

What God? **This God.**

The Sovereignty of God

The Extent of God's Sovereignty

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The Bond Of Unity

>> Pastor Richard J. Smit

“Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Eph 4:3

The unity of the church is one of four important attributes of the Church of Jesus Christ. In addition to being apostolic, holy and catholic, the church of Jesus Christ is one, which means that she is a spiritual unity. Wherever that church of Jesus Christ is instituted and manifest faithfully in the earth, she is a unity of body (I Corinthians 12:12), of her Head (Ephesians 1:10), of the Spirit (I Corinthians 6:17; Ephesians 4:4), of faith (Ephesians 4:5, Hebrews 13:8,15), of love (I Corinthians 13), of hope (Ephesians 4:4), and of the saints (Ephesians 1:1).

The importance of this unity of the church is indicated when we are commanded by the Lord in Ephesians 4:3, “Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” The unity of the Church is the gift of the Holy Spirit, and one which she must accordingly cherish and seek to maintain so that she may be and also function as the one body of our one Lord. In fact, every Reformed believer is bound, according to article 28 of *The Belgic Confession of Faith*, to maintain the unity of the Church according to the Word of God.

However, in order to fulfil that duty, the Reformed believer must understand the basis of that unity lest he become unfaithful and no longer serve properly in the church of the living God, Who calls the church to be a faithful pillar and ground of the truth (I Timothy 3:15).

The basis of unity for the church is not several things. First, is the basis for the unity of the church the earthly limitation of location? Sometimes the people of God can have a weakness in which they think that the unity of the church is based on their geographical location. As a result, it is hard for them to develop the unity of the church outside their city, town, or region. The fact is that the basis of our unity in the church is not where we live. The basis of the unity of the church is founded upon something else which transcends geographical distance, and even time.

Second, the basis for the unity of the church is not cultural commonalities among the people of God. Although we are very prone naturally to become attracted to those who have cultural similarities to ourselves, and tend to hold at a distance those who do not, still the fact is that the unity of the church is not based upon cultural similarities in thinking, eating, and living habits among God’s saints.

Third, the basis of the unity of the church is certainly never found in a compromise of God’s truth. There be many today that seek to find the basis for unity in a common ground which softens the sharp and clear lines of the truth. The motive for this compromise is often so that membership in congregations may increase for the church’s financial improvement or other such earthly gain. However, finding common ground in a denial of the truth, though that denial be ever so slight, will not maintain the unity of the church of Jesus Christ.

Of course, there can be no basis of unity in heresy, false doctrine, or a wicked way of life. How can that which denies God and His Christ or walks in a wicked life in impenitence, and in opposition to God’s commandments, prosper in the sight of God? The basis of true unity must be able to stand before the holy and righteous God. It must be in complete harmony with His righteousness. There is nothing in man naturally, nor in his sinful nature, that can provide a basis for unity that would stand before God and be with God forever.

Nevertheless, the basis of the unity of the church, though impossible for us by nature, is found and is a reality in our Lord Jesus Christ. Convinced of that truth, one Reformed theologian described the unity of the church with a very simple description. The church enjoys “the character of unity in so far as she rests on

Dear readers

Thank you for picking up our 14th issue of Salt Shakers! And please don’t just read the Editor’s Note, do go on and finish up the magazine! I’m sure you will be blessed richly by God’s Word and His testimonies contained in the many articles behind this page. Go read!

“They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” Jesus’ answer to the Pharisees, in Matthew 9:12, when they questioned about his eating with publicans and sinners.

No one wants to be in close proximity to a gathering of sick people. Not only is there little meaningful fellowship with those who would only moan and groan about their sores and aches, you run the high risk of being infected with one of their great illness! In addition to that, you might be mistaken as someone who is suffering from sickness, just like them. “OH, STAY FAR AWAY!” would be the advice of many a Pharisee. What fellowship can light have with darkness? We must be separate! We must flee to mingle with the clean!

Hold up. We shall be separate spiritually. We will flee, but to the cross. This issue was of great importance to Jesus; for the Pharisees questioned His disciples, but Jesus overheard and would not have anyone else answer for Him. He spoke, so that those who followed His example one day would not be defenceless, but would have the courage to be Christians.

Jesus does not tell us to have fellowship with the world, no; but Jesus tells us to be in close proximity to them, to dine and sit with them. Jesus does not tell us to mingle with them aimlessly; He tells us to be in their midst as doctors! This means first of all, that we are to be well trained. No doctor enters the field without proper knowledge and skills of medicine, and without special information about the sickness and infirmities he would be treating. Neither does he leave without the tools of his trade for that would render him useless even though he has a head full of knowledge. We must be well-trained Christians, who tirelessly search the scriptures and grow in love for God and His Word. We must be unashamed Christians, who are fearless because we have seen the power of God in the Gospel of Christ. We must be ready Christians, who can’t wait to share with someone about the reason of the hope that is in us. Second, this means that we are to be compassionate. Only one with such a heart would approach a stinking, dying man. Only such a Christian, would approach a stinking, dying sinner. Such mercy, according to our Lord, is to be desired. And, this is what differentiates Pharisees from true Christians, is not it? One boasts of his outward perfection and “cleanliness”, while the other has only his Master’s work in mind. One has less and less need for forgiveness, while the other has hope only in the Cross. In the third place, a doctor always seeks the healing of the sick. He is not aimless in his work, and every action is full of purpose. A useful Christian is like a huge signpost in the world, pointing everyone to the Cross of his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. And for those who are far off, he would bring the sign closer, that they may see and seek forgiveness at the Cross. He is faithful, and does not forget his calling. He is useful, like salt full of savour. He is finally, a profitable servant.

Christ regardless
paul

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Christ as the cause of life in all believers.” The basis upon which the church in her totality, including her unity, rests firmly and securely is Christ. Of course, that “resting” upon Christ is not something that the church establishes and does as her work and condition unto the establishment of her salvation and unity in Christ, but which Christ establishes by His sovereign Holy Spirit and grace. He anchors us unto Himself by His Spirit, and that produces in us by His grace the activity of faith (believing) by which we find, receive, and enjoy our unity in the only foundation and Rock for the church, Jesus Christ.

That Christ is the only basis for the unity and of the church is taught in Scripture, for example, in Ephesians 2:20-22, “And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.”

The church is built upon the foundation of Christ and built into Christ as a harmonious and “fitly framed” temple to serve as the dwelling place of Jehovah in His glory. Without Christ, that unity of the church would be impossible.

Without that unity, the God of true unity in His covenant would not dwell in His church by His Word and Spirit. Thus, the only basis for the unity of the Church is Jesus Christ, the chief cornerstone.

However, Ephesians 2:20-22 also teaches that the only basis of the unity of the church is the doctrine taught by the apostles and prophets. There may be some who might misinterpret the text to mean that the Christ, 12 apostles themselves, and many Old Testament prophets are the foundation of the church. However, is it true that the church is built upon Christ and all of these other men personally? If that were true would not that contradict what Jesus said in Matthew 16:18 and I Corinthians 10:4 which identifies Christ as the Rock and foundation of the church? We must understand that Ephesians 2:20-22 is showing that the foundation of the church and her unity is what the apostles and prophets taught in their special offices by the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the holy doctrine and truth which they taught, and which is infallibly inspired for us in the Holy Scriptures, is the basis of the unity of the Church. The basis of the unity of the church is the one doctrine of Christ, the Truth.

Let us then understand and remember that true unity has its basis and its enjoyment by us strictly in the sphere of the truth of Christ and never outside of it. Let us not be deceived into thinking that we can try to be friends and have fellowship with someone who denies the truth and is an unbeliever. Let us never think that unity can be found and enjoyed at the expense of the truth. True unity and fellowship together with others has its basis strictly and happily in the sphere of God’s truth.

The truth of Christ and Scripture has been given to the church by the Holy Spirit in the Reformed confessions which include the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession of Faith, the Canons of Dordrecht, and the Church Order. For the saints of God today, the basis of unity and the enjoyment of that unity is found in the truth of those Reformed confessions and church order. They collectively provide us with a full explanation of God’s truth from the entire Scriptures and provide us with a means to instruct ourselves in God’s truth and to protect ourselves from all of the past, present, and future errors that militate against God’s truth. Unity in the church is built upon that truth into which the Spirit of Christ has been pleased to lead the church and to confess as summarized in the Reformed confessions. These uphold the truths of God’s sovereign, particular grace in Jesus Christ alone unto the salvation of His eternally chosen church alone. As a result, outside the truth of the Reformed Faith, which is undoubtedly the truth of Scripture, there can be no true unity for the people of God.

This truth about the basis of true unity in Jesus Christ as set forth in the Reformed faith must be something that we not only confess with our mouths, but also put into practice throughout our lives. For example, believing that you belong to Christ, to what church will you then belong or work to become a member through catechetical training, and then continue to belong in that church to your utmost in obedience to Christ? We must belong to or work towards belonging to a faithful church that maintains most purely the truth of the Lord Jesus Christ. (Acts 2:41-47; Hebrews 10:25)

With whom will you establish true and meaningful friendships in life? What must be the basis of your friendship so that not only can you enjoy your friendship with that other individual but also at the same time together enjoy the all-important, true, and holy friendship with Christ? For two to walk together truly in love and harmony in Christ, they must agree and be one in His truth. (Amos 3:3) We must develop lasting and true friendships with those who are one with us in the truth. Whom will you marry and establish a covenant home? What will be the lasting and durable foundation of your future marriage and home? It ought to be the sayings of Christ, which are His truth. (Matthew 7:24-27) What will the basis of the education that you provide to your children so that all of their instruction is unified and so trains the children to love and serve the Lord in all areas of their present and future lives? It ought to be the truth of the Reformed faith. (Psalm 78:1-8)

May the Lord by His Holy Spirit grant unto us the full enjoyment of our only comfort in life and death in the sure basis and content of His infallible and glorious truth.

The Sovereignty of God

>> Sister Daisy Lim

Our God is sovereign. That means, whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did He in heavens, and in the earth, in the seas and in all deep places (Ps 135:6, Ps 115:3).

Our God is Sovereign in Creation

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth (Ge 1:1). He created all things for His own pleasure (Re 4:11). God says, “I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil” (Is 45:7). He created the Sun, moon and stars and all the luminaries in the whole planetary system. He created moving creatures in the air, land and seas. He created angels, the first man Adam and the first woman Eve, out of the man. Thus, by Him were all things created, that are in heaven and in earth (Col 1:16).

Our God is Sovereign in Providence

Our God continues to uphold and govern all things in the universe. Behold our God! He measured the waters in the hollow of His hand. The nations are as a drop of a bucket and as the small dust of the balance. He stretched out the heavens as a curtain (Is 40:9,12,15,22).

He worketh all things after the counsel of His own will (Eph 1:11). He could declare the end from the beginning and from ancient times the things that are not yet done. His counsel shall stand and He will do all His pleasure. Whatever He has spoken, He will bring it to pass (Isa 46:10, 11).

Our God is Sovereign in Salvation

God has chosen His people to be a special people unto Himself. He did not set His love upon them because of their numbers but because He loved them; because He hath sworn a covenant unto their fathers and He would keep

His covenant to those who love Him and keep His commandments (Dt 7:6-9). He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will (Eph 1:4,5).

Thus, election (predestination) is the fountain of all salvation. God loved Jacob and hated Esau (Mal 1:2, 3). For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of Him that calleth. He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy (Ro 9:11,15).

The promise of the gospel is to believers and to their children, even as many as the Lord our God shall call (Ac 2:39). Only those who believe on the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, hath everlasting life. The wrath of God abides on those that believe not (Jn 3:36). As many as were ordained to eternal life believed (Ac 13:48).

How can His people believe? God sent preachers to preach the gospel of peace (Ro 10:13-17). They are to preach repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ (Ac 20:21). Faith cometh by hearing the Word of God (Rom 10:17). For by grace are we saved through faith, and not of ourselves. Faith is a gift of God (Eph 2:8,9). Repentance from and forgiveness of sins are also gifts of God (Acts 5:31).

As many as received Him, to them He gave power to become the children of God, who were born not of blood, nor the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God (Jn 1:12, 13). The golden chain of salvation is reflected in Romans 8:28-33). Who are God’s elect? They are the called according to His promise, those for whom He did foreknow, predestinate, called, justified and glorified. Thus all things work together for good to them who love God.

Our God is Sovereign in all Events in the Universe

God performs whatsoever His hand and His counsel determines before to be done (Ac 4:28). Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle of His Word shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled (Mt 5:18).

The entire Old Testament points to the coming of our Lord Jesus. To list a few verses:

God will put enmity between the devil (serpent) and the woman, and between the devil’s seed (it) and her seed. Her seed (Christ) shall bruise its head, and it will only bruise His heel – the mother promise (Ge 3:15). For unto us a child is born unto us, a son is given. He shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.

The New Testament confirms all God’s promises and prophecies.

Christ was born of a virgin (Mt 1:23).

He was crucified on a cross (Ac 2:23).

He was resurrected on the 3rd day (1Co 15:4).

He ascended to heaven after 40 days (Ac 1:9).

He sent His Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Ac 2:4).

He continues to gather, defend and preserve His church (Jn 6:37-40).

He shall triumph over the Antichrist (2Th 2:3-8).

He shall come again to redeem His people unto Himself (Re 21:9, 27).

Indeed, our God reigns (Ps 93:1). He is high above the earth and is exalted far above all gods (Ps 97:9). He is great and greatly to be praised (Ps 145:3). The Lord takes pleasure in His people. He will beautify the meek with salvation (Ps 149:4). He shall execute vengeance upon the heathen and honour all His saints (Ps 149:9). Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord (Ps 150:6).

A Brief Introduction to the Protestant Reformed Seminary

>> Prof Dykstra

brothers recognized the crucial need to train men for the gospel ministry and began immediately to make provision for that. The minutes of a very early meeting (April 21, 1925) of combined consistories records the following:

Article 9. The training of ministers of the Word is discussed. It is decided to appoint a committee that will serve with advice at the next meeting. Committee. Revs. Ophoff and Hoeksema.

A month and a half later, the committee handed the consistories a schedule of classes to be taught by the three ministers. It was decided to go forward with instructing men for the ministry. Enthusiasm was high. The consistories advertised the availability of theological training, and twelve men applied. Though they had no established school building, and though the instructors were all extremely busy pastors in their congregations, instruction began that fall (1925).

From that year on, the PRTS has persevered in the calling of training Reformed men for the ministry of the word and sacraments. In its 87 year history, nine different men have been appointed to teach (not including Rev. Danhof who left the PRC in 1926). Various other ministers have assisted with a course or two in times of need. That early history indicates that the PRTS is a church-governed seminary. There are seminaries in the world that are not under the authority of a church or denomination. They are governed by a board of some kind.

That the PRTS is a church-governed seminary involves many things. It is a seminary that belongs to the Protestant Reformed Churches. It is supported by the PRC, which adopts a budget at synod annually, and commits to supplying the money needed. The PRTS is controlled by the PRC, answerable

to the synod, which synod appoints a standing committee, the Theological School Committee, to oversee the day to day operations and implement synod's directives. In addition, synod appoints the professors. Add to that, that the professors are bound by the confessions of the PRC. And finally, the PRTS is committed to training ministers for the PRC – ministers thoroughly grounded in the Reformed faith generally, and in the specific doctrines that God has entrusted to the PRC.

Why is the PRTS a church seminary? We are convinced this is biblical. The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, a minister of the gospel, And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the **same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also** (II Timothy 2:2). That indicates that prospective ministers are taught by those who are already ministers. Paul taught Timothy, and Timothy was to teach other men. That is what the PRTS follows.

Paul also wrote Timothy, “Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was **given thee by prophecy**, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery” (I Timothy 4:14). This indicates the nature of the instruction that prepared Timothy for the ministry – it was prophesy. That refers first to the fact that God uses preaching to prepare a man, even from his youth ordinarily. But in addition, this verse teaches that the professors’ instruction is a form of preaching. Seminary professors are not merely giving facts and information. They are preaching. The instruction they give is in harmony with the Bible and it is based on the Bible, directly or indirectly. It is authoritative instruction, having the authority of Christ.

But we can say more. Seminary teaching (preaching) is powerful. Through this instruction, the Spirit gives men

knowledge of God and of His Word. Second, the Spirit uses this instruction to confer and develop **spiritual** gifts. And finally, the Spirit-applied instruction develops a man’s **natural** abilities. Thus seminary instruction equips men to be preachers!

Currently, the seminary has four fulltime seminary students, one student in each of the four years. Three of the students are from the PRC, and one is from the Berean PRC in the Philippines. In addition to these, seven students are taking pre-seminary Greek. God has given the PRTS the privilege of teaching a number of men from outside of the PRC and North America. Over the last thirty years, five of the graduates are Singaporeans, four are Australians, two hailed from Northern Ireland, and Vernon Ibe from the Philippines is preparing to graduate this summer. These students add an important international and ecclesiastical diversity that is good for the seminary.

Seminary Requirements

Let me set forth briefly what are the pre-seminary requirements. A man who seeks entrance into the PRTS must first obtain a degree from a university. The desire is that a man will gain a well-rounded education, and thus have courses in English, history, science, logic, philosophy, etc. In addition, he must study certain languages – two years each of Latin and Greek (the language of the New Testament). Also recommended is Dutch, simply because of the rich Reformed heritage locked away in Dutch books.

Seminary courses can be divided into four areas of study:

Biblical Studies

Church History

Dogmatics

Practical Theology

Biblical Studies include knowing the original languages of the Bible (Greek and Hebrew); Hermeneutics (interpreting Scripture); Introduction to each one of the books of the Bible; OT History and NT History; and Exegesis (explaining the Bible). All three professors share in this work.

The seminary emphasizes the importance of church history (the area of Prof. Dykstra). We are convinced that all church history is our history, because the church is one. From the study of church history we can learn 1) to avoid errors that the church faced in the past, 2) how doctrine developed, and 3) how God’s counsel unfolds as Christ gathers, defends, and preserves His church by His Spirit and word.

Reformed doctrine is the heart of the instruction in the PRTS. Therefore all the students take six semesters of Dogmatics (direct study of doctrine, plus an introduction to Dogmatics – Prof. Cammenga teaches this). They take a year long course on the history of dogma. And they study the Reformed Confessions. Seminary also gives instruction in practical matters of the minister’s life (the special focus of Prof. Gritters). This includes classes on making sermons, on teaching catechism, on counselling, missions, and the Church Order.

All that instruction is geared particularly to prepare a man to **preach!** This is the goal of the seminary. To develop this ability, once they have learned how to make a sermon, all the students have three years of “Practice Preaching.” In this exercise they write and then speak their sermons before a sympathetic audience that includes all the professors and the students. They then endure a critique, which will include the form of the sermon, the interpretation of the text (exegesis), and the delivery. It is a major concern that the graduates

be able to preach well, first, because the word of God must be preached effectively. Secondly, the word of God is worthy of excellence.

Besides the classroom instruction, preparation for the ministry includes some “hands on” experience in the work of the minster. Students will often teach catechism in local congregations. They will, when the faculty judges they are ready, speak a word of edification in the churches (their approved sermons from practice preaching). And in the fourth year, each one has an internship for six months in a congregation in the PRC.

From all these, one can see that the PRC takes very seriously her calling to prepare men for the gospel ministry. The professors do not merely give tests on the material they teach, they also evaluate as much as possible each student’s gifts, comparing them to the standards of Scripture (especially I Timothy 3 and Titus 1). They are concerned as well with a man’s convictions. The student must not only know what he has been taught, he must believe the truth, be convicted of it.

The professors know that these men will go forth to serve God’s church, the highest calling in the world. The wellbeing of the church is at stake. And, more importantly, the seminary is concerned for God’s glory. The men who go out to serve in the churches must, in all their lives and work, give glory to God.

The professors are not only deeply aware of their calling before God, they are also aware that their work depends on the prayers and support of the people of God. That prayer and support the members of the PRC give continuously. God has heard those prayers for 87 years, and continues to answer them with His blessing on the PRTS.

And, more importantly, the seminary is concerned for God’s glory. The men who go out to serve in the churches must, in all their lives and work, give glory to God.

Why I Love Singing the Psalms: Psalter 55

>> Joanna Tang

I love singing the Psalms. The Psalms are a spiritual autobiography of every believer. They are so full of comfort. They contain the innermost thoughts of a child of God – his fear, his trust, his sorrow, his joy, his doubt, his assurance.

Every Psalm is lifted up to God, our Good Shepherd. The Lord says to us, “I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.” (Jn 10:11) And again, “I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.” (Jn 10:14)

Psalm 23, the Shepherd’s Psalm, is one of the most beautiful and personal Psalms in the Bible. Children love reciting it, adults take comfort in it amidst their busy lives, and the elderly find rest in it as they await their heavenly home.

The Lord my Shepherd holds me within His tender care,

And with His flock He folds me, no want shall find me there.

In pastures green He feeds me, with plenty I am blest;

By quiet streams He leads me and makes me safely rest.

This stanza incites in us a childlike dependence on God. The Good Shepherd holds His helpless little sheep close to Him, watching over them each day with the tender love of a father for his child. He holds us so close to Him, and provides for our every need, so that we have naught to utter but a prayer of thanksgiving to Him. Just as an earthly shepherd chooses the greenest pastures and the clearest waters for his flock, so the Lord fills us with pastures rich and plenty, and blesses us with quiet resting-places, so that we may dwell peacefully in the comfort of His love.

Whatever ill betides me, He will restore and bless;

For His Name’s sake He guides me in paths of righteousness.

Thy rod and staff shall cheer me in death’s dark vale and shade,

For Thou wilt then be near me: I shall not be afraid.

This stanza brings to mind a picture of imminent danger. In this valley of tears, we cannot escape the ills that befall us. God wills that we go through trials, and sometimes we are led right into death’s dark vale and shade. But with every tear we shed, we receive the promise of our Good Shepherd – He will restore and bless! Though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we can rejoice and find security in God’s guiding hand. He causes all evil to work out for our good and our salvation. He guides us in paths of righteousness by His Word, and causes us never to stray from His precepts. Oft times it is difficult to trust. We are discouraged by the failures and sorrows of life. But when we stumble or doubt, His rod and staff never fail to admonish us and comfort us, and lead us back in the way of life. Thus we are cheered and can press on in our sojourn on this earth. The Psalmist boldly proclaims, “For thou wilt then be near me: I shall not be afraid.” The presence of the Lord hushes away all fear from our hearts. If God be for us, who can be against us?

My food Thou dost appoint me, supplied before my foes;

With oil Thou dost anoint me, my cup of bliss o’erflows.

Thy goodness, Lord, shall guide me, Thy mercy cheer my way;

A home Thou wilt provide me within Thy house for aye.

We sing with David in this stanza as we meditate on God’s goodness towards us. The Lord prepares a bountiful table before us; He carefully appoints us good for both our bodies and souls, even in the presence of our foes. Nothing – not sin, nor Satan, nor anything else – can withhold from us or diminish God’s blessings upon us. He anoints our heads with oil and pours out His loving favour upon us, causing our cup to be filled, to abound, to run over with infinite joys. In His goodness and mercy He guides and cheers us along our pathway. And finally, we remember His promise of salvation and eternal glory. He will bring us to our heavenly home where we will dwell with Him for ever. Then, God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain (Re 21:4).

What blessed assurance! Truly, “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.” (Ps 23:1)

what God? THIS GOD.

>> Josiah Tan

Psa 48:14 *For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.*

A couple of days back, while I was waiting in my car, I decided to not waste my time and do something useful. I hit the “Play CD” button, knowing my mom puts in an audio sermon in the player. Every few days it changes. Sometimes I hear old sermons from Pastor Jason Kortering, sometimes Pastor Van Overloop, sometimes Professor Dykstra. But, that night, the CD player in the car played a sermon with an old familiar voice, one I was extremely fond of. It was Professor Hanko preaching on Psalm 48. The last sermon he preached before he had to go back to the States. It was a farewell sermon.

I was in the midst of another hectic week, feeling almost strangled by the demands of school and weakened in the spiritual battle against my own flesh, I reclined my car seat and wound down my windows as I listened attentively to the sermon, as if for the first time.

Here are some of what I gleaned from the sermon and my meditation. I hope it would bring comfort to your soul, as it did to mine.

"For **this** God", the verse begins. Why the emphasis of the psalmist on THIS God? Looking at the word before this, we read the word "for". For indicates a prelude to an important reason. So it reads, For this God! A troubled soul may ask, “What God? What is so great about this God in the face of the mountain of issues he faces?”

This God is the God of Zion. God of the church throughout the ages. This God is not just the God of oneself. We must see that. Look beyond just oneself and our problems we are facing today. This is the God of His church! The whole church which stretches across all of time. Starting some eight thousand years ago, this God comforted rebellious Adam and Eve that a Messiah will come and save them from their great rebellion against Him. He killed an animal for them to teach them that their Messiah will have to go through the same to save them. He used the skin of the animals to clothe them. He covered their naked bodies – bodies they used as instruments for sin and great foolishness. What a God, who was so merciful to the church eight thousand years ago! How undeserving is Zion.

What God?

This God saved the church from cruel slavery in Egypt. The church was persecuted; they learnt new definitions of the words “hardship”, “pain” and “suffering”. But, this God has a mighty hand. When His mighty hand stretched out, the world trembled. With His mighty hand, He brought forth ten devastating plagues on Egypt to deliver His church from bondage and judge wicked pharaoh. Free at last, the church sang as they marched out in deliverance.

What God?

This God, saved Israel from the Philistines. He used a small, fair, God fearing boy, David, to kill a mighty giant. A giant all the army of Israelite adults (many of whom were war veterans) dared not fight against. God used little David and guided the stone from his sling to slay the giant and send the armies of the Philistines running away, abandoning their great assault and persecution of the Church. God reminded the Church that a Messiah will come, like David, only infinitely greater. He will, like David, cut off the head of Goliath, a symbol of sin and the devil. The Saviour, His son, will crush the head of the father of lies. What scared Israelites! They foolishly did not trust in God, but hid in their trenches of self pity and crippling fear when Goliath blasphemed the Almighty God.

What God? This great God of Zion.

This God, whose greatness and glory, if it were to be discussed, a trillion Salt Shakers articles would not even scratch the surface of discussing God's greatness. A trillion Salt Shakers plus a trillion Standard Bearers magazines plus a trillion issues of Beacon Lights would be like a grain of sand in the wide, wide, universe in describing the glory of our great God. Yet now, our superficial discussion the greatness of God can bring untold comfort to our hearts. What a great God. The God of Zion!

The God of Zion has made Zion spiritually invulnerable. Yes, the body the world kills; yes, the saint sadly falls into sin often; yes, our path way dictates mourning and weeping. But, our souls together, the body of Christ, is safe in God's hand. Nothing can touch it, much less snatch it, from the Almighty hand of God. What God? This God.

Our God? Yes, Our God.

Here is a little story to explain the word "our". A little child gets bullied by many wicked bullies, the little child quickly points to his daddy and says, "This daddy is my daddy. Daddy will protect me because I belong to him." Daddy protects his child jealously and fiercely from harm and danger.

This God is our God. This God is our Father. The word "our" reminds us, we are His! We belong to God as His little children! If your earthly father protects you from bullies, what about our Almighty Heavenly Father?

This God, our God. For awhile? For a limited time period of special protection? For only certain periods in your life? When we fall in to the pit of sin and self-pity, God forgets us and leaves us alone? No, a million times "No". This God, is our God, forever and ever.

2Ti 2:13 If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.

The Psalmist, inspired by the Holy Spirit, says to you and me, "You are always safe and protected. Even now, you are. If I were to tell you, I watch over you forever, it is not comforting enough for your easily troubled hearts. I must add forever AND EVER. Lest the devil sow his seeds of lies in your heart to trick you to thinking I protect you like your friends do." Sometimes your friends are there for you, sometimes they are not. God is never like that. God is with us ALWAYS. God is not like a supermarket special offer that only lasts for a limited time period. God is not even like your parents who are fallible and sinful. Sometimes, they don't completely understand you, protect you and comfort you. (Earthly parents who think they can protect their child always and perfectly do not understand how great God's care is.)

This God is our God; now, forever and ever, to all eternity, our precious God. Even our parents "leave" us in God's hands and admit that only God can truly protect us. They dare not trust their own wisdom, much less the world with its earthly riches and fancy job titles, to protect you. Nor do they trust education, reputable schools or CCAs. These are all merely tools, subservient to God; merely means, to prepare you to work for bread that you may use the energy to serve the army of God with greater strength. Trust God, soul. Why be disheartened, why despair and hang your head low? While we are still on this earth, with much suffering, pain and callings, we will be carefully guided. Till we breathe our last and open our eyes in heaven, till we see our Saviour's face, till eternity, He will guide us. God has been protecting Zion since time began. God will make sure all of us get home, safe and on time.

1. Zion, founded on the mountains

God, thy Maker, loves thee well;

He has chosen Thee, most precious,

He delights in Thee to dwell;

God's own city,

Who can all thy glory tell?

2. Heathen lands and hostile peoples

Soon shall come the Lord to know;

Nations born again in Zion

Shall the Lord's salvation show;

God Almighty

Shall on Zion strength bestow.

3. When the Lord shall count the nations,

Sons and daughters He shall see,

Born to endless life in Zion,

And their joyful song shall be,

"Blessed Zion,

All our fountains are in Thee."

G O D L Y C O N T E N T M E N T

>> Brother Suan Kiat

Since Singapore became independent from colonial rule, our political leaders have ruled well and have brought about unparalleled prosperity to the nation. Most, if not all, of us live in comfortable homes and our fathers have good jobs. Although it is not wrong to enjoy God's abundant good gifts, for the sake of the Gospel, we must be prepared to move out of our comfort zones to pioneer mission work in Third World countries.

Living in a materialistic consumer society, I write also to caution myself of the ever present danger of coveting earthly possessions and failing to focus on heavenly treasures. Luke 12:16-21 talks about the parable of the rich fool. The rich man, in the modern context, would be a man whose business flourishes by honest and diligent labour and who wishes to expand his business to neighbouring countries, as far as China or India. The problem of the rich fool is that he does not acknowledge that his possessions belong to God. He amasses his fortune to cater for his future so that he can lead a life of luxury and ease. He leads a life without relation to God. Take the example of devout Job. Job was rich, owned many cattle and much land, had a large family, and had many servants to care for his estate. Job set up an altar for his family and rose up every day to offer sacrifice for the sins of his children. In his prosperity, he did not forget God but dutifully maintained his Christian walk. When Satan had God's permission to do mischief by removing Job's cattle, servants and family members, what was Job's response? Job 1:20 tells us, "He arose and rent his mantle and shaved his head and fell down upon the ground and worshipped." He humbled himself and acknowledged the hand of God. He confessed "Naked came I out

of my mother's womb and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.

Apostle Paul in 1 Tim 6:7 expressed somewhat similarly that we brought nothing of this world's goods into the world and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment, let us be therewith content. John MacArthur in his book 'Whose Money Is It Anyway' writes, "The dictionary defines contentment as feeling or manifesting satisfaction with one's possessions, status or situation. For the Christian, however, a definition of contentment goes beyond the issues of worldly wealth and success. You will find real contentment in God as you realise that your heavenly Father owns everything, controls everything, and provides everything. Wholeheartedly embracing these truths will begin to lead to victory over the pervasive snare of materialism."

Just to quote Scripture texts to support these truths.

God owns everything. God is the sole proprietor of everything you have – your clothes, your house, your car, your children, your computer, your savings, your investments and everything else imaginable. 1 Chronicles 29:11-12 states, "*Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all.*" Psalm 24:1 reminds us that "*The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness*

thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein." Since God owns everything, we can never really acquire anything new because it is already His.

God controls everything. Isa 46:9-10 states, "*Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:*"

God provides everything necessary. Apostle Paul in Philippians 4:19 encourages the Philippian Christians that "*my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. One of God's names in Hebrew is Jehovah Jireh, "the Lord who provides"* (Ge 22:14).

Realising it is God who owns, controls all the circumstances in your life, and provides for all your needs, there is therefore no need to worry and be anxious about what to eat, drink or wear.

Let me close by highlighting the Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 10, Questions and Answers 27 and 28. Question and Answer 27 talks about the providence of God. All things, good or evil, come not by chance, but by His fatherly hand. Question 28 reminds us that having understood the truth of the providence of God, our proper response should be patience in adversity, thankfulness in prosperity, and in all things, which may hereafter befall us, to place our firm trust in our faithful God and Father. It also reminds us that nothing shall separate us from His love, since all creatures are so in His hand, that without His will they cannot so much as move.

MARRIAGE, DIVORCE & REMARRIAGE

The topic of Divorce and Remarriage (D&R) has affected our church in the past and the results may still be felt by some. This important doctrine of the Bible has been a controversy in the church. Even though it may have been some time ago in the past when this controversy happened, we still ought to be familiar with this doctrine and be ready to defend this precious truth that speaks of Christ and the church.

Having sat through the workshop on Divorce and Remarriage organised by the Covenant Keepers Senior committee, the most important thing I learnt was that getting the right and Biblical understanding of marriage was the key to the whole problem of D&R. That is why the speaker, Elder Lee, used M&D&R instead of the commonly known D&R, adding marriage into the picture.

So what exactly is marriage?

Marriage, to the world, is the process by which two people who love each other make their relationship public, official, and permanent. But when personalities change, bodies age and 'love' starts to fade, divorce becomes a quick exit through the back door. And marriage becomes temporary, no longer until death. However, according to the Word of God, marriage is an institution of God. God established marriage on the sixth day of creation and joined man and woman to be one flesh. (Ge 2:18-25, Eph 5:31) Also in Ephesians 5, marriage is pictured to show Christ's relationship with the Church.

With this biblical view of marriage, we can see very clearly that divorce and remarriage ought not to be present at

all. Yes, divorce may be done if there is fornication present in the marriage. But even after a divorce, the man and women are still married in God's sight. This is because God is the institutor of marriage and man's divorce has no power to break what God has put together. Matt 19:6 "Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." No piece of paper, no will of man can separate what God joined together. How can anyone divide one body into half? Only by cutting it into two, which means death.

Furthermore, because our marriages are a reflection of Christ's relationship with the Church, Christ being the bridegroom and the Church being the bride, we ought to look at Jeremiah chapter 3. In Jeremiah chapter 3, we read that Israel played the harlot against God (v1, v6). And because of Israel's adultery towards God, God "put her away, and given her a bill of divorce" (v8). However, even after divorcing Israel, God in verse 14 says "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you". God declares that He is still married to Israel even after giving her the bill of divorcement.

How precious is this truth that God always remains faithful to His Church! So often we commit spiritual adultery against God, but He promises to never leave us. Imagine if that bill of divorcement really broke the marriage bond with Israel and Israel was no longer married to God. How awful would that be? Thanks be to God that He has promised to bring us to the marriage supper of the lamb! (Rev 19:9)

Since earthly marriages represent Christ's relation to the Church, it can never be severed (other than by death) because God is unchangeable and is faithful to us. Why then is there divorce mentioned in the Bible? Divorce was only used as a last resort. Divorce is to give the husband and wife a certain time apart when they can pray, fast and examine themselves before God.

It also lets the adulterous party know the seriousness of his or her sin – how it so severely hurts the very heart and essence of their marriage. It is important to note that the purpose of divorce cannot be anything else than reconciliation. It is of utmost necessity because we have learnt that God has always forgiven us even though He is always the innocent party. So much more then ought we to forgive each other and seek reconciliation, especially if we are found to be guilty.

The main ground used to support divorce and remarriage is found in Matthew 19:9. "And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except *it be* for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery."

Those who support the view of divorce and remarriage read it as adultery is only committed if divorce is made without the act of fornication. Meaning that if there is fornication present in the marriage, one could remarry after divorcement, and this will not be a sin. However, the right way of looking at this text is that even in the case of divorcement because of fornication, if one marries after that (before the spouse is dead), he or she commits adultery. And, someone else who marries the one who was divorced also commits adultery. How much more serious the consequences if the divorcement was not because of fornication!

In conclusion, if we have difficult questions about marriage, divorce, and remarriage, we ought to pause for a moment and look back to the fundamentals of what marriage really means. And more importantly, look at God for our perfect example.

**"This is a great mystery:
but I speak concerning
Christ and the church."**

Eph 5:32

>> Boaz Leong

This article is meant especially for the young man who asked last summer for help in choosing worthwhile books for his bookshelf. Here was a person who had not been overly conscientious in his studies as a youth, nor had he spent much time with books. Now as a husband, father, and office-bearer he felt the need for reading of literature that would provide growth in these various functions, that he might be a workman approved of God. His approach is correct. It is not too much to hope that there are many others who understand this.

Nor, I hope, is it overly optimistic to think that people still do read. It is certainly the case that we live in perilous times when men are lovers of self and pleasure more than lovers of God. It is true that at the present time as never before, other things clamour for our attention: sporting events, television viewing, endless programs. It is also true, in general, that the membership of our churches is not as well posted in ecclesiastical matters as it was, say, twenty-five years ago. Yet we believe there are still those who read. And perhaps these lines will serve as an inducement for others to forsake less worthwhile activities in order to take up this edifying pastime.

Reading is more than edifying: in this day of ignorance, apostasy, and spiritual decline it is necessary. Besides, once reading is established as a habit, it is a joy!

Writing in the June, 1969 issue of *Banner of Truth*, John F. Murray asks, "Why are so many Christians disinclined to make use of the vast amount of Christian literature that is readily available and at a very reasonable cost?" His answer, in part, is that it has been estimated that only two percent of the population (in England reads any books at all after leaving school. He finds the reason for Christians not reading more in the failure of church members to have a real Christian outlook, or as Murray says, "uplook."

Before we offer a concrete suggestion for the building of a home library, two points should be made. First, we ought to be aware that the art of reading, and the art of the teaching of reading, have come a long way in the last few years. Programmed reading in the elementary schools, a system which stresses sounds as well as the writing of newly learned words at a rate consistent with the individual child's ability, has resulted in little first-grade students reading several hundred words after as little as two months of instruction. Many are the children who can read intelligently anywhere in the Bible after one year of school! This says much concerning the perspicuity of Scripture, but also tells us we have reading children in our homes. Surely the reading of the Bible and related materials is the basic aim of a Christian school reading program, and therefore is the basic skill to be obtained. Now that our children have made such a rapid departure at the starting gate, shall we allow them to wander aimlessly into that ninety-eight percent of the populace that does not read after schooling is completed? Clearly this advantage ought not to be lost, but every effort should be made in the home to provide our youth with reading material of a Christian content. In the second place, books are meant to be read! It is easy to buy books and place them on a shelf permanently, but what a waste. Interior decorators will provide the pseudo-intellectual with book-binding by the foot, turning the family room into an impressive "library." But we are not interested in that, are we? A few, well-thumbed books are to be preferred over many shelves of shiny volumes. Buy carefully, rotate the switch of the television set to the extreme left position, gather the family together, and read!

The following suggestions are representative, not exhaustive. All the books mentioned are not recommended with equal heartiness. Admittedly, in many cases, preference has been given to those books found on my shelf. It is suggested that a few books in each category be purchased at the outset. Further growth will be determined by an individual's preference.

Also, further recommendations, as well as addresses, prices, etc., can best be obtained from your pastor.* Happy reading!

The Home Library

>> Pastor Dale H. Kuiper

I. Books that Aid in Studying the Bible. Since the Bible is the ultimate source of all truth in this world, the study of the Word of God itself may not be neglected. In addition to reading at the table and preparing for society, we ought to read from the Bible large sections at a sitting, whole books at a time. A further suggestion is that whenever we begin to read at the table a new book of the Bible, it might be advantageous to first read from an introduction those sections which describe its place and purpose in the Canon. If you are of a mind to study a particular book in depth, or if your society is doing so, you will likely wish to purchase a commentary; by all means consider the commentaries of that "prince of exegetes," John Calvin.

Behold He Cometh, Rev. H. Hoeksema, Reformed Free Publ. Assn

Bible Dictionary, M.Unger, Moody Press

Commentaries, (especially John Calvin's) Eerdmans

Cruden's Unabridged Concordance, A. Cruden, Baker

Introduction to the N.T., H.C. Thiessen, Eerdmans

Introduction to the O.T., E.J. Young, Eerdmans

The New Bible Commentary; Revised, Eerdmans

The New Bible Dictionary, J.D. Douglas, Eerdmans

II. Books of a Doctrinal, Confessional Nature. Although there are many study guides available for the Heidelberg Catechism and the Westminster and other confessions, there is a need for a book on the Canons of Dort. Perhaps the R.F.P.A. could investigate the possibility of putting into book form the thorough analysis given the Canons of Dort by Prof. Hoeksema about twelve years ago in the Standard Bearer. It is assumed that the Standard Bearer, Beacon Lights, and our Sunday School paper are received.

*Absolute Predestination, J. Zanchius, Sovereign Grace Union***

Calvin's Calvinism, John Calvin, Eerdmans

Institutes of the Christian Religion, John Calvin, Eerdmans

The Reformed Confessions, The Psalter, Eerdmans

The Triple Knowledge, Rev. H. Hoeksema, RFPA

Reformed Dogmatics, Rev. H. Hoeksema, RFPA

III. Books that Reveal God's Hand in History. If the maxim "those that refuse to study history are doomed to repeat it" applies to the arena of worldly affairs, how much the more is it true of the Church as she battles a foe that is common to every age.

*A History of the Christian Church, W. Walker, Scribners***

A History of Christian Missions, S. Nerill, Eerdmans

The Church in History, B. K. Kuiper, Eerdmans

The Reformation of the 16th Century, R. Bainton, Beacon Press

The Protestant Reformed Churches in America, Rev. Hoeksema, RFPA

IV. Books that Aid in the Defense of the Faith. If the city of Athens came daily under the bombardment of new ideas, the American church scene more. And we must have an answer; not only concerning the hope that is in us, but also concerning false doctrines and heresies that would destroy the Christian's hope.

In the Beginning God, H.C. Hoeksema, RFPA

Roman Catholicism, L. Boettner, Pres. and Ref. Publ. Co. (Baker)

The Bible, God's Word, T. Van Kootem, Baker

The Bondage of the Will, Martin Luther, Revel1

The Flood, A. M. Rehwinkle, Concordia

Thy Word Is Truth, E. J. Young, Eerdmans

The Four Major Cults, A. Hoekema, Baker

What About Tongue Speaking, A Hoeksema, Baker

V. Biographies and Autobiographies. The reading of this type of material is not done as much in our country as in England and Scotland where the Puritan fathers especially are held in high esteem.

Here I Stand (a life of Luther), R. Bainton, Abingdon Press, (Mentor, ppbks)

*The Confessions of St. Augustine, Augustine,****

The Journals of George Whitefield, G. Whitefield, Banner of Truth.

The Man God Mustered (Calvin), J. Cadier, Eerdmans

Therefore Have I Spoken, G. Hoeksema, RFPA

VI. Devotional Reading. There are times when the mind is not up to the rigorous pursuit of some doctrine, but when the soul needs the gentle leading of the Word as it has been explained by some man of God. There is an abundance of material of this nature, good when Biblical, worse than nothing when not. These can be recommended.

*Pilgrim's Progress, J. Bunyan ****

Preaching and Preachers, D. M. Lloyd-Jones, Zondervan

Rejected of Men, Rev. Hoeksema, RFPA

Ruth, the Satisfied Stranger, P. Mauro, Baker

The Mystery of Bethlehem, Rev. Hoeksema, RFPA

The Sermon on the Mount, D.M. Lloyd-Jones, Eerdmans

There is another category that ought to be included here, one that would contain books for children. We hesitate to make a listing of children's books because, aside from the Child's Story Bible by Catherine Vos (Eerdmans), there is not much that is very good. Let the parent choose wisely at the local library, and let the parent decide the merits of such children's series as Jungle Doctor Series, etc. Until the child can discern for himself, we ought to be careful on what we allow him to unleash his reading appetite.

* The Bookstore Manager, Prot. Ref. Seminary, 1145 Franklin S.E., Grand Rapids, MI, 49507 may also be contacted for many books at various discounts.

** Out of print: used copies available.

***By various publishers: paperbacks available.

MUSIC XV

Dear Young People,

In the last forum article I was showing you that the Psalms of the Old Testament Psalter speak of all the work of Christ that he performed while on earth. I mentioned a few of these Psalms; I could point you to more: Psalm 110, for example. Our Psalter version in verse 1 goes like this:

*The Lord unto His Christ hath said,
In glory I enthrone Thee
Till all Thy foes in triumph led,
Their sovereign King shall own
Thee.
From Zion shall Jehovah send
Thy scepter, till before Thee
bend
The knees of proud rebellion. (Psalter
number 302.)*

You should read the other two verses as well.

I might add as well that here too we have an instance of singing the Psalms with understanding, and the need to work at this. There is a line in the verse, which reads: “Their sovereign King shall own Thee.” The problem lies with the word “own”, and we have to realize that this word “own” means here, “admit” or “confess.” We ourselves use the word “own” in that sense, when we say, when someone charges a group with doing wrong and they know that they were the ones that did it, they admit their fault by saying “We own up to it.”

Another Psalm is Psalm 89, in which God promises David a son who will sit on David’s throne forever. It is a beautiful Psalm and, incidentally, proves the unconditionality of God’s covenant of grace in Jesus Christ. I will not quote the verses here, but you can read them for yourself. They are verses 1-6 of Psalter number 243.

Another Psalm is Psalm 45, a versification of which you may find in Psalter numbers 124 and 125. In this Psalm the Psalmist begins a thought that Paul later develops in Ephesians 5 where he describes marriage as a

picture of Christ and his church united in the marriage of God’s covenant. Psalter 124 speaks of the glory of the Bridegroom, as the title indicates, “The Royal Majesty of Christ,” and Psalter number 125 speaks of the church as the bride of Christ, again as the title indicates.

So many, many Psalms speak directly of Christ’s work and prophesy of the great salvation Christ brought by means of His work.

I want to speak of another aspect of the Psalms that make them important for the church to sing, a point that I made only in passing in an earlier letter. The church is singing these songs; we must not forget that. And, as we noticed, the church is singing about many things. It is singing loudly and joyfully of all the great work Christ has done for His church. It is singing of what great works God has done in creation and providence: Psalter numbers 401 – 404; and how God ought to ought to be praised for all his works Psalter numbers 407 – 413. We sing in the Psalters to call our fellow saints, all the angels in heaven, and even the creation itself to join us in praising God; Psalters 411 – 413.

The apostle in his epistle to the Colossians speaks of admonishing each other in our singing (Col. 3:16), something important for us to do. Psalter number 262 speaks this kind of language. And so there are many different kinds of Psalms.

But what I want to begin to discuss with you now is how these Psalms are spiritual biographies of you and me. While reading the Psalms a few weeks ago, my wife said to me, “I can always find myself in the Psalms.” What she meant was this, “In whatever mood I am in and whatever problems I face, there is a Psalm that expresses exactly how I feel.” How true!

But there is an important reason for this. I have insisted before and I insist again that every Psalm is really Christ speaking. I do not mean only those Psalms that directly predict some aspects of Christ’s work, but I mean, every single Psalm is Christ singing in the Psalm.

That means two things. It means, of course, first of all that Christ through his Spirit inspired the Psalms, so that

they are infallible, that is, without error. But it means in the second place, that Christ is singing about himself and telling us about himself in all his lowly birth, suffering, death, resurrection, exaltation, and his coming again at the end of the world.

Now, put that together with the fact that every Psalm is a kind of spiritual biography of every child of God. What does that mean? It seems to me to be pretty obvious that that means that Christ and his people are singing the Psalms together.

But it is not really Christ and his people singing the Psalms together, as much as it is Christ singing **in** us and **through** us.

It is at this point that I must admit that I find things a bit difficult to explain. But what I mean is that the Psalms express our spiritual biography only because we are his possession and are united to him so that we are one with him. We are so much one with him that what Christ suffered while on this earth, we suffer; the very same things in the very same way, so that Christ is, so to speak, living in us in such a way that everything he experienced in his life, we experience in our lives. And we experience these things for one reason only: we belong to Christ and are in him, and he makes us his possession and lives in us.

While I want to be a little more specific by demonstrating this from the Psalms, let me just point to the first verse of Psalm 22; “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” We all know that Christ spoke that in his fourth cross word. But we sing the same thing and mean by singing it: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken **me**?” We are forsaken of God sometimes in the same way Christ was forsaken; it is a dreadful thing, but it is true.

Yet, we are forsaken of God along with Christ, because we belong to Christ, because Christ sang this for himself, and is now singing it in and through us as a part of our experience.

But because Christ’s abandonment by God was necessary for Christ to accomplish salvation for us, it is also necessary for us to experience such abandonment so that we can be saved. Abandonment so as to be made glorious! It was for Christ; it is for us. Why? Because we belong to Christ and

Christ sings in us and through us of his abandonment, for his abandonment was his and our salvation, and our abandonment is the only way to heaven for us.

I hope you can understand what I am trying to say. Will you think about it? And ponder it? And read the Psalms this way? And maybe next time I write, I can make it a little clearer.

With our love in Christ, *Prof*

MUSIC XVI

Dear Young People,

I was explaining in the last letter that one of the reasons we should sing Psalms in our worship is because they are our spiritual biography. They are our spiritual biography, because they are the biography of our Lord Jesus Christ during the years he was on earth, when he suffered for our sins, and now in heaven where he sits at God’s right hand.

So, the strange and yet wonderful part of it is that when we sing the Psalms, Christ is singing in us and through us by his Holy Spirit. Christ is recounting his own life to us, and Christ is telling us that these experiences in our lives were really his experiences. “I went through these experiences for you, Christ says; and now I want you to go through the same experiences, because that is the way I am going to save you – through all these experiences that I went through. And so when we sing together of our mutual experiences, then you know that you and I are together and will be together forever in heaven.”

This union of Christ and his people is what the Bible means when it talks about Christ in us and we in Christ. It is what the Bible means when it says that Christ and his people are one. It is like a duet in which Christ, the bridegroom, sings with his bride to God – who is the Father of us both.

In a way, we can even say that Christ’s whole life on earth, and now in heaven, is repeated in us in our sin, our deliverance from sin, our salvation, our struggle with sin, our final victory, and our life with God in heaven.

Let me get back to what I mentioned toward the end of the last letter I wrote

to you. I was speaking of Christ’s abandonment by God when he suffered on the cross and cried out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” To be forsaken by God is to be abandoned by him. Christ was forsaken by God, because he was made guilty for our sins and he bore all our sins in his own body. Our sins deserve hell. Christ had to go to hell because our sins were his sins.

God’s abandonment of Christ was a dreadful thing for Christ. I think it is too dreadful for us to understand it fully, but there are a few hints in Scripture that give us a peek behind the veil of Christ’s suffering.

For one thing, Christ was the one singing in Psalm 63:

*The lovingkindness of my God
Is more than life to me. (Psalter 163,
verse 2).*

When Christ sang that, he meant exactly what it says: He would rather die than lose the lovingkindness of his God. He did lose it on the cross. He knew he would, because he cried out in great agony: “Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I into this hour. Father, glorify thy name” (John 12:27-28).

When Jesus was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, though he wanted God’s will to be done and not his own, he prayed, “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.” So great was his agony that his sweat was drops of blood – literally. Blood vessels broke and the blood came out his pores and streaked his face. The agony was the dread of being forsaken by his God.

We have something that is a weak figure of it in our relation to our fathers when we were children. If we loved our father and had done something wrong that displeased our father, the punishment he gave us was unendurable. We could not bear the punishment very well, not because it hurt us, but because we could not stand our father to be angry with us. Did he still love us? Had we forfeited that love? Were we still his children? Would he forgive us? Perhaps we quietly crept out of our rooms to which we had been sent, hesitantly to

come up behind Father where he was sitting; and then touched his arm and stammered out the words: “Father, do you still love me?”

The thought that our father might not love us was the worst of the punishment, especially if he was very angry.

That is the way it was with Christ – only a thousand times greater. All Christ knew on the cross was his Father’s anger and fury against him. It engulfed him in the cross’s darkest hour. It swallowed him up and pushed out of him the agonizing cry, “Why? Do you still love me? I can’t find any love in all this terrible darkness of thy wrath.”

We experience that same abandonment – according to the Psalms.

We must be careful here. We must not get the proud notion in our heads that our suffering is paying for our sins. We can never pay for even the smallest of our sins. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that our sufferings pay for our sins. That is why we need to go to purgatory after we die, because we do not suffer enough in this life to pay for our sins, so we have to suffer after we die to pay what we did not pay here on earth.

But the fact is that if we were to suffer for our sins, we would have to go to hell. And even one sin is enough to send us into hell forever and ever. But Christ paid for all our sins.

Yet we can experience, says the Psalmist, that abandonment that Christ endured. It is certainly true that when we walk in the ways of God’s commandments, we know his favor and love. We have fellowship with God. But when we walk in the ways of sin, whether that sin be indifference to and disinterest in spiritual things, or whether that sin be an overt sin of theft or hatred or fornication, we lose that favor of God and know only his wrath.

Maybe at the time we are living in sin, we do not care that God is angry. But that is only because we do not love him. If we do not care when our father here on earth punishes us – if we boast to our friends that our father cannot do anything to us that hurts – if we sneer about father’s punishment – the reason is that we do not love our father and we do not care whether he loves us. But if we love our father, as Christ loved his

father, then his anger with us makes us feel very bad, and we become afraid.

We are abandoned, so it seems, by our heavenly Father, and we can't stand that. But we know he has a right to be angry. And so we wonder if he still loves us,

Anger, you know is not incompatible with love. Hatred is. Hatred is the opposite of love. If God hates someone, he does not love that person. But a father may be angry with his daughter and still love her. He may and does, in fact, punish his daughter, because he loves her. If God was not angry with us it would only be because he doesn't care enough about us to teach us what is right and what is wrong.

But when he is angry with us, we do not know his love. Although love may be hiding behind anger, we can't see it. And so it is in our relation to God: we do not know his love and we want his love very much.

Many years ago I went to see a young man from the church, because he was not coming to church and was living wickedly. He was drinking too much; he was dating unbelieving girls; he was partying, and all the rest. When I talked with him, he was defiant, cocky and defensive of his life. I said to him, "Dave," for that was his name, "if you keep living the way you are now, you will go to hell." His response was, "I know it, and I don't care."

Later the Lord was merciful to him and brought him to confession of sin. It was almost, according to our thinking, too late. He had gotten some unbelieving girl pregnant and they had to get married because of it. But he was truly repentant; and he frequently came to see me after that, because he wanted help to establish a Christian home – something difficult to do with an unbelieving wife. At any rate, I said to him once: "Dave, do you remember what conversation we had when I told you that if you continued in your life of sin? And do you remember what you said to me in response?" He sadly nodded his head to indicate that he remembered all too well. I asked him, "What did you feel in your heart when you, in such a cocky way, told me you didn't care?" He said to me, "I was so afraid and scared that I just about went to pieces."

When God is angry, it is a dreadful thing.

That anger of God is like being abandoned by him.

This is why the Psalmist can also sing Psalm 22:1. This is why there are so many Psalms in which the Psalmist cries out such things as "Why art thou so far from me?" or, "Why dost thou not answer my prayers?" or, "Come quickly to my rescue." There is one Psalm in which David even says to the Lord, "It seems like thou art asleep or on a far journey, for my cries go unanswered." (I am not going to give you examples of these Psalms, because I want you to read the Psalms and look them up yourself.)

Those are dreadful times, but God uses these times to show us how awful our sins are, and through them he drives us back to him. He drives us back to him, because if we love him, we cannot stand not to know his love for us.

This spiritual frame of mind is exactly how we must come to God in worship on the Lord's Day. To sing these Psalms helps us. You won't find such things in hymns.

With love in the Lord, *Prof*

MUSIC XVII

Dear Young People,

A short time ago I was sitting in devotions in Seminary – The Seminary has devotions every day of class and chapel on Wednesday. During devotion one of the students reads a part of Scripture and leads the students and professors in prayer. On Wednesday, during chapel, in addition to singing and prayer, either a professor or a local minister from our denomination gives a short meditation on some Scripture passage. Because I usually work in my Seminary office a couple of times a week, I take advantage of these devotional periods during the day.

A short time ago one of the students read Psalm 56 and we sang the versification of the Psalm in our Psalter. Because I am convinced that the Psalms are a spiritual biography of every Christian in the Christian's union with Christ, I listened carefully to the

words of the Psalm to see how they applied both to Christ and to me – or any child of God. Let me just briefly go through the Psalm to demonstrate how this all worked out in my mind. I will take the Psalm verse by verse.

But notice, first of all, the heading of the Psalm: "To the chief musician upon Jonath – elem – rechokim, Michtam of David, when the Philistines took him in Gath." While these headings are not inspired by the Holy Spirit, they are very old and are usually accurate. While no commentator knows exactly what the large word means (and similar words in other Psalms), all agree that a "Michtam" is a Psalm of remembrance. That is, it is a Psalm of such importance that it is intended to be used to remind Israel of some great event in the Psalmist's life and, prophetically, in Christ's life.

Further, this introduction was written for the chief musician; that is, it was written for the man who was in charge of the music that was played and sung in the temple during worship.

Finally, the historical occasion for this Psalm is "when the Philistines took him [David] in Gath." David, out of fear of Saul who was hunting him to kill him, because Saul knew David was destined to be Israel's king, had fled to the Philistines to find a safe place to hide. But the Philistines were bitter enemies of Israel and captured David. When David was brought before the king, David feigned madness; and because the king was superstitiously terrified by madmen, he ordered David to be driven out of the land. You may find the story in I Samuel 21:10-15.

There is one more point about this Psalm and about more of the Psalms that speak of the enemies of the Psalmists and of the nation of Israel. They are the enemies of the people of God, and are therefore not only enemies from foreign nations (Egypt, Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Syria) but also spiritual enemies who threaten to destroy God's people. In the new dispensation, they are the well-known triumvirate: the world, the devil and his hosts, our own sinful nature. Now, let us look at the Psalm.

Be merciful unto me, O God: for man would swallow me up; he fighting daily oppresseth me.

Historically, this is David's prayer

when he found himself in the clutches of Achish, the king of Gath. He knew he was destined to be king of Israel. He seeks the mercy of God: a mercy, which he desires to deliver him from almost certain death; but also a mercy because of his sin, for his flight to Gath was sinful: he did not trust in God to take care of him in Palestine; he fled to the enemy. He brought the danger on himself

Prophetically this refers to Christ who is the one great King destined to rule over the everlasting kingdom of heaven; but now in the hands of those determined to destroy him, Christ too pleads for God's mercy – partly because he seeks deliverance from his enemies, but partly also because he bears the sins of his people and endures the terrible wrath of God.

We sing in fellowship with Christ, for our enemies seek to destroy us through persecution, but also the devil and his demons are intent on destroying us spiritually so that we remain in his clutches even in hell.

Mine enemies would daily swallow me up, for they be many that fight against me, O thou Most High.

It is not difficult to see how this is a historical fact for the Psalmist. The whole nation of Philistia was against him to destroy him. But let us not forget: he carried Christ in his loins, for he was a father of Christ. The devil was intent on preventing Christ from coming as well as to destroy Israel's king. And so he turns to God to remind God to take note of his terrible plight.

Christ is speaking prophetically also, because everyone was his enemy. Even we are, apart from God's grace, Christ's enemies. Not only were the Jews his enemies, but also Pilate, Herod, the people and Satan and his demons who roamed about in Jerusalem doing what they could to destroy Christ. Christ also implores God to take note of all these enemies.

Because we belong to Christ, we beseech God to take note of our many enemies: Satan and his devils, the wicked world that hates Christ and us, and our own sinful nature against which we have to do battle every moment – for all seek our destruction. When we make this prayer our own, it is almost as if we are saying: Lord take note of

our enemies – and of how I am my own worst enemy, for sin is always present with me. These enemies we face are cruel, relentless and a far greater danger to us than we realize. We sail blithely along as if we are in no danger, but the danger is great and very real.

What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee. In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me.

What a marvelous expression of David's complete trust in God. He confesses his own fear of the cruelty of his enemies, but his fear melts away when he thinks of his God. He also confesses that he believes for himself the comfort of the scriptures, (part of which had already been written by this time) and he praises them.

We ought not to be reluctant to say that Christ was also afraid. The Scriptures themselves tell us that he was like us in all things, including our temptations, except for our sin. And his bloody sweat in Gethsemane can be understood only by remembering Christ's fear of his calling to bear the wrath of his Father in heaven. But his trust was also in his God who had said, prophetically in the Scriptures, that he would take care of his own Son and deliver him.

Who of us is not frightened? Not only by evil men, but by Satan and his great power, so much greater than ours. And who would deny that sometimes we are afraid of ourselves – and our great capacity to commit awful sins. But God's word speaks of our deliverance and this calms our frightened spirits.

Every day they wrest my words: all their thoughts are against me for evil. They gather themselves together, they hide themselves, they mark my steps, when they wait for my soul. Shall they escape by iniquity? In thine anger cast down the people, O God.

How clearly this describes David's reason for fear: not only fear of physical harm that might come to him, but his fear of the powers of hell also who are dogging him every moment of his life and are waiting for his soul. They desire to destroy him spiritually. Helpless in his own strength, he pleads with God to "cast them down."

We may have some difficulty in seeing how Christ could be frightened by the devil. But do not forget that the devil

was constantly tempting him to leave the way of obedience (Matt. 4:1-11, Matt. 16:21-23). And once again I remind you that Christ was tempted in all point in which we are tempted (Heb. 4:15).

How easily can this be applied to ourselves. We may not always be aware of how the wicked wrest our words, lie in wait for us, mark our steps and wait for our soul, but this is partly because the world is still too preoccupied with its own problems to give full attention to the church; and partly, sad to say, because, in our desire to be looked upon with favour by the world (and the departing church), we compromise our faith. But when we come to our senses, we know the need to pray "Thy kingdom come," a prayer that asks for judgments upon the wicked.

Thou tellest (countest) my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?

The Psalmist makes a remarkable statement with this expression. Speaking of his wanderings, he confesses that he suffers grievously. But he is assured that God puts his tears in his bottle; that is, God preserves them for eternity. God counts each tear David sheds, and each tear, brought about by suffering, is cherished and preserved by God. But this is true, says the Psalmist, because all this suffering is determined by God himself and comes at God's will.

Christ can surely say this, first through David and then in his own life. God remembers Christ's sufferings into eternity, because they are the sufferings that secured the salvation of God's elect people. And so it had been ordained from all eternity.

But because Christ's sufferings are our sufferings as we fill the cup of his sufferings in our own lives, God cherishes and preserves every tear that creeps down our cheeks and finds delight in it, for our tears are brought about by suffering for Christ's sake. And as we make this confession our own, we too confess that no sufferings come by chance, but are all written in God's book.

When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies turn back: this I know; for God is for me. In God will I praise his word: in the LORD will I praise his

word. In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me. Thy vows are upon me, O God: I will render praises unto thee. For thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?

David is clearly praising God for his deliverance from his enemies. But strikingly, he also ends with a request that God preserve him from falling in future, that he may go to heaven. That is significant, for David confesses that it was his own sin that brought him into such danger.

It is not entirely clear how this refers to Christ, but it surely means, among other things, that Christ's prayer is also one of thanksgiving that his Father brought him up out of the grave and exalted him in the highest heavens – as God had promised. And perhaps Christ is also praying that the wonderful things he accomplished in his work of suffering and dying may endure for his people into all eternity.

But surely we who belong to Christ rejoice at our deliverance from troubles we have brought upon ourselves; by our own sin, even our sin in Adam. But we who have found deliverance from God

and praise his glorious name, cannot help but pray that God will keep our feet from falling that we may go to heaven. Sin becomes a great burden and we long for full deliverance.

This, briefly shows how we must read, study and sing the Psalms. No wonder that the apostle Paul urges us to sing with our understanding. I hope you see a little of how beautiful the singing of the Psalms can be.

With love in the Lord, *Prof*

Are your priorities what they ought to be?

>> Noelene Wong

Where do your priorities lie? Who do you live for? Where does God stand in your life? Those are not my questions to you. Those are God's questions to you and to me!

The principle of putting God first

Only when renewed in heart and mind, and transformed by the sovereign power of God, does one seek to put God first in his life. It is a fruit of a regenerated child of God. We sinners, by nature, are totally depraved. In the Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 2, Question and Answer 5, it says "for I am prone by nature to hate God and my neighbour." Matthew 22:37-40 tells us that it is our character that we can only do what is contrary to God's law. That is the only thing that we are capable of doing. We do not and cannot keep His law perfectly. Our whole being is entirely inclined to hate God and our neighbour. It is natural for us to be proud and seek our own good above anything else. Genesis 6:5 states, "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Hence it is only by the almighty work of God that a sinner is transformed into a child of God who desires to keep God's law.

What motivates a child of God to put God first in his life is the knowledge of the covenant between his Father and himself. By the working of the Holy

Spirit, he understands, loves and lives out the knowledge that he is a child of God. He knows how desperately he is in need of Christ and His blood. He understands what his Father has accomplished for him and knows of the eternal life promised to him one day. He is astonished by the gift of adoption. He is overwhelmed that the Almighty Creator has chosen him unconditionally. Are you?

Knowing that he was chosen unto adoption by God even though he was totally depraved, he rejoices. Moreover, since Christ's death on the cross is to destroy sin and death, he should not serve sin; he should not serve his previous master. Romans 6:6 states, "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." Also, "Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin (separate from sin), but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts

thereof." (Ro 6:9-12) Therefore knowing what the Lord commands him to do, he does it by faith. He lives for his God; not for himself. For God has bought him with His Son's most precious blood. He no longer is in subjection to Satan, but unto God. In thankfulness to His Father, he willingly obeys what the Lord requires of him, for his only goal in life is that His Father's Name is glorified.

The sin of being selfish and putting self first

Do you think that God is pleased when you live for yourself? Living as though you are your own master, doing as you please and as if God serves you. The LORD condemns it if we serve ourselves and not Him. He will not suffer His glory to be stolen.

"For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." Galatians 6:10

Let us consider the sin of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:1-6. "Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree

of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat." What made them fall into Satan's trap? 1. The lust of the eye – the fruit was pleasant to the eye. 2. The lust of the flesh – they wanted to be wise. 3. The pride of life – they wanted to be as gods, knowing good and evil. What happened after that? Verses 7 to 24 tell us that they could not stand before God for they saw their fallen, depraved nature and were ashamed. The ground was cursed and they were sent out from the Garden of Eden. Sin entered into the world.

Also, in Genesis 11, the people put themselves before God when they planned to build the tower of Babel. God had commanded them to disperse, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth."(Gen 9:1). However, in defiance and sinful pride, they came together, united themselves to resolve to build the tower. They wanted it to be the metropolis of their kingdom and the centre of their unity. Foolishly, they designed an affront to God Himself; they desired to build a tower whose top might reach heaven. It was a challenge to God. They imagined to come near to God, not in holiness but in height, to be like the Most High. They wanted to make a name for themselves. They wanted to be recognized as mighty and capable men who built such a great tower. They were proud and forgot their place in the sight of God. They out-rightly denied God's prerogative to be the universal monarch, the King of all kings and Lord of all lords. In the end, God made them to speak in many languages such that they could not understand each other, and caused them to be scattered abroad (Genesis 11:6-8).

Note here that it is very unintelligent for us, worms of the earth (Mic 7:17), to

defy God and provoke God to jealousy. Are we stronger than He? Proverbs 21:4 states, "An high look, and a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked, is sin."

Remember that every time we sin, we say by that act that we know better than God does as to what is good and what is evil for us. We say that we are above God and need not bow down before Him and His will. We say that every time we sin. What right do we have to say that to the only Holy and Wise One? Do repent, if you have said that. I confess that I have said that umpteen times. But I know, by faith, that "Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 5:20-21) Thanks be to God!

Trusting God for all things and trusting Him to help us do His will no matter how hard it is

It is hard to set our priorities right and to follow through with them. We are always reminded of our sinful nature when we fail. Day by day I fail; we all fail. But do we just stop there? Shall we say that as children of God we have no hope? Should we just swing our hands up in despair and give up? "For thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?" (Ps 56:13) If God has saved you from all your sins, will He forget to preserve you to the very end? Have you forgotten that you are a child of God? Or have you forgotten who God really is?

Isaiah 40:25-31 reads, "To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth. Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power

to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

Philippians 4:13 tells us, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." We have power from the cross. So, we must not give up. As children of God, we all feel tremendously distressed at times when we cannot do anything right in God's sight. Though we try many times, we still fail. In times like this, we should ask ourselves, Why are we so weak when we have divine strength to flee to? Why are we troubled when the LORD's own peace is ours? Look up to Jehovah for strength. There is none in us sinful men. He is the only source of strength and hope that we, by faith, may say that we can do it. Do not murmur and say that you cannot; do not doubt God's omnipotence! It is not a matter of incapability now, but a matter of willingness to do it (Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day Question and Answer 9).

We read in Philippians 2:12-13, "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

May the Lord grant us grace to say, "Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men."(Mk 8:33) May we say this boldly, whenever he tempts us to sin against the Almighty.

Proverbs 15:29 "The LORD is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous."

Keep His holy law before you, looking forward to the day when you will keep it perfectly. Be patient and press on for the glory of our Heavenly Father!

The Afscheiders: Too Young?

» Brother Joshua D. Engelsma

So far we have seen God's work of grace in the lives of five young church fathers: Timothy, Athanasius, John Calvin, Zacharias Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus. Now, there is one more tale that must be told. And this tale might very well be the most outstanding of all. This is the story of the Afscheiding, the Reformation that took place in the Netherlands beginning in the year 1834. This is especially the story of the wonder of God's grace through six young men who led this Reformation.

The situation in the Reformed Church in the Netherlands in 1834 was bad. Real bad. In name this was the church of the great Protestant Reformation and that "most holy synod," the Synod of Dordt (1618-19), but in actuality there was not even the slightest resemblance. In the two hundred years between the Synod of Dordt and 1834, the church had become lazy in doctrine and in discipline, and she had become thoroughly liberal and apostate. This was all solidified in 1816 by the king of the Netherlands, William I. William replaced the Church Order of Dordt with a new order that gave him power in the church. He put the church under the control of the Dutch government and made all appointments to the church's broader gatherings. He also had the Formula of Subscription rewritten so that the Reformed Confessions, especially the Canons of Dordt, would only have to be adhered to if the ministers judged them to be faithful to the Bible. For example, if a man cooked up the nonsensical notion that the doctrine of election and reprobation taught in the Canons was not found in the Bible, he could preach against that doctrine and still be considered a faithful Reformed minister.

Things were bad indeed!

The time was ripe for reformation.

It was then that God began to raise up the man that would spark this Reformation: Hendrik de Cock. De Cock attended the Reformed seminary in Groningen and was ordained into the ministry in the Reformed Church in 1523. It is indicative of how bad things were in the Church that De Cock became a Reformed minister without ever reading the Three Forms of Unity or John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. But he did. After his

ordination, De Cock served two different congregations before accepting the call to serve the congregation in the city of Ulrum in 1829.

It was here in Ulrum that God worked a powerful change in the life of this liberal minister. In God's providence, de Cock came across the *Institutes* in a fellow pastor's study and read it vociferously, and he also read the Canons of Dordt. He was also influenced by one of his simple yet faithful parishioners, a man by the name of Klaas Kuipenga. Kuipenga told de Cock these memorable words: "If I must add even one sigh to my salvation, then I would be eternally lost." God used all these things to work a mighty change in de Cock, and soon his congregation noticed a change in his preaching. He preached the sovereignty of God's grace in salvation and all the other grand truths set forth in the Reformed Confessions. Soon hundreds of spiritually-starved saints were flocking across the Dutch countryside to Ulrum to hear the pure gospel of grace preached.

De Cock's preaching did not go unnoticed by the authorities for very long. The local government officials were very nervous about so many people gathering in the church Sunday after Sunday. The church officials were upset too, especially because de Cock was preaching against the heresies that had overtaken the church. What finally touched them off was de Cock's practice of baptizing infants of those who were not members of his church and his outright refusal to sing hymns because of his firm conviction that they brought Arminianism into the church. De Cock was eventually suspended from office, and the broader church assemblies began the process of deposing him from the ministry altogether.

De Cock humbly submitted to his suspension for over a year. During this time he was not allowed to preach to his congregation but had to sit quietly and watch while liberal ministers occupied his pulpit and filled the people with their lies. When Hendrik P. Scholte, a minister who was sympathetic to de Cock, came to supply Ulrum's pulpit on Sunday, October 12, 1834, he was not allowed to preach in the church. A service was held in a nearby field instead, but this was the breaking point. De Cock could keep silent no longer. On Monday,

By using these young men, God's Name was the more magnified and glorified. He used the weakest of means to fulfill his purpose.

October 13, 1834, de Cock and his consistory signed an "Act of Secession or Return," separating themselves from the apostate state church and forming again a true, instituted church of Christ. Prof. Hanko captured the humble beginnings of this reformation well:

The reformation of 1834 in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands began in a dark and smoke-filled consistory room of a country church of no importance where five men gathered to sign a single sheet of paper to protest what had happened to their minister. The next day the majority of the congregation in Ulrum signed the document. The Reformation was now officially underway.

At first, de Cock and the congregation at Ulrum were alone, but it did not stay that way very long. Scholte was the next to follow, only two weeks later. Scholte had been educated at the bastion of liberalism, the university at Leiden. He was well aware of the heresies taught by his professors and often skipped their lectures. While at Leiden, he gathered around him a group of spiritually-minded students which became known as the "Scholte Club." Together they learned the Reformed faith and encouraged each other to remain faithful to it. In the Club were all the future leaders of the Afschiding: Antony Brummelkamp, Simon van Velzen, Albertus C. Van Raalte, and Georg Frans Gezelle Meerburg. All of these men except Van Raalte were ordained as ministers in the state church. By 1835, they had all left and joined de Cock.

Each of the members of the Scholte Club was different. Scholte was the unquestioned leader of the group and was the first to join with de Cock. But he was very independent and taught erroneous views on certain points which led to his deposition from the Afscheiding churches in 1840. Scholte eventually immigrated to America and set up a colony in Pella, Iowa. The group remained fiercely independent and died

out with their leader.

Brummelkamp was a more moderate man who was always trying to keep the peace between the reformers. He was also one of the ones who worked with the state church to gain acceptance for the Afscheiders. He was one of the first professors appointed to the Afscheiders' new seminary in Kampen, but it was largely due to him that the error of the well-meant offer of the gospel entered these churches.

Meerburg was another peace-loving man, so much so that he has been called "the Melancthon of the Secession," after the peace-at-all-costs friend of Luther, Philip Melancthon. Meerburg's influence was limited because he died already in 1855.

Van Raalte was never ordained in the state church, but he was examined and approved by the first synod of the Afscheiders held in 1836. Van Raalte eventually left the Netherlands with a large group of followers and set up a colony in Holland, Michigan. He played an important role in the history of the Protestant Reformed Churches and is worthy of special note.

Van Velzen was by far the most orthodox of the group. When de Cock died in 1842, van Velzen became the unquestioned leader of the Seceders. He was the greatest theologian of the reformation and maintained an unconditional covenant and the sovereignty of God's grace in salvation. Two interesting facts about van Velzen: first, he and Brummelkamp and Van Raalte were all married to sisters from the de Moen family and therefore were brothers-in-law; second, at eighty-three years of age he presided at the synod of 1892 when the Afscheiders and Abraham Kuyper's Doleantie merged into one denomination.

Together, these men brought God's spiritually-starved people out of the corrupt state church and filled their

souls with the bread and water of life. They preached the gospel. They rejected hymns. They refused to allow the government to interfere in the church. They restored the precious heritage that is the Reformed confessions. In so doing they were kicked out of the church where they were born and raised. They were mocked and ridiculed by their former colleagues. They were heavily fined, beaten, and even imprisoned, all for the sake of the truth. Yet they refused to give in. They knew the people needed to hear the comforting gospel of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. It was truly an amazing work of God in these men!

This work of God is even more magnified when we consider how old these men were. As one historian wrote,

Viewed from a historical distance, they tend to be pictured as men with long white beards. The assumption that they were venerable fathers is enhanced by the fact that their movement was a conscious return to long-cherished confessions and traditions. It may well come as a surprise, then, to learn that the average age of these six leaders at the time of the secession was twenty-seven years.

None of these reformers was an old man. De Cock was the oldest of the group, and in 1834 he had just reached the ripe old age of 33. Scholte was the next oldest at 29. Meerburg was 28; van Velzen was 25. And Brummelkamp and Van Raalte were only 23. These men could hardly grow a beard much less sport a "long white beard"!

These men were young. Very young. Too young, if judged without faith. Today, they would just be entering seminary, not leading a reformation. But God was pleased to use these weak means. By using these young men, God's Name was the more magnified and glorified. He used the weakest of means to fulfill his purpose. What a wonder he performed in The Netherlands in 1834!

Judging: The Christian's Duty

We are often caught in sticky situations where we are called to make a judgement whether the person has done right or wrong.

>> Ezra Tan

We are often caught in sticky situations where we are called to make a judgement whether the person has done right or wrong. Verses in Matthew 7 will often pop out in our minds. “Judge not, that ye be not judged” and “why beholdest thou the mote that is in thr brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in your eye?” Does this mean that a Christian is not to judge another? Or that we are allowed to tolerate a brethren’s sin? Certainly not. Our duty to God is to love and honour Him, as well as to love our beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, judging them in love and also being conscious that God our Father is the righteous Judge.

The view of tolerance is godless, dangerous and unscriptural. God calls the church to live antithetically, which means living apart from the world. The church is to declare sin as sin and point out the lies of Satan and his hordes. The church also disciplines those who continue to live in sin. If a church fails to live antithetically, it is no different from the world and is no longer a church of God.

The Word of God clearly forbids murder (Exodus 20:13). However, society has been slowly accepting abortion and euthanasia, despite condemning cold-blooded murders. All are the killing of God’s creation, and are abominations to Him. In Singapore, the government has introduced legalised gambling by building two casinos and society has slowly accepted it. Can we Christians accept this? What does the Word of God say? In Exodus 20:17, God commands His people not to covet. This means Christians must not support casinos as they promote covetousness.

These inconsistencies and contradictions show that the world does not regard God’s Word as the only standard of right and wrong. They do what they think is right in their own eyes. Men being in total depravity (the state of being incapable of doing any good) do not want God to tell them what

to do but want to be their own judge.

We will examine 3 Bible passages to show that judging is indeed a Christian’s duty.

Matthew 7:1 This passage is most often quoted to support the idea of tolerance. It is clear here that Jesus forbids judging. But does Jesus forbid all judging? Or is it a certain type of judging? Verse one does not give us the answer but the whole context from Matthew 7:1-5 does.

Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother’s eye.

Jesus instructs the Jews not to judge. He tells them the reason why they must not judge: the standard they use to judge others will be also used to judge them. They must not ignore their own sins while condemning the sins of others. To do so is to judge with two standards, to judge hypocritically. Jesus was telling them, “Can you be helping your brother overcome his little fault while you yourself are guilty of a great fault?”

We can take note that the sins of both the person and the brother are the same. First, in nature; as both are pieces of wood in the eye. Second, both were continuing in sin since the wood was still in their eyes. The only difference was the size of their faults. One was small and the other big. One whose sin is great and yet condemns another whose sin is smaller is a hypocrite! In our context it can be a woman who is aborting an innocent

foetus condemning a man who murdered another out of revenge.

Hence, Matthew 7:1, taken in its context, does not forbid all kinds of judging and intolerance but only hypocritical judging and intolerance. The verse requires that we repent of our own sins and that we condemn and cast away both of our sins as seen in verse 5. Jesus commands genuine, not hypocritical, intolerance of sin that our brother commits.

John 8:7-11 So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.

Evaluating John 8:7 and 11 is also important. The context is the story of the woman who was caught in the act of adultery and was brought to Jesus by the scribes and Pharisees. In verse 7, Jesus says to the scribes and Pharisees, “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.” In verse 11, He speaks to the woman, “Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.” The advocates of tolerance use these words to argue that one should not condemn others, because he is no better than they.

Although we will explain what it means to judge in more detail later, understand for now that when one judges, he gives a verdict: guilty or innocent. After one is judged, he is sentenced: the guilty person is condemned (sentenced to punishment) and the innocent is set

free. The point is that judging and condemning are two distinct actions, related but not identical.

Bearing this in mind, notice that Jesus did in fact judge this woman, but He did not condemn her. By telling her, “Go, and sin no more,” Jesus indicates that she did sin. In itself, the Pharisees' accusation was correct, and Jesus judged sin to be sin. This shows intolerance of the sinful action! Following Jesus' example, we must tell sinners to show evidence of genuine repentance by no longer committing sin.

While Jesus did judge the woman, He did not condemn her. She could go free; she would not be put to death. The gospel for penitent sinners is: “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Ro 8:1). This message Jesus gives the woman: Jesus would Himself be condemned for her! He would bear her punishment that she might go free!

Jesus' answer to the Pharisees exposes their hypocritical judgment in the matter. (Their primary purpose, of course, had nothing to do with the woman; it was to trap Jesus in His own words. Yet Jesus knew that the Pharisees prided themselves in their self-righteousness, and responded in light of this fact.) The Pharisees, Jesus reminds them, were also guilty of sin, and specifically of adultery, whether in the act or in the heart. Because they also were not free from sin, they were as worthy of death as she was. So, by wondering what judgment she ought to have received, they revealed their own hypocrisy and wrong motivation.

John 8:7 and 11 teach us how to deal with others who sin. Verse 11 teaches us that we must desire the sinner's repentance; verse 7 teaches us that we must not do so hypocritically, with wrong motives, or in an improper manner. The passage does not mean, however, that we must never hold each other accountable for our sins (that is, judge sin to be sin).

1 Corinthians 5 is an important chapter as regards the duty of judging. In verse 3, Paul states under the inspiration of the Spirit that he has passed judgment on a member of the church in Corinth who was living in the sin of fornication.

His judgment was “to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” This is a bold judgment on his part.

Second, in verses 9-13, Paul reminds the saints of their duty to judge people that are within the church, as to whether or not they are obeying the law of God. Those who claim to be Christians and are members of the church, but who are also judged to be impenitently disobedient to any commandment of God’s must be excluded from the church’s fellowship. Paul, under the inspiration of the Spirit, tells the church not to tolerate impenitent sinners.

The Church is under obligation to excommunicate a member so as to remain pure and holy. It is a shameful act and only by God’s grace will the sinner be brought to repentance. In verse 13, “But Them that are without God jugeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.” The judgement is called showing that we cannot tolerate sin. It also shows the severity with which sin in the congregation must be treated.

What is judging? Judging involves two factors. First, it involves a pronouncement whether something is right or wrong. It is to be critical. In being critical, one does several things. First, he observes an action or hears an opinion of another person. Second, he evaluates what he has observed, considering the positive and negative aspects or implications of the action or opinion. Third, he reaches a conclusion and expresses an opinion regarding whether that which he has observed was good or bad.

The second main factor involved in judging is that of sentencing. If the judge finds the accused to be guilty of the crime, he sentences him to an appropriate punishment. If the judge finds the accused innocent, he lets him go free of punishment. To order the release of the one who is acquitted is also a sentence: the innocent person deserves life.

In saying that the Christian must judge, we must decide what is right and what is wrong. All Christian judgment involves such a determination. However, only in some instances will our duty to judge also involve pronouncing a sentence.

God is the ultimate judge who gives a sentence. In many instances, the Christian who judges whether another’s actions are right or wrong must leave the sentencing to God. This is because, although all of us sin and deserve of ourselves to die on account of our sins, Christ bore the sentence of death for the sins of God’s children, while He did not bear this punishment for those who are not God’s children. God will sentence to everlasting punishment those who are not His children, and to everlasting life those whom Christ has redeemed.

What must we judge? There are some things which we cannot judge. Whether or not another person is an elect, or whether or not the faith which he professes to have is genuine, is known only to God, and not revealed to us (1 Timothy 2:19). Some might object by saying that we can indeed determine whether or not the faith of another person is genuine, because we can judge by the works that that person performs; for true faith brings forth good works (James 2:18, 26), and good trees cannot bring forth bad fruit, nor bad trees good fruit (Matthew 7:18). However, in saying this, one must be sure that he is looking for fruit, not simply for fruit to a degree that not every child of God always bears it. For, while every child of God does indeed bear good fruit, it remains a fact that every child of God also gives evidence of the corruption of his sinful nature, which remains in him until death.

Because we do not know the hearts of others, we must not judge secret motives (1 Cor. 4:5). God will judge these.

We are also forbidden to judge others in things indifferent (Romans 14). Should someone feel bound by conscience to do something that I would not do, I may not judge him to be wrong, so long as his actions are not clearly contrary to God's law. Whether or not we eat, we drink, or we regard a day as holy, our choice must be motivated by faith and love for the Lord, and we must not condemn the actions of others in matters that are indifferent. In this connection, Paul says in Romans 14:13: "Let us not therefore judge one another anymore: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way." Paul's point is

that we may not condemn the practice of the Christian brother as wrong just because we would not do it that way.

Positively, we must judge whether the practices or teachings of others are in accordance with the law and Word of God.

That we must beware of false prophets has already been pointed out (Matthew 7:15). We must "believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). We must guard against those deceivers and antichrists "who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh"; and we must not receive into our houses those who teach false doctrine (2 John 7, 10). All of these texts speak of our duty to distinguish the truth from the lie. Our standard in this regard is Christ and Scripture, for Christ is the truth (John 14:6), and God's Word is truth (John 17:17). After the Christian understands clearly what truth is and what it is not, he must confess the truth and oppose the lie, as well as ally himself with other believers and separate himself from deceivers.

Our duty with regard to the actions of others is also clear. We must judge sin to be sin (1 Cor. 5: 1ff.). In this regard we follow the example of Jesus (Matt. 5:13ff.). The standard of our judgment of sin is the law of God, for Christ commands us to judge "righteous judgment" (John 7:24). Judging sin, we must also separate ourselves from those in the church who persist in their sins (1 Corinthians 5:13).

Not only must we judge the wrong teachings or sins of others, but we must also judge our own sins and wrong thinking. The warnings against hypocritical judging certainly make the necessity of doing this clear. How do our own actions measure up to God's law? How do our own ideas measure up to the teaching of Scripture? If they do not measure up, what will we do about it? Will we condemn ourselves, or continue in our sins, hold to our wrong ideas, and insist that the standard is faulty?

Whose duty is it to judge? This duty to judge falls both on individual believers and on the church as a whole. Christians indicate that we are partakers of the

anointing of Christ — that we are prophets, priests, and kings. Particularly as king, we fight against sin and Satan in this life (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 32). One aspect of the work of a king is to judge, both within and without his kingdom. Within, he judges whether or not his subjects have obeyed his laws. Without, he judges (discerns) who is the enemy, and fights the enemy. So the Christian, as king, judges sin within himself as well as outside himself to be sin, and fights against sin and Satan. The Christian, believing child of God will not hesitate to judge as wrong and speak out against the immorality which plagues our society today.

He does the same with respect to false doctrine. He judges as wrong the notion that Christ is not the only saviour. He denies that God's love will, in the end, prevail over His justice, and that every person will somehow be saved. He repudiates the notion that Jews, Mormons, Buddhists, or other religious groups, have the truth apart from Christ.

The church as a whole must also judge, through her office bearers (pastors, elders, deacons). In the preaching of God's Word by the pastors, she must set forth the truth over against the lie, the right way of living over against the wrong way. On the basis of the Word, the pastor must judge right to be right and wrong to be wrong. In the work of church discipline that the elders are called to exercise, sin is judged. A member who commits gross sin against the law of God must himself judge it to be sin, confess it, and repent of it. Elders must judge and discipline those who fail to confess their sin and who remain impenitent. The elders must also guard the pulpit by subjecting the pastor's preaching to the test of Scripture, and calling the preaching heretical if it is that. That the church must judge is evident from 1 Corinthians 5, in which Paul commands the church to judge the sinner, and if need be to remove him from her midst.

How must we judge? Though it is clear that it is our duty to judge, the question of how we judge is important. To judge by using a standard other than the law and Word of God is wrong. Using the standard of God's Word, we judge sin to be sin, knowing we are right even if society accuses us of intolerance. Our judgment will then be in accord with

God's judgment in the Judgment Day, because He will also use His law and Word as His standard of judgment.

To judge hypocritically is wrong. We ought to judge others only after examining ourselves first. This does not mean that we may not judge another for a sin that we once committed; rather, it means that we must be sure we have completely turned from our sin before we can speak to others of their sin (Matt. 7:1-5).

Sometimes, in pride, we imagine that we would never commit the sins that we judge in others. At other times we judge rashly, not having examined the evidence carefully enough to know whether or not a real sin has been committed. Or we might judge in ignorance, judging the actions or ideas of others as wrong simply because they differ from what we have always thought to be right, without evaluating whether our own thoughts are in accord with Scripture. All such judgment is wrong.

Proper judgment must be carried out in a spirit of humility, in mercy and readiness to forgive, and in accordance with God's law. It requires us to remember that we too shall stand before the judgment seat of Christ. It is also done with authority and boldness, for God calls us to do it, makes us partakers of Christ's anointing in order that we might do it, and gives us His Word as the standard by which to do it.

In conclusion, some passages of Scripture may seem to forbid judging, while others clearly require it. Studying the contexts of those that seem to forbid judging, we find that what is forbidden is not actually judging itself, but a wrong kind of judging. God hates hypocritical judging! But God loves righteous judgment on the part of His children. That God loves it is clear from the fact that He commands it, and has given His law as a standard by which to do it. It is, therefore, the Christian's duty to judge.

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Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church

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

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