear on the distinctive God-centredness of the Reformed faith.

If you wanted to prove that the Bible is indeed about God, centrally about God, how would you prove it? The first line of inspired Scripture, “In the beginning God ...” (Gen. 1:1), is a good place to start! If you were to say to a number of professing Christians, “We are going to have some sermons about the perfections of God,” most would see that as a turn-off. They would think, “I can’t warm to that! That sounds dry!” Something about political action or the end times or the latest Christian rock band might get them interested, but they have little or no interest in God. “That is too hard or boring,” they think. You see, they do not love Him! They do not want to learn about the great Creator of the universe, who upholds all things by the powerful speech of His Son, who fills heaven and earth and yet is above time and space, and who is coming in Jesus Christ at the end of the age to judge the world at last day. They like “worship services,” with clapping and swaying, but they do not want to know about the true and living God, the One they supposedly worship! That one point alone is enough to prove total depravity!

“In the beginning God ...” (Gen. 1:1) is not only how the Bible starts. This is how exegesis of the Scriptures and preaching must start. Prof. Herman

Hanko would make this point frequently in his seminary classes: Whenever he is developing biblical concepts, the minister must tell the people about God, not merely about puny man. This is how the Christian’s thinking and loving must start: God first! “Seek ye first the kingdom of God” is what our Saviour teaches His disciples (Matt. 6:33).

Our Belgic Confession begins with God in the first article. It confesses that there is one, only God and it lists many of His glorious perfections. Article 2 sets forth the two ways in which He is known, while articles 3-7 explain the truth concerning Holy Scripture, God’s wonderful revelation of Himself. Next comes the beautiful doctrine of the Holy Trinity (articles 8-11). The truth that God is one in essence and three in person is stated in article 8 and proved in article 9. Articles 10 and 11, respectively, set forth the deity and eternal generation of the Son, and the deity and eternal procession of the Holy Spirit. God created and governs the world (articles 12-13). Man, whom God created good, is fallen and cannot will or do any good (article 14); through Adam’s fall, we all partake of original sin (article 15). Article 16 explains that the God who is merciful and just has eternally elected some in Jesus Christ. God recovers elect mankind through sending the seed of the woman to crush Satan’s head (article 17). This leads us to the incarnation of Jesus Christ (article 18) and His two natures (God and man) in one divine Person (article 19) as the manifestation of God’s justice and mercy (article 20), and so forth to the end of our great confession. The Belgic Confession is about God! This is its hallmark as authentic Christianity. Belgic Confession 2-37 proceed in the same way as its opening article which is entitled, “There Is One, Only God.” De Brès was a faithful servant of the living God, a man taught by the Spirit in

>> Ps Angus Stewart

Belgic Confession 1: There Is One Only God
We all believe with the heart, and confess with the mouth, that there is one only simple and spiritual Being, which we call God; and that he is eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, immutable, infinite, almighty, perfectly wise, just, good, and the overflowing fountain of all good.

the Holy Scriptures and a faithful pupil of John Calvin, whose own Institutes of the Christian Religion is also all about God.

The Reformed faith in its treatment of God particularly emphasizes that part of the divine blessedness which is most attacked, that the Most High is absolutely sovereign. What is the greatest creedal statement of the absolute sovereignty of God? The Canons of Dordt. The Pope and all his minions could never have written it; Rome hates it as abominable heresy. The Canons could never have been written in Lutheran northern Germany. The Anabaptists would not have dreamt of it because they disagree with every article of it. The Canons were produced in the Reformed churches because there the knowledge of the independent, eternal and sovereign God came most clearly into its own.

Are you familiar with the five solas or “alones” of the Reformation? The five solas are Scripture alone, Christ alone, grace alone, faith alone and the glory of God alone. The five solas are not all on a plane; they are not all equally ultimate. Scripture alone teaches the other four solas. Faith alone is over against man working for his own salvation. The same is true with grace alone which excludes any and every lie that teaches that God does His bit to save us and that man also does his bit. The truth of Christ alone rules out Mary, ourselves and the saints as co-saviours. To sum it all up: the Word of God alone declares that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone and all of this is to the glory of God alone (solus Deo gloria). This last sola is served by the other four solas.

This is the genius of the Reformation. Where people and religious groups oppose Scripture alone or Christ alone or grace alone or faith alone, it shows

that they are not supremely concerned with the glory of God alone. Not only are they teaching false doctrine, but they are fundamentally opposed to Jehovah’s glory.

What do we do to promote the God-centred nature of the Christian faith? In what ways does our church show that God’s glory is first? One way is by believing, holding to and preaching the truth summarised in our Belgic Confession! The CPRC in N. Ireland made it very clear that the glory of God is the chief thing about our Reformed faith. The plaque in the hall of our church building states, “For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen” (Rom. 11:36). All things are out of God as their source; all things exist through Him as providential governor; all things are to Him as the goal of the universe (Rev. 4:11). “For in him we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

We promote Jehovah’s glory by singing the God-centred, God-breathed Psalms. Lutheranism does not maintain the regulative principle of worship, worship governed by the Word of God. Likewise, the Anabaptists did not relish Psalm-singing. The Christian religion, as they interpreted it, with the subjects and themes they emphasized, was reflected in the hymns they wrote and sang. Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf of the Moravians wrote hymns to be sung to Christ rather than to the Triune God through Christ. The Methodists wrote and sung hymns to attack God’s sovereignty in salvation and promote free-willism and perfectionism. Fundamentalists sing hymns which emphasize the Christological aspects of the faith and man’s salvation, usually drawing from the filthy sewers of Arminianism, including the hymns of Charles and John Wesley.

A church’s theology and view of what

is central in the faith will reflect itself in its songs. The Reformed, who teach and practise soli Deo gloria, sing the Psalms that God inspired and which glorify Him but which carnal man reckons too deep and judges as dry as dust. Carnal man does not want the songs that the Holy Spirit breathed (II Sam. 23:2), wrongly thinking that Isaac Watts, with his erroneous views on the Trinity, and others can do better than the Holy Ghost.

How does soli Deo gloria relate to the major areas of theology? What about anthropology? “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever,” declares the Westminster Shorter Catechism (A. 1). This is our purpose and goal, as human beings: to glorify God! Not glorifying God is living as a rebel in God’s universe. Unless Jehovah is our chief end, all we do is vanity.

Moving to Christology, Jesus Christ is to be honoured as “the only Redeemer of God’s elect” (Westminster Shorter Catechism, A. 21). As our mediator, the Lord Jesus does not simply bring us to Himself that we might remain with Him; Christ brings us to the Triune God. God Himself speaks to us through Jesus Christ and we come to God through Christ. Christ performs His work when He brings us to the Father. This is our Trinitarian salvation! The Holy Spirit glorifies Christ and brings us to Christ, and Christ is the way, the truth and the life who alone brings us to the Father, the Triune God (John 14:6). Salvation comes from the Triune God to us and we, in turn, are brought back to the Triune God. In short, Jesus is our Saviour through whom God Himself makes us His covenant friends.

The truth of salvation (soteriology) is that the Triune God alone saves us completely, from beginning to end—not man, even in the tiniest part. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:8-10). Scripture identifies salvation or eternal life with the knowledge of the Triune God through the mediator: “This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3).

The church (ecclesiology) serves the glory of God. Jehovah proclaims, “This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise” (Isa. 43:21). This is why God saves His church, that we may worship and extol Him. I Peter 2:9 explains, “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.” This is why He calls and gathers the church together as the body of Jesus Christ under pastors, elders and deacons with the preaching of the Word, the sacraments and our mutual communion, so that we build one another up, edify one another and serve each other’s salvation, so that God is glorified. If this is not a church’s goal, calling, prayer and activity, it is just another social club and it would be better to disband and close down.

What about the last things (eschatology)? Jehovah will bring this world to an end when all of His elect are are effectually called (II Peter 3:9; Belgic Confession 37).

Then He will gather together all the men, women and children who have ever lived, and all the elect angels and all the demons, to the judgment seat of Christ for the great theodicy, the vindication of God.

Then God will say, “Everything I did from creation through the entire history of the world, including My sending of My Son; every unjust thing you think happened to you; every time you raised your fist against Me; each and every one of your sins—I am going to show you that I was just and holy and wise and true in it all.” Then everyone will be on their knees, for all will bow and “confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:11).

The truth of God which has been denied and buried by fallen, sinful, depraved mankind for thousands of years will be openly and undeniably manifested to all men and angels. All the lies of Satan and the world will be exposed and condemned by the righteous judge.

The living God, whom the ungodly reckon to be non-existent or irrelevant or boring or unjust or a spoil-sport who denies man his sinful pleasures, will be glorified, and the unbelieving will be cast into hell. God will reign forever and His name will be one (Zech. 14:9). This is why Scripture teaches us that there will be a judgment day: the glory of God demands it!

After going through these major doctrinal topics, from anthropology to eschatology, and seeing that they are all subservient to the glory of God, it is clear that all of Christian teaching is theology, the truth about God. Even when we talk about man, we are always talking about the God who decreed and governs man for His own glory. How different from the apostate, liberal church, for even when they claim to be talking about God, they are really only talking about man. This is Jehovah’s condemnation of foolish man: “thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself” (Ps. 50:21)! Those who reckon that God is just like themselves (v. 21) and refuse to praise and glorify Him (v. 23), He will display all their sins (v. 21) and tear them in pieces (v. 22)!

Now, in the light of the true Reformed teaching of soli Deo gloria, we are in a position to understand Christian ethics and practice. Good works are

only those done to the glory of God (Heidelberg Catechism, Q. & A. 91). Such good works we must promote and practise! This is not in opposition to solid theology which honours the Lord; this is how God would have us use the knowledge He graciously gives us of Himself, for biblical and Reformed teaching is “the doctrine which is according to godliness” (I Tim. 6:3). The Spirit uses the truth to work piety in us (John 17:17). Those people do good works with the most sincere spirit who truly seek God’s glory. This is the spirit of gratitude for God’s grace to us in Jesus Christ. This thankfulness enables us to keep Jehovah’s law and seek His face in prayer, as the third part of our Heidelberg Catechism rightly teaches. This is God-centred, Reformed and biblical and it motivates us a lot more than mere moral codes!

CHILDREN:

>> Sis Ming Hui

A HELP TO PARENTS IN THEIR CALLING

I. THE CALLING OF PARENTS

To Bring Up Their Children in the Fear of the LORD

According to the form for the administration of baptism, “infants are to be baptized as heirs of the kingdom of God, and of his covenant. And parents are in duty bound, further to instruct their children herein, when they shall arrive to years of discretion.” The calling of parents is to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, to teach the commandments of God diligently to them. (Ephesians 6:4, Deuteronomy 6:7) When children are baptized, their parents swear an oath to “instruct and bring up their children in the doctrine of the Reformed church, or help or cause them to be instructed therein, to the utmost of their, the parents’, power.” They swear an oath to be a good teacher, a good example, a good influence, for life. This is their calling.

II. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF CHILDREN – TO HELP THEIR PARENTS

The calling of parents is not an easy one, so what is the responsibility of children in relation to their parents? It is to help them: to help them in honouring them, in loving them, in submitting to them, in obeying them, in encouraging them, in praying for them, in bearing with them in their weaknesses and infirmities, in being a crown of glory to them.

A. Honouring Parents

Scripture clearly commands children to honour their parents. The Heidelberg Catechism says the requirement of the 5th commandment is “that I show all honour, love and fidelity, to my father and mother, and all in authority over me, and submit myself to their good instruction and correction, with due obedience; and also patiently bear with their weaknesses and infirmities, since it pleases God to govern us by their hand.” The fifth commandment is the first of the commandments in the second table of the law, which teaches us what duties we owe to our neighbour. Our closest neighbour is our family, and the foundation of the second table of the law is good family relationships. To maintain good family relationships is not easy, but we are called to do it, and do it we must. The most important commandment concerning the duties we owe our neighbour, concerning family relationships, is the command to honour our parents and all in authority. What is authority? Authority is a spiritual invisible power conferred on, or given to, someone, by God. “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.” (Romans 13:1) Our parents have authority. They have the right and power to demand us to behave ourselves according to God’s standard. They are not born with authority; authority is not natural, but God, the ultimate source of all authority, confers His authority on our parents, so that when we honour our parents’ authority, we honour God’s authority: we honour God. Even when our parents are not believers, we are still to honour them because their authority, their power, is given to them by God. There is NO power but of God! “To honour is to show reverence, respect, and godly fear.” (The Family: Foundations Are Shaking – 10. Honor Required of Children by Rev. Barry Gritters) We are to honour our parents in the way we act towards them, in the way we speak of them, in the way we speak to them, and even in the way we think about them. Older siblings especially must live their lives as good examples for their younger siblings to follow. “Sometimes it is said that younger children show less honour to their parents because the parents become looser in their old age. That may be partly true. Is it not also the case that the younger children learn some disrespect from the older siblings?” (The Family: Foundations Are Shaking – 10. Honor Required of Children by Rev. Barry Gritters)

B. Loving Parents

“Honouring parents is not the same as loving them...Some children...who say they love their parents, do not honour them... Honouring parents includes loving them. The heart of the second table of the law is to love the neighbour. Since parents are the children’s closest neighbour, obedience to the fifth commandment is loving the parents. This is not a natural love – loving because the parents gave them birth and feed them. This is a spiritual love that comes from a heart that loves God.” (The Family: Foundations Are Shaking – 10. Honor Required of Children by Rev. Barry Gritters)

When we honour our parents, we love them actively, instead of simply saying that we love them but continue to treat them indifferently or even disrespectfully. To show our love for our parents, we must honour them and show them reverence and respect. “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself”! (Matthew 22:39b)

C. Submitting to Parents

Lord’s Day 104 commands that I “submit myself to their good instruction and correction.” “He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul: but he that heareth reproof getteth understanding.” (Proverbs 15:32) This verse tells us that we must have teachable spirits that will humbly submit to both instruction, as well as correction. “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.” (Hebrews 13:17) Our parents must give an account to God for the way they bring up their children and for the condition of their children’s souls. They are responsible for us. We should only give them cause to joy and not to grieve in the way we conduct ourselves and live our lives. We should be crowns of glory to them. (Proverbs 17:6) “Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.”

D. Obeying Parents

Ephesians 6:1 “Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.” This explicitly commands children to obey their parents, not only sometimes, because “the idea is, ‘Children, be continually obeying your parents.’ Such obedience must be an ongoing activity. There is not any sphere in which the command is limited either. ‘Obey your parents in all things,’ says Paul by inspiration...in Colossians 3:20... Children, there is no area in which you need not obey your parents.” (Children, Obey Your Parents! – Reading Sermon by Rev. Douglas Kuiper) We are to obey our parents in all things! The only time we can disobey our parents is when they tell us to do something against the commandments of God. “We ought to obey God rather than men.” (Acts 5:29b) Other than that, we are to obey our parents unquestioningly, without murmurings and disputings (Philippians 2:14). We can help our parents by obeying cheerfully, willingly, and immediately. This kind of obedience is a source of joy to our parents, whereas disobedience or reluctant obedience is not only a source of grief to our parents, but also causes them to be stressed and thus their health to suffer. Also, we are to obey our parents in the Lord, because it is right! “The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it.” (Proverbs 30:17) Such shall be the end of all who disobey their parents.

E. Encouraging Parents

Further, we are to called to encourage one another, and build each other up. This includes our parents. “My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy word...My soul melteth for heaviness: strengthen thou me according to thy word.” (Psalm 119:25,28) God’s Word is able to quicken and to strengthen. Sometimes, many times, this is what our parents need. Raising children is far from easy. We have to remember that our parents are sinners too. It is not easy for a weak and depraved sinner to teach another weak and depraved sinner. Parents can easily grow weary and discouraged in their calling of raising children because it is so difficult. We, as children, can encourage them not only by honouring them and obeying them and submitting to them, but we can also share Scripture and its applications with them. “But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” (Hebrews 3:13) All of us can encourage our family members, not only our parents, through little notes or SMS, sharing what we learnt in our devotions, telling them that we are praying for them, saying thank you for all that they have done, etc. Even if our parents are unbelievers, we can still write them thank you notes and also show our appreciation for things that they do like housekeeping and breadwinning, etc. Also, we can encourage our parents through the relationships we have with our siblings. I am positively sure that it is very encouraging for parents to see that their children are best friends with one another. When we are patient with our younger siblings and help one another and are kind to one another, our parents feel that God has blessed them in their efforts of bringing up their children in the fear of the Lord. Finally, we can encourage our parents by reminding them to go to church on Sunday, and for church activities like the fortnightly prayer meeting, talks on weeknights, etc.

F. Praying for Parents

One of the most helpful things we can do for our parents is to pray for them. “But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.” (Luke 22:32) Christ prays for us, so likewise we ought to pray for each other and strengthen our brethren through prayer. We can be assured that when we pray for our parents, God will hear us and attend to the voice of our prayers. (Psalm 66:19) After all, God hears the prayer of the righteous (Proverbs 15:29), and we are made righteous through the blood of Christ!

In all that we do in relation to our parents, we must remember that our parents are sinners as we are, and thus we must patiently bear with their weaknesses and infirmities, because God has chosen to place them in authority over us. We can be assured that the parents that we have are the best ones God could ever have given us! “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose!” (Romans 8:28) Although it is one of the most difficult things to help our parents in their calling, we are still called to do it. I myself fail utterly and miserably in all aspects: in honouring my parents, in submitting to them, in bearing with their weaknesses and infirmities, in encouraging them, in loving them, in praying for them, in obeying them; but although it is difficult, we can know and be assured that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us! (Philippians 4:13)

Why I LOVE SINGING THE PSALMS - Psalm 1

>> Sis Bernice Lim

I love singing the Psalms because they remind me of how I should walk in my life as a Christian in this sin dominated world. As we sing the Psalms, we should meditate on the words and it should also be reflected in our lives. Also, I take comfort in singing the Psalms as they bring peace to my soul and remind me of God’s greatness towards His people. He will not forsake us nor leave us no matter what the circumstances may be. The words also seek to remind all of us of God’s mercy and sovereignty.

The Blessedness of the Godly

That man is blest who, fearing God,

From sin restrains his feet,

Who will not stand with wicked men,

Who shuns the scorners’ seat.

Yea, blest is he who makes God’s law

His portion and delight,

And meditates upon that law

With gladness day and night.

That man is nourished like a tree

Set by the river’s side;

Its leaf is green, its fruit is sure,

And thus his works abide.

The wicked like the driven chaff

Are swept from off the land;

They shall not gather with the just,

Nor in the judgment stand.

The Lord will guard the righteous well,

Their way to Him is known;

The way of sinners, far from God,

Shall surely be o’er-thrown.

Psalm 1 is a song which talks about about how the righteous walks in this world. It also talks about the blessings he receives. This righteous man is a man of God, one who is radically different from the world. (v. 1 & 4) He does not belong to this world because he “walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful”. This means that we are not to have any fellowship with the ungodly. The ungodly are those who live contrary to God and His laws. The ungodly hate God and love sin. Also, the blessed man agrees with Job that “the counsel of the wicked is far from me” (Job 21:16). God will preserve the righteous but forsake the ungodly. (John 17:16, 2 Cor 6:14-18)

The first verse talks about how a man of God will behave differently from the world. He, being godly, will avoid the companionship of evil-doers, and will not be led by them. To not walk in the council of the ungodly means that we must say to evil-doers, “Depart from us (Psa 119:115)”. This means that we must first have the mindset that we want to glorify God by obedience to Him. Only then can we glorify His name. From the first verse, we can see that there are three characters the blessed man will meet; namely, the ungodly, sinners, and the scornful. The ungodly rebels against God by not fearing Him and not living in a way that God wants him to. When they are no longer living a life as how a Christian should, they become sinners, that is, their rebellion against God is open and outright, and they engage in the service of sin and Satan, the devil. When the heart is so hardened and black with sin, they soon become scorners who without shame defy all that is holy, make fun of and despise religion, and make a joke of sin. They would then love sin and disregard God.

The Righteous and Unrighteous

<i>Blest is he who loves God's precepts,</i>	<i>He is like a tree well planted</i>	<i>Well the Lord will guard the righteous,</i>
<i>Who from sin restrains His feet,</i>	<i>By the flowing river's side,</i>	<i>For their way to Him is known;</i>
<i>He who will not stand with sinners,</i>	<i>Ever green of leaf and fruitful:</i>	<i>But the way of evildoers</i>
<i>He who shuns the scorners' seat.</i>	<i>Thus shall all his works abide.</i>	<i>Shall by Him be overthrown.</i>
<i>Blest is he who makes the statutes</i>	<i>Like the driven chaff the wicked</i>	
<i>Of the Lord his chief delight,</i>	<i>Shall be swept from off the land;</i>	
<i>In God's law, divinely perfect,</i>	<i>With the just they shall not gather,</i>	
<i>Meditating day and night.</i>	<i>Nor shall in the judgment stand.</i>	

The second verse speaks about how the man finds delight in God's laws. God's law is His Word, the entire Scripture, which is the lamp before our feet and the light upon our pathway. (Ps 119:105) The Bible is our affirmative guide which shows us the narrow way that leads to heaven. That law is also found in the 10 commandments and is summed up in Matthew 22:37-40 “You shall love the Lord your God with your whole being and in all that you say and do. You shall love Him above all else. This is the first and great commandment. And from that follows: You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” We cannot love God and hate our neighbour, nor can we love our neighbour without loving God. The man realises his sinfulness and guilt and how essential God's Word is to his life; without this ‘food’, he will surely die. We must make it a habit to meditate upon God's Word and that is what our top priority should be in this life.

From verses 3 to 6, it shows how God would preserve the way of the righteous and establish him, and how the ungodly would perish. The righteous are like the tree that bears flowers and fruits while the ungodly are like the chaff. The righteous are planted by the grace of God and the work of God is clearly seen. When the godly and ungodly do not have fellowship, the godly is kept from influence and he would not be tempted by the ungodly to dwell in sin. God has put it very clearly that friendship with the world is enmity with Him (James 4:4). When there is no unity in the truth, there should be a very clear line between a child of God and a child of the devil. God will one day destroy the ungodly and exalt the godly man. Are we sure of the kind of life we are living?

In conclusion, when singing the Psalms, we must have deep sorrow for our sins and transgressions that we have committed and be aware that we are not to fellowship with the world. It is a very good reminder for us as we sing this song. We must not be subdued by our sinful flesh and give in to it, but we must turn away from sin. We must teach and remind ourselves and one another to be conscious of the sinful world we live in. We can do this by reading God's Word and abounding in the fruit of righteousness. We must also pray that God will give us wisdom and grace to turn away from evil and instil in us the desire to do His will.

We cannot love God and hate our neighbour, nor can we love our neighbour without loving God.



>> Elder Kong Wee

marriage II: after the wedding & honeymoon



We considered the wedding in our first article on marriage. We saw that the most important thing about a wedding is the vows that we make before God, which seals our commitment to each other as husband and wife in an unbreakable bond of friendship and fellowship. That this is so is because our wedding, which is the very beginning of marriage, must reflect what marriage is – a picture of the one true marriage between Jesus Christ and His Church.

In this second instalment, we shall move on to consider the early days of marriage – from the day after the wedding to perhaps the first year. The relationship between a man and woman goes through various stages. During courtship, more often than not, the relationship is sweet and exciting. The couple desires to see each other and hear each other's voice every day. The wedding day appears to be the climax of the relationship when everything seems so romantic and perfect and blissful. The bliss continues into the honeymoon as the couple begins their life together and enjoys the exclusive and intimate companionship.

Then comes the time when “the honeymoon period is over” and the routine of married life begins. I want to talk a bit about this stage of marriage. It does not take a couple long after the honeymoon to discover that things are not quite as rosy and romantic as they imagined it to be. I do not know of any married couple who has not said at some point in their marriage (often not too long after the wedding) that “the honeymoon period is over” (especially when the kids come!). When the routine of daily life together sets in, and we begin to rub shoulders with each other much more frequently than the days of courtship, and step on each other's toes more often than we thought we ever would, we soon enough discover that our spouses are not as perfect and flawless as they appear to be during courtship and the wedding day. Indeed, far from perfect! When the fever of the honeymoon subsides, and the daily reality of the cares and demands of married life together sets in, we begin to wonder what happened to the ‘spark’ in the relationship. We do not wake up every day with a warm, ‘fuzzy’ feeling about each other. And certainly, it is a far cry from the naïve fairy-tale ending of “living happily ever after”.

Hence, I think there is great wisdom in the Form that we use in our church for the “Confirmation of Marriage” (you can find it at the back of the Psalter). The strong dose of solemnity and realism it administers right at the very beginning of marriage at the wedding ceremony is much needed in our day when many young people have naïve and idealistic dreams about their marriage being that ‘perfect match made in heaven’. They imagine marriage to be almost all cushy and ‘feel-good’, carrying the promise of happiness and fulfilment, and generally without pain and struggles. The Form begins by saying “Whereas married persons are generally, by reason of sin, subject to many troubles and afflictions...” Perhaps unbelievers would frown and squirm at these opening lines of our Marriage Form as some pessimistic ‘wet blanket’ that spoils the entire mood of such a joyous occasion as a wedding. But let us not be so quick to dismiss it, but take a moment to think carefully and soberly about this statement. Is it true? It is! It is undeniably and absolutely true! Every married couple would not need to wait long to experience the truth of this statement. Every honest couple would testify of its truth. Sin, which entered into the very first marriage between Adam and Eve, resides in every subsequent marriage ever since. Its reality in our marriage means we can certainly expect many struggles and troubles as our portion as we begin to walk the pilgrim's pathway together as a couple.

When the honeymoon period is over, and married life takes its daily course, the first and most fundamental thing we ought to remind ourselves is that sin is present in our marriage. And for the rest of our lives together as husband and wife, we must keep this truth at the fore of our minds. As every marriage is the intimate union of two totally depraved sinners; so we cannot expect it to be free from struggles and difficulties. In fact, because of the intimacy of marriage, there is a greater potential for sin to cause friction and hurt between husband and wife like no other relationship. Having such a sober and realistic view of what marriage is, rather than undermining it in any way, will in fact strengthen the foundation of our marriage, not to mention the amount of heartaches and headaches it will save us. It will prepare us mentally and spiritually to be better able to receive and endure the ‘hard knocks’ of married life. To imagine that marriage is always, or predominantly, a trouble-free life of bliss and romance is to deceive ourselves terribly. This is where TV shows and movies do a great deal of harm to many young people today. They either paint too ideal a picture of marriage – never showing the daily rigours and responsibilities involved in a marriage, especially with regards to raising children – or pervert it to be some manipulative ‘love-game’ between men and women, where all parties involved in this ‘game’ (and yes, the ‘rules’ allow more than 2 parties) behave selfishly in seeking their own happiness. Marriage in reel-life grossly distorts and perverts marriage in real life. We must realise this and seek to build our understanding of marriage only upon the truth of Scriptures.

To be deeply conscious of the reality of sin in our lives and our marriages will drive us repeatedly to the Cross together and to seek to live each day of our marriage by God’s grace alone. This is utterly crucial in setting us on the right footing as we begin the lifelong journey of marriage together. The reality of sin means we must forgive each other over and over and over again, by God’s grace, in our marriage. Husband and wife must learn early in their marriage not to keep ‘scores’, but readily to seek forgiveness from and to forgive each other, just as Christ has freely forgiven us (Matt 6:12, Eph 4:32). In the days after the honeymoon period, we begin to realise and perhaps even feel the weight of the marriage vows we have made. It may have seemed relatively easy to keep those vows during the wedding and honeymoon, but when we have to grapple with the reality of sinning against each other every day in our life together, then we feel it is next to impossible.

Indeed it is impossible, except by the grace of God. The Marriage Form goes on to say that we may be assured of God’s help in our marriages because it is an institution that is pleasing to Him: “may also be assured in your hearts of the certain assistance of God in your afflictions...He also will (as He hath promised) bless and assist the married persons...” As sin has corrupted marriage, so grace has restored marriage. For the Christian, grace reigns also in his marriage! Even as we realise the reality of sin in our marriage, we must also determine to overcome it by grace. We must lay hold of the promise of God’s help, and by His grace, work hard at our marriages so cause them to reflect more and more perfectly Christ’s marriage to the Church. Marriage is not so much about “falling in love” with each other, but rather “growing in love” for each other. And one of the chief ways we grow in love for each other is by learning to deal with each other’s sins throughout our marriage in the way of unconditional love and forgiveness. The sooner we learn to say ‘sorry’ and forgive each other daily in humble repentance, the sooner we will begin to establish a firm foundation for a happy and lasting marriage.

From the wedding day to the honeymoon and all through each day of our married life together, we must constantly remind ourselves what marriage is truly about – not the dazzle and euphoria of the wedding or the romanticism of the honeymoon, but the union of two equally great sinners, who are called to remain faithful to each other in a lifelong covenant bond of unconditional love and most intimate friendship. But, we fail in this calling so miserably. Every godly couple knows this only too well. Therefore, we go to the Lord for forgiveness, and by His infinite mercy and grace, we find strength and hope to press on in seeking to glorify Him in our marriages.

(to be continued)



Marriage is truly about... the union of two equally great sinners, who are called to remain faithful to each other in a lifelong covenant bond of unconditional love and most intimate friendship.



THE HEIDELBERG REFORMERS: TOO YOUNG?

>> Bro Joshua D. Engelsma

The work of God in history is always an amazing and awe-inspiring thing. But there are certain times in the history of the church that truly make the believer’s jaw hit the floor in astonishment at the wonderwork of God.

“God did what?” “He did this when?” “He used that man? Of all people, that man?”

One of the outstanding examples of this is the Heidelberg Catechism. Would you believe it, young people, if I told you that our beloved Heidelberger, the creed you learn in the catechism room and hear preached from the pulpit every Sunday, was written by two young men not much older than you are now? “Impossible!” you say. Yet, in his infinite wisdom, God chose two men, one twenty-eight years old and the other twenty-six, to write one of the most beautiful statements of faith that has ever been written, a statement of faith which is still in use almost 450 years later.

The first man was Zacharias Ursinus. Ursinus was born on July 18, 1534, in the city of Breslau to poor parents. When he was about fifteen years old, he left Breslau to study in the great Reformation city of Wittenberg. There his enormous God-given talents caught the eye of one of the professors, Philip Melancthon, who was a great friend and co-laborer of Martin Luther. The two became fast friends. Under Melancthon, Zacharias learned a great deal about the faith of the Reformation, the faith which he later encapsulated into the Heidelberg Catechism.

After his studies in Wittenberg were complete, Ursinus traveled throughout Europe sitting under the feet of many great teachers, including Calvin himself. Calvin even gave the young traveler a signed copy of his written works. Ursinus eventually came home to teach in his native Breslau. But soon there was trouble there. The Lutherans in the city were upset that their son was leaning in the direction of the Reformed view of the Lord’s Supper. The backbiting reached such a pitch that Ursinus eventually left his hometown and went to the city of Zurich. From Zurich he was called by Frederick III, ruler of a region called the Palatinate, to come and teach in his school in the capital city of Heidelberg.

The decision to move to Heidelberg was not an easy one. By nature, Zacharias, although extremely gifted, was shy and reserved. His desire was to find a quiet corner in which he could study in peace. He did not want the scrutiny and attention which he was sure to get in Heidelberg. In this way he was very much like another young man we have looked at—John Calvin. But Ursinus went anyway. God had a great work for him to perform there.

The second man was Caspar Olevianus. Olevianus was born in the Roman Catholic city of Treves on August 10, 1536. Unlike his future colleague Ursinus, Olevianus’ parents were more well-to-do. They could afford to send their son to the best schools in Europe. So off he went to Paris at the age of fourteen to pursue a career in law. While in France, young Caspar came into contact with the Huguenots, those faithful French Protestants who were persecuted so severely for their faith. Caspar even attended some of their secret meetings. Their staunch stand for the faith no doubt made a mighty impression on the young man.

There was one experience in France that affected Olevianus like no other. A fellow student, who just so happened to be the son of Frederick III, fell out of a boat

commandeered by a bunch of drunken boys. Caspar dove into the water to try to save Frederick's son, but he was unable to reach him. In fact, Olevianus himself almost drowned. At that moment, Caspar promised that he would preach the Reformed faith in his hometown of Treves if God would spare his life. Olevianus survived, and he never forgot that promise. And Frederick never forgot the boy who had tried to save his son's life.

Once his studies were completed in France, Olevianus traveled throughout Europe just as Ursinus had done. He met such great reformers as Calvin, Peter Martyr Vermigli, Theodore Beza, and William Farel. It was Farel, that fiery servant of God who had detained Calvin in Geneva, who ordered Caspar to return to Treves to preach the gospel there. Caspar obeyed and was eventually tossed into prison by the Catholic authorities. It was only after much pleading by Frederick III (and the transfer of much gold) that the bold young preacher was released and taken to Heidelberg.

So, Frederick III now had the bold preacher Olevianus and the brilliant teacher Ursinus both in Heidelberg. But why? The simple answer is that the city of Heidelberg was divided. It had officially declared itself for the Reformation in 1546, but there was so much infighting, especially between the Lutheran camp and the Calvinist camp over the doctrine of the Lord's Supper. The animosity had even escalated to the point where a Lutheran minister and a Calvinist deacon grappled over the communion cup in full view of the entire congregation! Things had reached a head, and Frederick III knew it. He himself had studied the matter and was convinced that the Calvinistic view was in accordance with the teaching of Scripture. But what to do about all the fighting?

Frederick had a solution. He wanted his land to be united in a common confession of the truth, including the truth of the Lord's Supper. Therefore, he commissioned his young scholars Ursinus and Olevianus to draw up a confession which all preachers and teachers would have to hold to. The two young men began their work in 1562, and by the start of 1563 the beautiful Heidelberg Catechism was complete. One historian writes,

The peculiar gifts of both, the didactic clearness and precision of the one [Ursinus], and the pathetic warmth and unction of the other [Olevianus], were blended in beautiful harmony, and produced a joint work which is far superior to all the separate productions of either. In the Catechism they surpassed themselves. They were in a measure inspired for it.[12]

The Heidelberg Catechism was not only intended as a means of uniting the citizens of Frederick's kingdom under a common confession. Rev. Hoeksema writes, "From the outset...the Heidelberg Catechism served the double purpose of catechetical textbook and symbol of the Church." [13] The Catechism was intended as a means to instruct the youth of the church. It was meant to be used in the catechism room, just as it is still today in our Protestant Reformed Churches. This is evident from what Frederick III wrote in his introduction to the Catechism:

...we also have ascertained that by no means the least defect of our system is found in the fact, that our blooming youth is disposed to be careless in respect to Christian doctrine...

...it is essential that our youth be trained in early life, and above all, in the pure and consistent doctrine of the holy Gospel, and be well exercised in the proper and true knowledge of God.[14]

The Catechism, therefore, was written by two young men for the children and young people of the church. As was mentioned at the beginning, it is a wonder of God's grace that two men in their twenties wrote the Heidelberg Catechism.

First of all, it is a wonder because of the doctrinal clarity and depth. All of the doctrines of Scripture are clearly laid out in the 129 Questions and Answers. This level of understanding is uncommon in twenty-something year olds. Secondly, the writing of the Heidelberg is a wonder because of the way in which it is laid out. It is not laid out logically like the Belgic Confession, but rather it proceeds from the idea of comfort and traces the experience of the believer from sin, to deliverance, to thankfulness.

It all begins with that soul-stirring first Question and Answer:

Q. What is thy only comfort in life and death?

A. That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ; who, with His precious blood, hath fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must be subservient to my salvation, and therefore, by His Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me sincerely willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto Him.

The wisdom and comfort in this approach is also uncommon in young people. But, it attests to the fact that God is pleased at times to work amazing things through young people such as Caspar and Zacharias, and you and me.

To his Name be all the glory!

>> *Glowing Candles BS*

We thank God for:

-our church, which feeds and nurtures us, as a mother does her child

-PRCA ministers who came, and those who will be coming, to minister to us, out of a sacrificial love for us

-various ministries in our church, faithful men who lead them, and dedicated members who labour for the edification of our people

-blessing the activities and events we had last year: VBS, church camp, youth camps, RDC, etc.

-His keeping Hand upon us last year, especially in our travels and activities

-His Word, which serves to guide us in this world of darkness

-giving us the desire to seek His truth and memorize His Word

-protecting and keeping Aaron, Gaius, Isaac, Matthias who are studying abroad

-helping our children to grow spiritually

-granting wisdom and diligence to our students in their studies and various callings

-helping our students through school, tests and examinations, and for the results they have received/will be receiving

-youths who have grown up and are serving actively in the church

-youths who will be making Confession of Faith

-Ella's successful procurement of her documents so her family can apply to be Permanent Residents

-Sister Poh Sue's PET Scan, which showed no increased cancer activity; for human angels in doctor, nurses, family and brothers and sisters in Christ who supported her in prayers and care

-improvement in Sister Sally's father's kidney problems, and improvement in his health

-sustaining the young people involved in the Saltshakers magazine

Let us pray for:

-CERC, that she may wait upon the Lord and be united regardless of the circumstances

-the needs of our church, particularly for a shepherd for God's flock

-our people, to realize the importance of coming for our church prayer meetings, to pray together for our church

-our session members who are responsible for bringing the church forward during this very difficult time

-the health of our elderly saints, those of us with physical infirmities, and those going through trials, that God will grant us patience to wait upon the Lord, and that His name may be magnified through our trials

-spiritual growth of adults and children in our church

-salvation of our unsaved loved ones and friends

-our fathers' health and safety, as they toil daily to provide for their families

-our mothers, that they may have the joy of our Lord even though they have so many responsibilities and duties

-God's keeping Hand on the youths studying abroad, and for their spiritual growth

-our youths, that they may make Confession of Faith to join the church, signifying their desire to serve their LORD and Saviour

-our students who will be taking important examinations this year, that God will keep them close to Him

-FSM ministry to be used to edify the families of our church, and for a chairman to head this ministry

-the bible study groups in church, that they will learn from Psalm 42, to hunger and thirst after God and to behold precious truths about Christian contentment from studying this Psalm





Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church

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

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