

# salt shakers

joel 3:16 matthew 5:16

Issue 15 | Jul 2012

'Behold, how good  
and how pleasant  
it is for brethren to  
dwell together in unity!'  
Psalm 133:1

<b>Prof's Corner   The Implications for the Doctrine of the Covenant in Divorce and Remarriage</b>	<b>04-05</b>	<b>Salt of the Earth   Strangers and Pilgrims</b>	<b>18-19</b>
<b>Oh taste and see!   Reason for Great Joy!</b>	<b>05-07</b>	<b>Salt for Savouring   Malachi Lesson Overview 1</b>	<b>20-21</b>
<b>Fine Salt   The Lord's Supper</b>	<b>07-09</b>	<b>Coarse Salt   Our Father's Handiwork</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Rock Salt   Our God-Centred Confession</b>	<b>10-12</b>	<b>Salt for Thought   Young People's Forum</b>	<b>23-24</b>
<b>Salt for Thought   Culture Impeding the Instruction of Scripture</b>	<b>12-13</b>	<b>Salt &amp; Paper   Peace for the Troubled Heart</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Fine Salt   Marriage III</b>	<b>13-15</b>	<b>Oh taste and see!   Camp Echo, Prayer &amp; Thanksgiving</b>	<b>26-28</b>
<b>Fine Salt   Living the Single Life</b>	<b>16-17</b>		



### Dwelling together in unity

In the last Salt Shakers, Rev Smit discussed in his article "The Basis of Unity" that there can be no basis of unity in heresy, false doctrine, or a wicked way of life. But the basis upon which the church in her totality, including her unity, rests firmly and securely is Christ. This article is a follow-up of that. Building on the principles established, this editor's note hopes to discuss what our calling is towards dwelling together in unity. It also hopes to be a word fitly spoken, warning us of the things that can hinder the church from dwelling in unity.

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! Psalm 133:1

#### The Blessedness of Unity

God teaches us in His divine word that after the end of this world, the complete family of God will dwell together in unity with Him in the great consummation of the covenant of grace. God also instructs us in His wisdom that we are to now dwell in the blessedness of unity (Psalm 133). But where does this unity come from? Is it created by the labours of man? Or, is it a gift from God? This unity is only established by our Father, through Christ. This unity mentioned in the Psalm is none other than the precious covenant of grace. God establishes it with man. What was the price that had to be paid to establish this most intimate relationship between God and His people? Christ's blood.

This unity is, first of all, the church's relation to God. The bride is redeemed from her foolish and whorish ways. Washed in Christ's blood, she is now presented spotless, holy, unblameable, and unproveable. She is united to Christ, her Saviour and Groom, in blessed intimate covenant fellowship. So close is this bond between them that Christ shares His secrets with the church and no one else.

When the child of God is brought out of the darkness of pride and sinful lust into the family of God, he learns bit by bit how not to war with his neighbour but to deal peaceably with his new brothers and sisters in Christ. He follows after Christ who set the example for him.

But, outside the Covenant, man by his nature is prone to hate his neighbour. Man in his nature strives wickedly and deals deceitfully with one another. Every favour is done with a hidden motive. Man is constantly at war with and suspicious of one another. Deep down, he only cares about himself. Outside this blessed unity in the church, it is extremely lonely and comfortless. This is why those outside God's covenant are despairing and drowning in the emptiness of their souls and the godless pleasures of the world. When we unnecessarily deprive ourselves of the preaching or fellowship of the church, we subject ourselves to great spiritual danger and can grow bitter towards God and His people.

#### Blessedly Close

Just like an earthly father is pleased to see his children not just living under the same roof, but helping, engaging, being loving and gracious towards one another, similarly, when the family of God dwells together in unity, our Heavenly Father judges it good and pleasant that the fellowship must be warm and not a false or shallow one. It must be a deep and intimate fellowship of interaction and communication (Gen 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; Isa 6:8).

That tightly knit unity is divinely described as the precious and consecrating oilment that was poured on Aaron's head. That oilment gave forth a smell of sweet savour. It is also that way with unity – so confounding and beautiful, and it ascends into heaven and pleases God. This is because it is God's will that His covenant people dwell in close fellowship with one another.

The unity in the church becomes a picture pointing the saints to look forward to that great feast the family of God will have in the heavens with Christ Himself – the great consummation of the covenant of grace. That beautiful unity makes the family's sorrows lighter, and its rejoicing brighter. It is so pleasing before our heavenly Father that it is likened to triple goodness. Do we realise the great the amount of precious oilment that was poured on Aaron's head? That it flowed down his very beard? Yet more, even all the way down to the skirts of his garment! God's Son, Jesus Christ, paid with His blood and death to save and bring us into God's family. And, when we dwell together in unity, God is glorified and pleased.

#### The Family of God

What does it mean to say, "We are in the family of God"? How does that affect our church life? When Christ while ministering on earth, He was informed that His mother and brothers were calling out for Him because they were looking for Him. What was Christ's answer to the messengers?

Who is my mother, or my brethren? And he looked round about on them which sat about him, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother. Mark 3:33b-35

Look around. See the boys and girls, men and women in church? See them serving and doing the will of God? Those are your brothers! Your sisters! Your mothers! We ought not to look anywhere else for another family outside the family of God!

We, covenant keepers, must not fall into the error of thinking our responsibility is only to those who are related to us by blood. If we find ourselves thinking, "All a Christian ought to do is take care of his or her own blood family and life in

the church is secondary”, the head of the household together with the whole family will suffer spiritually. Christ shocked many with this teaching of who our brothers and sisters are. We must not be shocked. Members of CERC ought to know and heed the teaching of Christ in Mark 3:33b-35, bending their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ's command.

We must believe with all our hearts and confess with our mouths, “We, in the covenant family of God, must be serving to build up one another, according to the gifts God has given us as members of each other in the same body.” (Belgic Confession Article 28)

Jesus is our Elder Brother, and all in Christ found in your local congregation are your da jie, xiao mei, da ge and xiao di. (Older sister, younger sister, older brother, and younger brother – translation from Romanised Chinese for our fellow brothers and sisters in the United States, Ireland and Philippines.)

May God grant us the desire to obey Him and dwell together in unity. May we ignore all instigations of the devil that militate against a close family of God, and rid ourselves of all self-elevation and pride, but rather be filled with humility.

### **Dwelling is Living**

Imagine two best friends, united in the greatest beliefs and truths, but they do not speak, call or fellowship with each other. They isolate themselves spiritually, and keep issues of the heart to themselves. One would surely wonder if such a friendship is only in name.

God teaches us that unity is not a label or a title. It is not something theoretical. The unity of God's people seeks its source from Christ, and it flows out to the saints living and working together for the kingdom of Christ. Can one then just seek to attend the worship service and make that all of his church life? Can one long for fellowship with the Head of the Church but disregard fellowship with the Body of Christ? No, that is impossible.

While in this world, the Body of Christ is manifested in the local church. Just like Zion in the Old and New Testament, where God's children gather to worship Him. This is where Christ rules and dwells. And because the church is literally the company of God's elect, caring, loving and exhorting

God's people is really the core of our Covenant life. That also means that we need to break down the divisive walls of pride and the spirit of isolation found in our hearts. There are many things that militate against that unity that Christ established, and pride is the chief of them. Our hearts need to be completely humbled before God; only then, can we rightly live with our fellow brothers and sisters.

Can fellowship be divorced from unity? Can a man tell his wife that he loves her without making any effort to communicate with her? Or, can a home be a home without any sharing of joys and sorrows among its members? No. Close companionship with God and His people is true dwelling together in unity. It is our calling as Christians to seek out God's people, fellowship with them, and dwell with them.

Dwelling in unity really means making Zion your habitation. Lives revolve around the church and families seek to support the church. When this love for the saints grows coupled with the fear of God, this dwelling together in unity becomes far deeper than any relationship we would ever have with those outside the church.

This is why Professor Hanko mentions:

“There is the closest relationship between our responsibility to be keepers of God's covenant and our responsibilities to the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. So close is that relationship that I am convinced that we do not exaggerate if we say that the covenant of grace that God establishes with His people in Christ will never come to the realisation in history without the church. God establishes, and maintains His covenant through the church of Christ, particularly as that church comes to manifestation in the midst of the world in the church institute.”

May CERC always remember this: God does not only save us individually, but also as a whole – the Body of Christ. May we live together in covenant fellowship.

### **Same Care Among All**

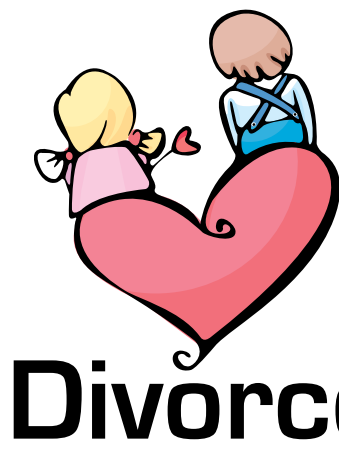
1 Cor 12:25b but that the members should have the same care one for another.

It is in God's judgment that when the saints seek this unity, they do so with all parts of the body of Christ without

exception. This all-inclusive unity in the body of Christ is good and pleasant. It is not to say that we must talk equally with every single person in the church and with all saints around the world. That would be impossible. Nor do we keep to ourselves just because we cannot spend time with every member of the church. Rather, it is a calling from God for us to deal impartially with all (Mal 2:9, 1Tim 5:21, James 2:4, James 3:17). God does not call us to just befriend or favour those whom we “prefer”. What does God mean when he calls us to be without partiality and to have the same care one for another? Simply, we must show to all of God's people the same love and favour. We may not discriminate with an evil heart in our fellowship with saints in the church. We may not seek out only those whom we have a natural liking for and pretend that the rest of the body of Christ does not exist. We ought to salute all the brethren in Christ, and not salute some but ignore the others. We ought also to help those in need, not just those whom we prefer to work with. Because of our pride and the wicked judgements we make, the Apostle Paul reminds us to have the same care one for another.

Do not all come abased, broken, humbled to the dust as we partake of the Lord's Supper? We all admit that we share the same gross depravity. Do we not all need and cleave to Christ? We may not think ourselves higher or better than other fellow children of God, thus deserving of only certain kinds of friends in the church. If we persist in that thinking and have preferential and conditional care for one another in the church, we become instruments for creating “churches within the church”, dividing and injuring the family of Christ. As what the Apostle Paul says, have the same care, “That there should be no schism in the body”.

Let us consider this illustration of a family. Is it right before God that in a family, the father or mother shows favouritism and talks only to or smiles only at one of two of the children and neglects to care for the rest of the family? Imagine the deep hurt and division in such a family! We may not decide to have a “different care” among fellow brothers and sisters in the family of God. May God give us the same care among all the saints because we all belong to the same family of God!



# The Implications for the Doctrine of the Covenant in Divorce & Remarriage

>> Prof Hanko

The Staff of Salt Shakers have asked me to write regularly for the magazine which they prepare and distribute. They asked me to write, first of all, an article or two on the title I put above this article. The assumption is that the error of divorce and remarriage will have consequences for the doctrine of the covenant, for the Bible makes it very clear that God's covenant with his people can be defined in terms of a marriage. For proof of this, one can point to the prophets who frequently taught this. It is most clear in Ezekiel 16 and Hosea 1 & 2.

Our Lord appeals to the same figure in Mark 2:19, where Jesus is discussing the whole matter of fasting. It can also be found in Jesus' parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25:1-13. Paul discusses the relation between husband and wife in the marriage union in terms of the relation between Christ and his church in Ephesians 5:22-33. And the book of Revelation does the same when it describes the bliss of heaven as a wedding supper (Rev. 19:9). The picture of Christ, the Bridegroom, and the church, the bride, is also expressed in the prayer of the church for Christ's coming. The Spirit and the bride pray (Rev. 22:17).

If God's covenant relation with his people can be pictured as a marriage, it stands to reason that God's covenant will also have a lot to say about the nature of this earthly institution of marriage; and, vice versa, one's view on the legitimacy of divorce and remarriage will affect his doctrine of the covenant.

It is my purpose to explore this relationship in this and, perhaps, one more article.

It is important that we start with what Scripture teaches concerning God's covenant of grace with His people. That is, we must not start with the institution

of marriage and see what implications our institution of marriage has for the doctrine of the covenant. We must start with the doctrine of the covenant and proceed from that to the truth concerning marriage.

We must do this, because the covenant God establishes with his people is the real marriage; and our institution of marriage, as instituted by God, is an earthly picture of the covenant. This is a principle that we follow in all Scripture. The Bible speaks of God's right hand, God's eyes, God's ears. It speaks of God "coming down" to observe what men are doing; of repenting that he had made the world, or that God had made Saul king.

These expressions Scripture uses to speak of God are called by the long name: anthropomorphisms. That is really not such a good name. It means that God is revealed by means of figures taken from man. And our first inclination is to think along those lines. We have the real eyes and ears; we have the real right hand; we do the real coming down. We use these human expressions to speak of God and give to him human characteristics – although we know that he is infinitely higher than we.

But this is wrong. We have it just backwards. God's hand is the real hand; his eyes are the real eyes; his actions are the real actions. And our eyes, ears, and actions are the figures, mere figures of what is a reality in God. We are created in God's image. An image is patterned after a higher and great reality. An image can never be as "real" as the reality that an image reflects. So, when we are created in the image of God, we are like him in certain ways, but every way in which we are like him is a shadow, a figure, less than and inferior to the reality that we reflect.

We must now apply that to marriage. Not, our marriages are the real ones, but, God's marriage to His people is the real one. Our marriages are the pictures, the figures, the images of the real one: the marriage of God with His people. And so our covenants of marriage, made when we speak our marriage vows, are patterned after, and must be made to pattern after, God's covenant of marriage with his people.

If we turn these two around, so that we make our marriages the reality, then we are going to go in the wrong direction in defining God's marriage with His people. Specifically, if we determine God's covenant with us to be patterned after the covenant we make as man and wife, it is no wonder that we get wrong notions about God's covenant.

When we start with our marriages in this sinful world, we find all kinds of reasons why our marriages can be ended. A man may become weary of his wife as she gets older and as she loses her beauty to the ravages of old age, and so decide to divorce her for someone younger, more lively, and more beautiful. A man may accuse his wife of being a hag who is constantly berating him for every little thing he does. And, after all, even Solomon says that it is better to live alone on the roof of a house, than in the same house with a brawling woman. So why not divorce her. Or a woman may complain that her husband does not love her anymore; he does not understand her needs and wants; he has not sympathy for her tedious work in the house taking care of children. And so it is better to break the marriage. There are a thousand reasons why a man or a woman can recognise a break-up of the marriage as the thing to do. As one woman said to me once, "I have a right to be happy. I cannot be happy with my husband. I am going to find my happiness elsewhere."

But then there are those who want to be a bit more Biblical. Perhaps, Scripture can be found to give a reason for dissolving a marriage. The reason why a man or a woman may be permitted a divorce that dissolves the marriage bond is unfaithfulness on the part of one of the spouses. And so they claim that unfaithfulness breaks the marriage bond. It actually breaks it so that the two are no longer husband and wife. Even if they are reconciled, they must be married all over again; for if they would not be married for the second time, they would be living in adultery. And those who want to start with our marriages to work their way to God's marriage with his people, find that because a dissolving of the marriage bond in human relations is possible, it must also be true of God's covenant of marriage with His people. The next step, of course, is to find Biblical proof for the fact that Scripture teaches that the human bond of marriage can be broken so that it exists no more.

This takes so doing. It is very difficult to find such proof in Scripture, so most often the one text to which appeal is made is Matthew 19:9. That is about the only passage one can find. But to give to this passage an interpretation that means the marriage bond is actually dissolved takes some exegetical sleight of hand. One has to take the text out of its contexts in verses 4-6 and verses 10-12. Worse, the text has to be taken out of the broader context of Scripture as found in such passages as Matthew 5:32, Luke 16:18, and Romans 7:1.

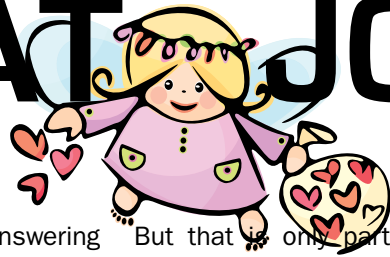
But, it is not my purpose to argue here that remarriage is always adultery. I want to show how people begin with human marriages and then argue to God's covenant.

And so, because we start with man's relationships and argue from human marriages to God's covenant of marriage, lo and behold, we find that there are those who teach that God's covenant of marriage with His people can also be broken.

Now, the Scriptures do not teach that God's marriage with us can be broken, but it is said to be true after all because human marriages can be broken.

We shall look at this remarkable conclusion in the next issue of Salt Shakers.

# REASON FOR GREAT JOY!



*by Prof Hanko:*

“With joy and thanks to God for answering our prayers, we have received news that the synod of the PR Churches, at its session of June 12, 2012, has given its final approval to sister-church relations between our denomination and CERC. In a way it seems like the climax of our many visits to Singapore over the last six times we were in Singapore. We were with you in August and September of 2008. As I recall, we had come to Singapore only for a vacation, and in connection with work we had to do in the Philippines, but the Lord had other purposes in mind. We were in Singapore again in November and December of the same year, April and May of 2009, January and February of 2010, October through December of the same year, and November through December of 2011. These stays in Singapore developed in our hearts a deep love for the saints in CERC. But our broader goal was sister-church relations between us. The Lord has now granted this, and we are humbly thankful.

We have recently had the privilege of introducing our churches and the work of the churches to two couples and eight young people from CERC in Singapore. This was a most delightful time. It was our pleasure and privilege to have them in our homes and enjoy fellowship with them. It seemed to us to be a unique blessing that comes from being sister churches. It is our hope and prayer that such a visit may happen again soon. But at the same time, it is also our hope and prayer that both adults and young people from our churches may visit Singapore and enjoy the hospitality my wife and I have always enjoyed, and experience the riches of fellowship with saints in another land and culture. We are still amazed that people from different backgrounds, different cultures, different races, can find unity within only a few hours of meeting each other. It is the unity of one family in the household of faith.

But that is only part of sister-church relations. If the Lord is pleased to bless our relationships newly established, he will also, I am sure, open the door to cooperation between our churches in work to which he calls both of us in Southeast Asia. And we hope and pray that our fellowship with the saints in CERC may, in time, extend to fellowship with the CPRC in Northern Ireland and the dear saints in the Philippines.

In the meantime, we know that the church of Christ will be a truly catholic church in heaven; we have experienced a little bit of heaven in your sojourn among us. You enrich our lives and open the door to friendships in Christ that will endure into eternity.

May God bless our new “family” relations and use them for the advance of the kingdom of his dear Son.”

*by Pastor Ronald van Overloop:*

“The 2012 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America (PRCA) had several moments of great joy – reasons to celebrate the grace of God. One of those was the establishment of a sister-church relationship with our fellow-saints in Singapore in Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore (CERC).

What happened at this year's meeting of the Synod of the PRCA was really the second of the two step process required for the establishment of a sister-church relationship. At last year's meeting, the decision was taken to approve “the establishment of a sister-church relationship with the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore, with the relationship to be implemented at Synod 2012, provided our sister church (Covenant PRC in Northern Ireland) has no legitimate objections” (Article 28 of Synod 2011). The rules for the establishment of a sister church relationship require that our other sister be given opportunity to

express any legitimate objects to the establishment of such a relationship. The Contact Committee of the PRCA informed Synod 2012 that our other sister had no objections.

Synod 2012 responded to this information by approving “the implementation of sister church relations with the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore.” And then Synod passed a motion to “express to the CERC our thanks to God for the establishment of the sister-church relationship between us, and our resolve as Protestant Reformed Churches to contend with them for the faith which was once delivered to the saints (Jude 3).”

Present at the meetings of Synod 2012 was Deacon Felix Chan, representing the session and congregation of CERC. After these decisions were taken, he addressed the delegates of the synod with greetings from the session and members of CERC. He also expressed their gratitude to God for this evidence of the unity of the body of Christ.

When Synod 2011 took the decision to establish the sister-church relationship with CERC, it was with “great joy”. Further, it was said, “We give thanks to God for this relationship in which these two denominations may be a blessing and encouragement to each other, as we together are built on the solid foundation of God’s truth. May the Lord bless this relationship!”

The same joy was evident at Synod 2012. Something that contributed not a little to the joy was the presence of Deacon Felix Chan and his wife, Angela. And then there was the presence of eight young adults from the Singapore congregation. These young adults had spent two weeks prior to synod visiting in the areas of Chicago, Illinois, Northwest Iowa, and Grand Rapids, Michigan. The presence of these saints from Singapore lifted the relationship out of the merely formal. Their presence, fellowship, joy and gratitude contributed greatly to make the relationship very real.

Another important element of the joy and gratitude to God is the fact that this was a RE-establishment of the sister-church relationship. While it may be said that this was the first time such a relationship was established with

Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church individually, reality and experience show that this was a renewal of the sister-church relationship with these saints. All of them were a part of the denomination with whom the PRCA had been sisters for over twenty years. The sister-church relationship was first established in 1985 with what was then called Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore (ERCS). With much grief, this relationship was declared to be dissolved by Synod 2006. However, this same synod gave approval for the Contact Committee to explore the possibility of a relationship with CERC. So for five years, efforts were made to re-establish this sister relationship. That was finally done in 2011. And now, with the approval of our other sister in Northern Ireland, the relationship can be implemented. Just as a wedding ceremony is a necessary and joyful declaration about a real relationship that exists prior to the wedding, so the decisions of the 2011 and 2012 Synods of the PRCA are a necessary and joyful formalization of the relationship.

This is cause for celebration and tremendous gratitude to God! It is a sacred duty to manifest the true unity and catholicity of the church on earth in as far as that is possible, not only in denominational fellowship but also in conjunction with all other churches which have obtained like precious faith, both domestic and foreign. The PRCA and CERC are unified in all essential matters of faith, doctrine, church government, and practice.

The establishment of this relationship is meant to be real and for the mutual benefit of all involved. This was experienced at Synod 2012 via the presence of Deacon Chan and his wife, along with the eight young adults from the congregation. By means of many conversations, both serious and light, the relationship became wonderfully real for many members of the PRCA who have not been to Singapore. The unity in Christ arising from being one body and having one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, and one hope, was quickly experienced every time there was opportunity to visit with the Chans or the eight young adults.

This is truly a reason for celebration at this evidence of God’s goodness. ‘Truly God is good to Israel!’

### **by Salt Shakers’ Committee:**

“The Salt Shakers Committee rejoices greatly over the re-establishment of full sister relationship with our brethren from the PRCA! But, even though this relationship has just been formed, we already have much to be thankful for. Looking back, let us reflect on God’s goodness shown to us through our brothers in Christ.

Over the years, God has moved pastors from halfway around the world to answer God’s call and feed us here in CERC. Not only did these pastors feed us with the sincere milk of God’s word, they also gave up much time with their wives and families, were far from their own beloved congregations, and gave up many personal comforts.

Countless hours have been put into preparing powerful and thoroughly Reformed sermons and instructional mid-week lectures to quench our spiritual thirst for the knowledge of God. But yet, despite their racing schedules, they always made time for heartfelt fellowship and to get to know the saints they were ministering to better.

These pastors, that brought us the pure Word of God, are truly testimonies of God’s faithfulness to CERC (Jer 3:15). As CERC has grown and must continue to grow ever increasingly by being rooted in God’s word, may we also earnestly contend for the faith! And, may the body of Christ continue to work in unity, humility and love with each other. Blessed be the God of Zion who graciously uses His church for the furtherance of His great Kingdom and His Gospel. By all let God be praised, for He alone is great! (Psalter 404)

So, in a fractured world filled with strife and slander because of the divisive heresies of the devil, when Christ leads His people from opposite ends of the globe together, we bow before God and confess “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” It is Salt Shakers’ heartfelt prayer, and we are sure yours as well, that God may bless our church’s relationship with our fellow brothers and sisters in the PRCA.”

# The list of ministers from the PRCA that came to labour among our midst from 2007 to 2012

Many more ministers came before 2007 and helped further the Reformed faith here in Singapore; here are to list a few: Prof. Homer Hoeksema in 1975, Pastor Van Baren and Prof. Hanko in 1986, Pastor Dykstra and Prof. Herman Hanko in 1990, Prof. Robert D. Decker in 1996, Pastor Arie Den Hartog for 14-15 years, Pastor J. Kortering for 8 years.

## 2007

Nov - Pastor Steven Key

## 2008

May: Pastor Carl Haak and Pastor Kenneth Koole

June: Pastor Arie Den Hartog

August: Prof. Herman Hanko

Nov - Dec: Prof. Herman Hanko

## 2009

May: Prof. Herman Hanko

June: Pastor Arie Den Hartog

## 2011

Feb - March: Pastor Ronald Van Overloop

Apr: Pastor Kenneth Koole and Pastor Andrew Lanning

June: Pastor Ronald Hanko

Nov - Dec: Prof. Herman Hanko

## 2012

Jan: Prof. Russell Dysktra

Mar: Pastor Daniel Holstege

May: Pastor Kenneth Koole and Pastor Audred Spriensma

June: Pastor Audred Spriensma and Pastor Richard Smit

July - August: Prof. Russel Dysktra

Coming Soon, DV: Pastor Arie Den Hartog

Coming Soon, DV: Pastor Ronald Van Overloop

Coming Soon, DV: Prof. David James Engelsma

# The Lord's Supper

>> Bro Paul Lau

## Introduction

The Lord's Supper is one of the two sacraments given by God to the Church. The sacraments are given to us in love, and so it is with the institution of the Lord's Supper. Our shepherd knows our weakness and frailty as His little lambs. He knows that we are prone to forget who we are, who He is, and what He did for us. He knows that we often let our minds get lost in doubts whenever we fail and falter in our battle against sin. He knows, all too well, how the devil is quick to question us, "Did God say...?", whenever we have wandered too far and the Shepherd's voice seems so much softer. Knowing that we are physical creatures, God gives us the Lord's Supper, to anchor spiritual realities in things we can physically sense, and remind us of His promises and our blessed hope. As we go through the Lord's Supper in this brief article, may those who are young

grow in greater appreciation of this sacrament, and may those who already know be reminded of the wondrous love of our Saviour.

## The Table

The partaking of the Lord's Supper involves the gathering at our Lord's table (1 Cor 10:21). It is a simple and beautiful truth that no one is too young to begin to understand. The table of the Lord speaks of God's exclusive area. It is His table where He sits at! It is the area at which those who belong to Him can come freely to enjoy His presence and fellowship. It is the area where God's favour and blessings are poured out to those gathered around. It is a position of privilege that is only available to His children. It is the area where there is a clear line drawn between us and our enemies. At the table is an area of refuge, comfort, and rest; a place where our enemies cannot touch us (Psalm 23:5). We feel strengthened just sitting

at our Lord's table, not because we were strong enough to arrive there, but because in that place, we face our Giver of grace whose strength is perfected in our weaknesses and in whom our only hope is found. We see Him clearly at the table; and our doubts, if any, are cleared.

## The People

If we understand the significance of the Lord's table, we will know that is not just for anybody to sit at. There are three important points which define the people who gather to partake of the Lord's Supper in church. These are essential to the proper administration of the Lord's Supper; and the rulers of the church, namely the elders, must be faithful in supervising those who come together in this holy communion. We must note that this does not only mean rejecting those who may not come to the Lord's table, but it also means encouraging those who may come to

approach the Lord's table freely and without fear.

First, those who are gathered to partake of the Lord's Supper must be professing Christians. 1 Corinthians 10:21 makes it clear that those who come must be those who have forsaken "the table of devils". This means that we do not share the table of our Lord with unbelievers who do not know Christ; we do not share the table with those who do not acknowledge Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. This must be obvious since we call it the Lord's table, for what business does a non-Christian have in this sacred place? We are reminded of God's Word in 2 Corinthians 6:14, "what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?" Those who are not called by His name have no part in this divine fellowship (2 Chronicles 7:14); in fact, they blaspheme the name of God and desecrate this holy Supper with their foolish participation which, at best, can only hope to fill their bellies.

Second, they must be a people who are united in the Truth. As everyone is perfectly united at our Lord's table in heaven (Luke 22:30), even so must we strive to show forth that blessed unity that awaits us in our partaking of the Lord's Supper while here on earth. To understand this a little bit better, we must first be convicted that our coming to the Lord's table is done basically for the glory of God. The Apostle Paul mentions this in 1 Corinthians 10:31, soon after his teachings on the Lord's Supper. Though it is given to us in love, and it serves many purposes for us, finally, we must be doing it for God's glory; just like eating, drinking, and everything else. If God's glory is on our mind, then we would have the spirit of Matthew 5:23 and 24 when coming to the Lord's table. God is surely not pleased if His children gather at His table all squabbling and kicking against each other under the table!

Some would then object and say, "but I have rightly examined myself, and I take the Lord's Supper as something simply between me and God!" We can turn to 1 Corinthians 11:17-22 for instruction. Paul was exactly warning the church not to partake of the Lord's Supper at one's own whim and fancy without caring for the unity of the body of Christ. Such

behaviour results in coming together "not for the better, but for the worse". What doctrines are important then?, you may ask. For a Christian, every part of God's Word is so important to Him, and so pertinent to godly living, that he can scarcely find an unimportant doctrine. As such, two godly persons who differ on a certain doctrine can find it better, for the both of them, not to partake of the Lord's Supper for the glory of God and to preserve the meaning and significance of the Lord's table. This ensures that our celebration of the Lord's Supper testifies of the reality of the Lord's table in heaven and is done in obedience to God's Word; "for we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread."

Third, those that come together in this holy communion must have examined themselves so that they do not approach the Lord's table carelessly or foolishly. The rightful examination of ourselves as stated in the form for the Administration of the Lord's Supper corresponds to the triple knowledge for happiness in Q&A 2 of the Heidelberg Catechism – how great my sins and miseries are, how I may be delivered from all my sins and miseries, and how I shall express my gratitude to God for such a deliverance. For God's children, this examination is not a terrifying "pass or fail" examination. This is a sincere and joyful one that always leads to a "pass with perfect score" by virtue of the fact that Christ's blood can wash away any and all of our sins! It is a consideration which leads us to be reminded, and to stand in awe, of the wondrous work that enables us to come to our Lord's table.

Therefore, those in Christ examine themselves wrongly if they finally conclude that they cannot come to the Supper because they are sinful. No, they must come! They must come, washed in the blood of Jesus, and robed in the righteousness of Christ. They must come, only by the mercy and grace of God, knowing that nothing they ever do can earn them a place at His table. They must come, with heartfelt prayer and thanksgiving, as adopted children who are infinitely privileged, and as servant-friends who would give of their lives willingly. In that frame of mind and consciousness, one would be ready to partake of the Lord's Supper.

However, those who are not in Christ, and continue in their sins, will never be able to examine themselves in a rightful way. They must abstain from the Lord's table so that they do not eat and drink unworthily and add damnation to themselves for not discerning the Lord's body (1 Cor 11:29).

### The Bread and Wine

There are some useful comments on the special significance of bread and wine for the Lord's Supper. For example, they are both the products of unity – from the process of grinding many grains, flour is obtained, and it is used to bake a loaf of bread; from the process of pressing many berries together, a single consistent wine is extracted. However, we must be careful not to forget the true meaning of the bread and wine.

From 1 Corinthians 11:24-25 and Luke 22:19-20, we know that the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper symbolises Jesus' broken body and shed blood. These two elements should be viewed together, and they form the first point of significance which is Jesus' crucifixion on the cross. This is of utmost importance because all of history is centred on the coming of Christ; even our dates testify of this as history is split into Before Christ and Anno Domini (year of our Lord). And the coming of Christ was for nothing else but to do God's will – the work of salvation accomplished at the cross. Therefore, we miss the point if we place any other significance above this. For example, to be carried away and imagine that the bread and wine truly transforms into Jesus' real flesh and blood is counteractive because it wrongly directs people's attention to the elements rather than to what they symbolise, which is far greater.

The bread and wine, as used in the Lord's Supper, are for eating and drinking. The Lord gives them to us, and tells us to eat of the bread and drink of the wine. This is the second significance – the physical bread and the wine that our bodies depend on for food and drink, represent spiritually our need for sustenance, our longing for nourishment, our hunger for the Bread of Life, and our thirst for the Living Water. Knowing this, we would be foolish to be overly concerned about the quality of the wine, or the taste and texture of the bread; for they mean so much more



than what our senses can tell.

### **The Remembrance**

This is the most important part of the Lord's Supper as it has to do with our intentions and our hearts. Jesus said, "this do in remembrance of me". We fail if we have done everything necessary up to this point and then forget to remember, forget what to remember, or worst, remember a wrong thing! For this matter, we see that the Lord's Supper can be very meaningful even for those who do not physically participate in it. This is because the external eating and drinking does little for one's soul if his intentions are wrong and his heart is somewhere else. Therefore, Christian children and Christian non-members of the church can surely be blessed spiritually if they earnestly come to the Lord's table in their hearts and do so for the right reasons.

First, we remember the Lord's death (1 Cor 11:26). On Calvary's cross, our Lord and Saviour was crucified. It was no normal death for He hung between thieves as a subject of capital punishment. He was sentenced by the law to be worthy of death. Jesus had not stolen anything that was not His for He was not a thief; but He had taken everything that was not rightfully His – all the sins of His people. Your sins, my sins, the imperfections of His bride; Jesus took them all to the cross and suffered painfully for the curse that was due to us. The King of Glory in human flesh – that must have already been more than enough humiliation to take. But no, He was rejected of men, and finally forsaken of His Father in heaven while suffering the wrath of God upon sin at the bitter and shameful death of the cross (Heb 12:2). His saving work on this earth was complete when on the cross he cried, "it is finished."

Somewhere along this remembrance of Christ's death, as we look at our unsightly sins that were paid for by the Lamb of God, we are bound to ask, "How is this possible? Why would anyone do that for such a sinner like me?" We would be humbled to the dust, and yet at the same time be overwhelmed with gratitude that such amazing grace and mercy was given to us. By our God-given faith, we believe that Christ died for us that our sins may no more be remembered; by faith, we believe that His blood was shed to redeem us as

adopted children of God and clothe us with His perfect righteousness. How precious the death of our Lord!

However, remembering our Lord's death does not stop there. Jesus' crucifixion must not be remembered without His resurrection! Christ rose from the dead on the third day in a resounding victory over sin and death! His resurrection was proof that He was indeed the Son of God who had power over death. More importantly, His resurrection was a seal of God's approval of Christ's work which makes us just before God (Rom 4:25). Because of this, we do not believe that the bread and wine become Jesus' physical body and blood, because He is already risen in heaven and does not need to keep repeating His crucifixion every time we remember Him! How glorious His resurrection!

Second, we remember our needs as sheep in the fold of our Shepherd. We are weak, foolish, and very often clueless about what we are doing. We would starve if our Shepherd did not lead us to green pastures to feed; we would thirst if He did not lead us to still waters to drink (Psa 23). We depend fully on our Shepherd, and without Him, we will not survive. This is a true description of us in reality. Unless the Holy Spirit leads us to Christ, we will not move on our own. We will never desire the Bread of Life, or long for Living Water, if the Holy Spirit does not work hunger and thirst in our souls. Even as we remember these things, we must pray that the working of the Holy Spirit will feed and nourish us in our salvation, and apply unto us all the benefits bought for us at the cross. Since God is the One who quickens, feeds and sustains us, may we seek to live as His thankful servants who sincerely desire to flourish with the fruit of the Spirit and who spare no effort for the cause of His Kingdom!

### **The Comfort and Joy**

As we remember the grace of God shown to us by the death of Jesus Christ our Lord and applied to us by the operation of the Holy Spirit, we cannot help but feel comforted. This is because our bodies, our souls, our hopes, and even our entire lives, all depend and come down to this singular historical fact – our Saviour's death on the Cross. Without which, we lead vain lives and are much better off dead. What comfort it is to be reminded of the truth of

the Cross! What comfort it is to have meaning once again in our lives! It is like a pilgrim who, though he knows he is on the right path, takes out his map from time to time to have a glimpse and be reminded of his final destination.

Our eating of the bread and drinking of the wine are real physical occurrences. And through them, God reminds us that our Lord's broken body and shed blood are no less real! It is also reality that our hunger and thirst are satisfied by the bread and wine. Even so, are we fed, nourished, and strengthened spiritually by our remembrance at the Lord's table and the working of the Holy Spirit in us!

Having this comfort at the Lord's Supper, we naturally respond with true joy and thankfulness to our great God. There is no better way than to conclude with a portion of Psalm 103, expressing our unmeasured, overwhelming joy together with the Church of the ages for our redemption in Christ Jesus:

"Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's. The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed. He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel. The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust."

# The Attributes of God

>> Pastor Angus Stewart

## Belgic Confession 1B (I)

*Belgic Confession 1:*

*There Is One Only God*

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

Our first instalment introduced the Belgic Confession and the second began our exposition of its first article emphasizing that the Belgic Confession is a God-centred creed. We shall now consider Belgic Confession 1's teaching on the attributes of God.

### God's Simplicity

The very first divine attribute or perfection mentioned in Article 1 of the Belgic Confession, and the one that is especially highlighted, is God's unity, oneness or simplicity. God is one, single and simple, as opposed to two, double and consisting of many parts. The first three words used to describe God, "one only simple" all present His glorious attribute or perfection of simplicity. This is why the article is headed "There Is One Only God."

There have been, and are, many in the world who do not believe there is one God. In UK politics, the leaders of the Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party, Nick Clegg and Ed Miliband, respectively, are atheists, believing in no god at all. Those who believe in two gods are dualists, like the ancient Manichaeans, in whose ranks Augustine was found prior to his conversion to Christ. Those who worship many gods, like the Greco-Roman pantheon or the millions of idols of the Hindus, are polytheists. Pantheists believe that the universe is god.

Our confession makes an affirmation: there is one only God. This opposes agnosticism, which claims that we do not, or cannot, know that there is a God. We reject scepticism, which doubts our ability to know anything, and relativism, which claims that there is no absolute truth. Our confession begins with an article titled "There Is One Only God."

The first, and most basic, of the four statements I shall make concerning divine simplicity, unity or oneness is that it means that there is one God.

Second, the simplicity of God means that His Being, that which He "is" – for "Being" is related to the verb "to be", equals His attributes or His perfections. This is not true of anyone or anything else. For instance, Jack is clever, but he does not equal his cleverness. Jill has a superb memory, but she is not her fine memory. A man of thirty years old may be the same person at ninety but many of his attributes and characteristics have changed—many of them, especially his physical qualities will have gone downhill. But God is different: He is His holiness, He is His eternity, He is His goodness and all His other perfections. In this, He is utterly incomparable and unlike man!

Third, God's simplicity means that all His attributes or perfections are one in Him and qualify each other. Although we distinguish God's attributes – His love, His justice, His power, etc. – we learn from His Word that all these attributes are one in Him. This means that God's love is His justice; God's power is His holiness. God's wisdom is His sovereignty, is His grace, is His righteousness, is His unchangeability, is His spirituality. Each of God's attributes implies and includes all the others. Yet it is also meaningful and helpful for us to refer to God's various perfections, to define them, to distinguish them, to relate them, in order better to understand, love and serve the Most High. This truth is hard for us to grasp, but we need to remember that God is infinitely greater than our puny and limited minds can comprehend.

We can also use the attributes of God to qualify each other. God's holiness is a merciful, just, all-powerful and unchangeable holiness. God's omniscience is a righteous, long-suffering, eternal and sovereign omniscience. Similarly, the Westminster Shorter Catechism states, "God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth" (A. 4). This sentence affirms that "infinite, eternal, and unchangeable" qualify God's "being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth." Therefore Jehovah's justice, for instance, is an infinite, eternal and unchangeable

justice. This is included in the truth of divine simplicity, that God is one.

A very popular error is contradicted by the doctrine of God's simplicity, especially the truth that the attributes of God qualify each other. The free or well-meant offer claims that God loves the reprobate and desires to save them. That theory presents God as if He loves the reprobate throughout their lifetimes but, when they die, He stops loving them and punishes them forever in hell. That view posits a temporary divine love. But God's simplicity means that all the attributes of God qualify each other. So God's love, being God's love – remember He is absolutely simple in His Being – is a love which is infinite, eternal, unchangeable, wise, omnipotent, holy, just, good and true. So if someone talks about a divine love which is merely temporal, you should think, "That doesn't make sense. That isn't God for He is simple."

Some try to get around this by saying that God has an infinite love for the elect in Jesus Christ, but He also has a second love which is a lesser love than the first love. Our response to this is: "You posit two loves in God. But God, being one, has only one love—a holy, omnipotent love, a love in perfect conformity with His own blessed Being. Two divine loves would be two gods! You haven't grasped the simplicity of God." A love of God for those who are not His own in Jesus Christ would be a love that is not infinite, but we know that God is infinite. If that love of God changes into hatred when the person dies, then Jehovah's love would also be temporal, but God is eternal.

Also, there is no mercy of God for someone who is never saved in Christ, for God's mercy, being God's mercy, is omnipotent, for God is omnipotent. Moreover, if God were to love and sincerely desire to save someone, yet this person perishes everlastingly, this would conflict with His wisdom, because God's wisdom directs His love to the accomplishment of His desires.

I once exchanged letters in the British Church Newspaper with a Scottish Presbyterian minister who tried to explain how, in his mind, God could love and desire to save those whom He does not elect, redeem or save. That man said that God has "two levels." On one level, God loves the elect with His infinite love in Christ; on the other

(lower) level, He loves the reprobate in time but does not save them and they perish in hell. The unity of God means there are no “two levels” in God. There is one “level” in God (if we want to use the word “level” at all) and there is no disunity, division or conflict in Him for His Being is absolutely simple. We, fallen puny human beings, have conflict within ourselves: we want to do one thing and we also want to do something that is incompatible with the first thing. This is because we are sinful creatures and not simple like God, who is absolutely one in His Being, mind and will. He does not have any division or conflict or “two levels.”

Fourth, since God is simple, none of His attributes are higher than, or superior to, any other divine perfection. Many people today elevate the love of God above the other divine attributes. Of course, it is a blessed truth that the God of love sent His own Son to the cross to deliver us from destruction. If it were not for the love of God, we would all perish and nothing could comfort our hearts. But to elevate the love of God (or any other divine perfection) above His other attributes is wrong.

In the history of the church, Arminianism, Liberalism and the Charismatic Movement have elevated the love of God above the other divine perfections have a bad pedigree. Sadly, much of contemporary evangelicalism has this false view of the love of God and this is often displayed in its wrong presentation of the gospel to unbelievers: “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.”

Nowhere in the book of Acts, the biblical book that most deals with the spread of the gospel and the church, does Paul or any of the other apostles say in their sermons, “God loves you, God wants to save you and Christ died for you.” You can look in vain in Scripture for that. But telling unbelievers that God loves them is the sine qua non for much of evangelicalism. It is not even true that God loves everybody. He did not love Esau: “Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated” (Rom. 9:13; Mal. 1:2-5). This over-emphasis on, and universalising of, God’s love by modern evangelicalism leads to the same destruction that it brought upon Liberalism and Arminianism.

For instance, some in Puritan Boston

and New England in the eighteenth century promoted the Arminian idea that God loves everybody and wants to save everybody. They soon realized that if a human father, with the puny love he has for his son, would not put his child in hell, certainly God, who, they say, loves all people, would not condemn anyone to eternal punishment. Then there really cannot be a hell. You see the connection? Those who hold this false view of a universal love of God will struggle with the biblical teaching of hell, especially as this teaching sinks in and begins to work through. Already, a significant number of evangelicals are having problems with hell because they cannot square it with their view of a love of God for everyone head for head.

This wrong emphasis on, and false teaching regarding, the love of God may also show itself as antinomianism in the practical life of churches and believers. What is antinomianism? Antinomianism comes from two Greek words that mean “against” and “law.” It means “against the law.” Antinomianism is the view and sentiment that “I can live whatever way I like because God loves me. I do not have to keep the law of God as a rule of gratitude to Him.”

Consider Deuteronomy 6:4-5: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.” This is a very famous text quoted by the Lord Jesus in the gospels, only He adds a little bit to it: “and with all thy mind” (Mark 12:30). So we are called to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, might and mind. Deuteronomy 6:4 is a important text in Judaism because it is used by the Jews as if it excluded Christian Trinitarianism. This verse is referred to as the Shema because this is the Hebrew for the command “Hear, O Israel.”

Deuteronomy 6:4 is a clear biblical statement of divine simplicity. “Hear, O Israel” – this is something that needs to sink down deep into your heart – “The Lord our God is one Lord.” That is, there are not “no gods”, or “two gods”, or “many gods”, but one God, and He is one in all of His infinite Being. This is the doctrine. Next, verse 5 sets forth the calling, the practice that flows from this doctrine: “thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.” In

other words, since God is one, perfectly simple and united – no duality, no division, no conflict – then we must be perfectly united and simple in our affection and love for Him with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our might and with all our mind.

The biblical truth of divine simplicity emphasized at the very start of our confession is necessary for especially two doctrines set forth later in the Belgic Confession.

First, we should consider the truth of the Holy Trinity, as presented in Belgic Confession 8. This article is entitled “God Is One in Essence” – this is His simplicity – “Yet Distinguished in Three Persons.” The article begins, “According to this truth and this Word of God, we believe in one only God, who is one single essence” – four words are used here to underscore Jehovah’s simplicity (“one only... one single”). Concerning God’s “one single essence,” Article 8 continues, “in which are three persons, really, truly, and eternally distinct...” Near the end of the paragraph, Belgic Confession 8 adds, “Nevertheless God is not by this distinction divided into three,” for He is absolutely simple in His Being. Jehovah is to be distinguished as to His three Persons, but He is not divided into three parts, like three slices of a pie. In short, one needs to understand God’s simplicity to grasp the truth of the Holy Trinity. The Trinity does not make sense, for instance, to Islam because it does not understand the Christian doctrine of divine simplicity. Islam has a different doctrine of the simplicity of its god, Allah.

The second paragraph of Belgic Confession 9 begins, “In all these places” – referring to various texts of Scripture in the previous paragraph which prove the truth of the Holy Trinity – “we are fully taught that there are three persons in one only divine essence” – God’s simplicity again! Similarly Belgic Confession 11, which teaches the Deity of the Holy Ghost, declares that He is “of one and the same essence, majesty, and glory with the Father and the Son.” Clearly, divine simplicity is necessary for the truth of the Holy Trinity.

There is a second truth that rests upon Jehovah’s simplicity, especially as it is presented in Belgic Confession 20. Here the confession is moving into Christology and soteriology, the truth

concerning God's salvation of us in Jesus Christ. The article is entitled, "God Hath Manifested His Justice and Mercy in Christ." Both these divine attributes, justice and mercy, which are operative in our salvation, are perfectly one in God. The article begins, "We believe that God, who is perfectly merciful and just, sent His Son... God therefore manifested His justice against His Son when he laid our iniquities upon Him, and poured forth His mercy..."

The exercise of the divine attributes of justice and mercy in the salvation of sinners (Belgic Confession 20) is traced back to God's eternal and unconditional election (with its necessary corollary, reprobation) in Belgic Confession 16. This article, entitled "Eternal Election," states that God is "merciful and just: merciful since He delivers and preserves from... perdition all whom He in His eternal and unchangeable counsel, out of mere goodness, hath elected in Christ... just, in leaving others in the fall and perdition wherein they have involved themselves."

God's salvation of us through the cross of Christ is both just and merciful (Belgic Confession 20), but if you think of election and reprobation, election especially shows God's mercy and reprobation His justice (Belgic Confession 16). Psalm 85:10 states, "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other." So God's truth, mercy, righteousness, and peace are especially evident as one when God comes to save His people; and this is particularly demonstrated in the death of Jesus Christ for us. This is the greatest manifestation of the unity or simplicity of God – the cross!

>> Pastor Arie den Hartog

# Culture Impeding the Instruction of Scripture

The title of this article was given to me by the editorial committee. We might also state the topic in these words, 'Culture and the Christian'. To understand the subject, we will begin with the question, what is culture? It is a bit of a nebulous subject. Especially so in our modern day when cultures are constantly changing. One of the definitions of the Webster's dictionary I have is "the sum total of the ways of living built up by a group of human beings and transmitted from one generation to another". This is the understanding of the term from which we will proceed in this article. Culture can include such things as the lifestyle and behaviour of a people, the foods unique to them, the manners they have, the religion they practice, the forms of art they produce, the entertainment they engage in, and a host of other things. It is easy to go along with the stream of the culture in which we live. But often, we need to stand opposed and go against the stream.

We enjoyed our ten years of living in Singapore. There were many aspects of Singaporean culture that we enjoyed. The great variety of Asian food that is available in Singapore is so good that there is a temptation to eat way too much of it. The sounds Singaporeans make while eating their food sometimes made us laugh. The 'Sing English' they speak is so unique that when on occasion we hear it in a crowd back in America, it always is a dead giveaway of where the person who is talking is from and it brings back delightful memories. More seriously, the excellent government and the orderliness, and general physical safety of life in Singapore is admired by many all over the world. I just read an article recently that listed Singapore as one of the cities in the world that has the absolute best quality of life. In certain respects, Christians in Singapore can be thankful for what they enjoy in daily life compared to many other places in the world.

There are many aspects of culture that are neutral as far as our walk with the Lord and living according to His Word is concerned. There is no moral difference between eating a packet of chicken rice in Singapore and a McDonald's hamburger in America.

There are parts of the culture of every country that reflect its ungodliness. This is true in a nominal Christian country like America, and also true in countries

like Singapore that were never as a nation in their history 'Christianised'. I remember from our years of living in Singapore how many Christians had to discern carefully to separate themselves from pagan practices of idols even in the daily events that took place in their home and in ceremonies common in non-Christian homes which related to Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam etc. We witnessed new Christians in those days who were ready to suffer persecution, family shame and even worse things because they were steadfastly unwilling to go along with practices that involved the service and worship of idols. These Christians made strong stands because they loved the Lord, they were willing to suffer for the name of the Lord, and because of their seriousness about true Christian living. These brought glory to God and to name of our Lord who redeems us, and they will receive His reward. We are thankful to God for the memories of these.

The very fact that we are talking about the culture of this ungodly world means that there are aspects of this culture that we must condemn and separate ourselves from. A gross example of this is the culture of immorality. America has its own form of immorality that is systemic to our American culture. It is to our great shame and disgrace and the wrath of God will be poured out upon such immorality. This culture of immorality in America is getting worse and worse, and the modern electronic media is constantly becoming more and more powerful to promote this culture. The Christian is not unaffected by the temptation of this culture. Immorality has always been pervasive and appalling in pagan societies. It has led to all sorts of atrocities against women. The nature of this great evil is that it especially affects women in a society given over to it. Abuse of even the youngest of children is another great tragedy that follows upon the wake of this evil. While we were in Singapore we also saw this sin developing in its own unique ways, different in certain respects than in America. Christian young people have to be on their guard so that their thinking and behaviour is not affected by the culture of immorality. This culture presents great dangers to marriages and families in the church.

God's Word contains many strong warnings against the culture of

immorality. Christians in Singapore need to be warned against the pervasive evil of this culture. Our modern society attempts to give an 'acceptable' and even glamorous portrayal of this sin. This is an example of how the Christian may not simply go along with the culture of the nation in which he or she lives. Every culture, in whatever country we live in, and whatever people that we live among, has depraved aspects that Christians must condemn and flee from in the fear of God. Christians must desire to be holy as God calls us to be holy.

There are also more subtle aspects of culture that God's Word warns us against. There can be, and indeed are, lifestyles of a culture that will lead a Christian away from the Lord if they are not careful. These may involve 'cultural' things which in themselves are good and can be used by the Christian. Education is a good thing in itself. We ought to be responsible in life and pursue an education to prepare for our life's career in the providence of God. Having a beautiful home to live in with our families can be good. Being able to afford a private car in Singapore involves great expense. Not all can afford this. Culture can make owning a car a status symbol and the occasion of pride in which one considers himself better than the neighbour. Others are then stirred up to envy.

Scripture warns not only against the sins of immorality, but also those of covetousness, greed, envy, self-seeking and a host of other sins which are reflected in the culture of the land in which we live. Covetousness is, in Scripture, said to be a form of idolatry. (Ephesians 5) Scripture says that the

love of money is the root of all evil. (1 Timothy 6) The Christian in any culture must be aware of the great spiritual dangers of these things that are ever present. Scripture warns us so strongly against these dangers. There are lots of things in a culture that can become idols in our lives and lead us away from the Lord. We ought to take this very seriously. 'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?' Education, money, beautiful houses, successful careers, highly regarded professions, cars, vacations, overseas trips etc. All of these can lead us away from the Lord. In fact, they have led many before us away from the Lord and to spiritual ruin in spite of the fact that these cultural things may be greatly honoured by the society in which we live.

Cultural things can lead to excessive pursuits in life. The result can be that the service of the Lord in His church suffers greatly. Cultural interests and pursuits can cause us to be less than faithful in attending worship services and spiritual activities such as Bible Study Groups. We all have an important calling to be continually part of the communion of the saints in the church. This is necessary for exercising care for our fellow saints and the promotion of evangelism in the church. Cultural pursuits can impede obedience to the Word of God and greatly impede genuine Christian living. We need to realise how very serious this can be. We need to make the necessary sacrifices for the Lord's sake, and the necessary changes of lifestyle, and not just go along with the stream of culture. Making necessary changes is hard to do. But, it is necessary. Christian living

requires great personal sacrifices. It often means that we do not have the things of the world and cannot live the lifestyle of the world. But remember, when we sacrifice the things of the world, we enjoy the great blessing of knowing the Lord, fellowship with Him, and having His favour on our lives.

We must not make the excuse that the culture in which we live makes this impossible for us in Singapore. "It might be possible in America or other parts of the world but it is not possible in Singapore." Or even worse, we must not foolishly imagine in ourselves that pursuing our secular career hard or maybe even government service in our great country is just another way of serving the Lord. Then we have become very confused Christians.

God has given to us all the days and years of our life. They are the gift of God's grace in Christ Jesus. Because of our sinful nature, it is possible to live many, if not all, hours and days of our lives in vain pursuits. The inspired apostle Paul exhorts us to live carefully and to redeem the time of our lives for the days in which we are living are evil. (Ephesians 5:14-16). What a tragedy for a professing Christian to have written over his or her life 'utter vanity', 'useless', and 'nothing'! Perhaps he had great honour, riches, and glory in the world; but in God's sight, it was useless and nothing.

Another great exhortation from scripture is found in Hebrews 12:1 and 2. Read this passage for yourself and consider your own life.

May God help us to be faithful to Him in the midst of the Singaporean culture. Praise and glory be unto His name.

>> Elder Lee Kong Wee

## M . A . R . R . I . A . G . E III THE KEY INGREDIENT TO A LASTING MARRIAGE

The last time, we considered the early days of marriage after the honeymoon period. We saw that after the initial excitement of the wedding and honeymoon dissipates, and married life takes its daily course, a couple soon discovers that their 'love story' is not quite the fairy-tale of living happily ever. The reason is because of the sober and undeniable reality of sin in the marriage. Sin in the husband. Sin in the wife. We must remember and grapple with this fundamental truth as we seek to grow in love for each other through the way of forgiving and receiving forgiveness from each other. We must do so humbly and unconditionally, ever mindful that Christ has forgiven us for our far greater sins against Him.

In this final article, I want to draw our attention to what I consider to be the ONE, key, Biblical ingredient necessary for a blessed, lifelong marriage.

That ingredient is LOVE. Surprised? Unimpressed? Disappointed? Yes, love, you say – but doesn't that go without saying? Isn't there love in every marriage? Why else do two persons want to get married in the first place anyway? If by 'love' you mean that self-centred, 'gushy', 'feel-good', ebb-and-flow emotion between a man and a woman who seeks each other's company as

long as they feel good about each other, or a 'love' that maintains the marriage as long as one's personal happiness is not compromised or that does not require commitment at all costs, then yes, there is plenty of such 'love'. But if by 'love' you mean an unconditional, selfless, self-sacrificing determination to seek the temporal and eternal welfare of the spouse, to the extent of giving up one's life to do so, and in spite of the spouse becoming 'unlovable' as a result of sin, hurt, pain, illness, whatever, then no – emphatically NO – there is hardly any such 'love' to be found in marriages today, even (sadly) among Christian marriages. We need only to look at the soaring divorce rates and the prevalence of remarriages (after divorce) in our day to know this is true. If marriage is regarded as nothing more than a mutual contract between two persons to live together for some mutual benefit, but which contract can be broken at any time for any reason as long as one party is deemed to have breached any terms of the contract or simply 'wants out', how can there be true love in such marriages? What kind of a 'love' is it that vows "till death do us part", but parts anyway (never mind the vow or whatever it may mean when it was taken) within a few short years? Love - true love - is virtually non-existent in modern day marriages. It is critical that we understand what love means and how we are to love each other in our marriages. To err on this point spells certain trouble and disaster for a marriage. To get it right would lay a firm and unshakable foundation for an enduring and lifelong (though still imperfect) marriage that honours and glorifies God.

What then is 'love' and how does it come to expression in our marriages?

The essential character of love is fundamentally this : it GIVES. "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it."(Eph 5:25). "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:16). If you read 1 Cor 13, the classic passage in the Bible regarding love, you will notice that love is described in relation to how it views or responds to others (long-suffering, kind, envies not, does not behave unseemly, etc) and never about

what it gains for itself or about some feeling.

Love is not a good, tingling feeling that one has when one is with another person, (though it involves feelings and emotions); but a deliberate, conscious act of the will to give to the object of love.

Furthermore, love gives UNCONDITIONALLY, not because the other gives, or to seek anything in return. It simply gives. It gives unconditionally because its focus and chief concern is not self, but the other (1 Cor 13:5, "seeketh not her own"). Its foremost pre-occupation is the happiness and well-being of the other. Therefore, self-forgetfulness, self-denial and sacrifice are at the very heart of love. And because love is really a giving of oneself (not things and material possessions) to the other, the sacrifice of our very lives is the ultimate act of love, for it is the ultimate act of giving oneself to another without the possibility of receiving anything in return.

Our Lord Jesus Christ has demonstrated that supreme love in giving His life for His people. He willingly gave up His life as a conscious, deliberate act for His sheep (John 10:18). Did Jesus feel like loving the church? She is described in Isaiah 1:5-6 this way: "Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment." And in Jeremiah 3:1-10, she is labelled as

a shameless "harlot". Is the church so beautiful and attractive in and of herself that Christ is moved to love her? Is there anything desirable or that would make Jesus feel good about the church? Absolutely not! Nevertheless, He willed to love her by giving Himself freely and unconditionally, out of sovereign mercy and sheer grace, to save her from her sins and take her to be His Bride. And because our earthly marriages are pictures of the one, true, spiritual marriage between Christ and the Church, we must manifest a love that gives unconditionally to each other in our relationship as husband and wife.

This comes to expression in many ways in our daily life together.

Love gives of its time. Time to enjoy each other's company and to share the joys and pains of life together. Time to get to know the other person. Time to communicate with each other so as to understand each other's thinking and feelings. Time to meet the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual needs of the other.

Love gives up its 'rights', enjoyments and conveniences. Personal enjoyment is no longer a priority, but that of the spouse and family. The frequency of hanging out with friends or going to one's favourite places also reduces. The husband foregoes his golf game and newspaper reading to help his wife with the household duties. The wife foregoes her personal ambition, time, space and indeed her entire life to devote herself to the care of her husband and the children.

Love gives in and says "sorry". It does not argue to the end and insists that it is right all or most of the time. It is ready to admit wrong, however 'right' it may think itself to be, and is willing always to give the benefit of doubt to the other. Love would rather be wronged, than to wrong his spouse.

Love gives mercy when offended. In other words, love forgives readily and freely. It keeps no record of wrongs. Love is merciful, for it is deeply conscious that it has obtained far greater mercy for its own sins against God.



# Love gives till it hurts. In fact, love gives even though it hurts.

The husband continues to lead, provide for and protect his wife even when she does not submit willingly or becomes an emotional roller-coaster that is virtually impossible to relate to and reason with. The wife continues to submit to and honour her husband even when he refuses to lead the family or neglects her and the family. This is not to say that we condone such sinful behaviour or close an eye to the sins and wrongs of our spouses. But while pointing these out in a patient and loving manner, always seeking the other's repentance with tearful prayers day and night, we continue to love our spouse in spite of his or her sins against us. That is why it hurts!

Because love demands everything from us, because it requires us to deny ourselves constantly, it is extremely difficult to love. Believe me, it is spiritually, emotionally, mentally and even physically exhausting to love. Try it – you will be drained! For we are self-centred and self-seeking by nature, and to love is to ask the very opposite of what our sinful natures would naturally do. It is going "against the grain". Indeed, it is impossible to love, except we are regenerated and empowered by God's almighty grace. As Christians, because Christ has demonstrated that love supremely for us on the Cross, and shed that love in our hearts by His Holy Spirit, we are, by grace, able to show such love to our spouses, though imperfectly, in this life, for a lifetime! What a wonder of grace! What power of love God has imparted unto us as His beloved children!

There is a sense, however, in which love does not 'give' – it NEVER gives up! Love gives ALL, but never gives up! "Love...beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things" (1 Cor 13:7) – regardless of how difficult our spouse is or however trying the circumstances we find ourselves in in our marriages! Love perseveres, believing that God works ALL things together for our good and enduring

ALL things in the earnest expectation and hope of enjoying the perfect marriage with Christ one day in heaven. Whenever we are tempted to 'want out' in our marriages, we must remember that to every man, God brings a woman according to His infinite wisdom and sovereign will. We know this from the account of the institution of marriage in the Garden of Eden when God created Eve and brought her to Adam to be a help meet for him (Gen 2:18-25). God knew exactly the companion that Adam needed so that Adam could perform and fulfil God's will as ruler over the entire creation as God had determined. God created Eve out of Adam's ribs such that she could complement and support him as her head, and together they serve their Creator and Master in perfect love for Him and each other.

So it is today. God still brings, according to His infinite wisdom, a woman to a man and join them together as husband and wife for life. As Christians, we must believe this. Though we have a role to play in courtship and marriage, ultimately, it is God who joins two persons together in the most intimate human relationship of marriage. God knows best just the person we need (not the person we want) in our lives - for the rest of our lives – for our spiritual good and for His glory. We must believe this because there would be times in our marriages when we sinfully entertain the thought, that perhaps our spouse is "not really the one for me". This would imply that God made a mistake! No, no! God NEVER makes any mistakes; and certainly not in the critical matter of bringing our spouse into our lives! When a couple rails at each other with sharp and unkind words, or sinfully hurt one another by deeds of neglect and unfaithfulness, the strain in the relationship can be unbearable. The very fact that the relationship is a most intimate one causes the pain and strain to be all the greater. We want a way out of the emotional agony. We want relief desperately. That's when we are tempted to contemplate divorce. But God's Word clearly forbids such a course of action. Banish the thought! That is NOT the "way out" for whatever situation we may find ourselves in. It is NOT an option at all. By God's grace, we must hold fast the belief that God has given us our specific husbands and wives according to His infinite wisdom,

and that therefore we must cleave to each other for life. Yes, even when our husbands are no longer the chivalrous and romantic knight in shining armour, or our wives are no longer the sweet and submissive damsel in distress. Yes, even when there are unbelievably deep troubles and hurts and pains in our marriages. Remember, God has not made a mistake. This is the one thought that would keep our foothold firm and steady. The "way out" in the midst of the fiercest storms and tempest of married life – the ONLY way out - is the way of love and forgiveness.

Such is the love that must be manifested in our earthly marriages, for such is the love that exists in the marriage of all marriages that is between Christ and the Church, albeit in an infinitely greater and perfect measure. Christ has bound Himself to His Church with an unbreakable bond, never to forsake her. He has loved her unconditionally, and in spite of her utter unloveliness. In like manner must we love our spouse.

The burden to love falls on the husband (Eph 5:25). Just as Christ took the initiative to love the Church first, so the husband must take the initiative to love his wife. This is not to say the wife need not love her husband, or that she is always only on the receiving end while the husband always gives. She too must give, in response to her husband's giving. Indeed, she must give her love and submission even when she thinks her husband does not love her as much as he should. Hers is a loving submission. His is a loving headship. Love is the common motivation that drives each to fulfil their God-ordained roles in the marriage. Nevertheless, the primary responsibility to love, to give, to forgive, to heal, to nourish the marriage belongs to the husband. For he is the head of his wife. And God holds him responsible for the marriage.

Love, when properly understood and nourished in a marriage, is the key ingredient that will bind husband and wife in a blessed union of lifelong covenant friendship and fellowship – from the wedding, to the honeymoon, when the children come and till old age and death.

May the Lord grant unto our church strong and loving marriages that reflect with shining brightness the marriage between Christ and His beloved bride, the Church.

# Living the Single Life

>> Rev. Wilbur G. Bruinsma

Volume 71, Issue 18 (Strength of Youth)

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A little over a year ago we wrote an article that addressed the fear of single life (Vol. 70, No. 11, March 1, 1994). It was an article aimed at those young people who are afraid that marriage might pass them by. Out of panic, these young people might resort to some desperate and sinful means to solve their perceived problem. For that reason we encouraged our young people to rely on God in faith. If it is His will that we marry, He will guide the events of our lives that we will meet and marry that young man or woman He has chosen for us. We need not fear or force the issue. We must simply in faith follow the Lord's guiding. In connection with this we were also reminded that it is the Lord's will for some that they remain single their whole life. In these instances God has a purpose for these individuals as single persons in His church. Singles also are a valuable and necessary part of the church of Jesus Christ. When we trust in God, He will make us realize that single life also can be as fulfilling as married life and can bring us great reward.

We review all this because I received a fair amount of response to this article—not so much from young people, however, as from younger and older single adults. They appreciated the encouragement the article gave to them. One wrote: “I really appreciated your article in the S.B. It not only pointed out the dangers of marrying foolishly, but it helped me to realize that as a single, I fear it. In order to fight the battle of faith, we must realize who the enemy is.” This response and others like it serve to remind us as God's people of the various needs that exist among the members of the church. There are those who are beyond fearing the single life. They are resigned to living the single life.

But this raises an important question: what is the place of the single person in the life of the church and covenant? All of us must be sensitive to that question. As churches we stress the covenant fellowship and friendship that

God establishes with us and with our children in the line of our generations. This blessed truth has been a great comfort to us in all of life's difficulties. There is not one individual in the church of Jesus Christ who does not benefit from this truth. There is nothing more encouraging to a believer than to know that in every circumstance of life God is our sovereign Friend who will always be there for us, to uphold and strengthen us. The comfort God's covenant affords us has been our mainstay as Reformed believers. Never, therefore, would we want to forsake this glorious truth of God's covenant.

Yet, as with all truth, there follows life. Our covenant theology has shaped and moulded our world and life view. Since God has established His covenant in the line of continued generations, we place much stress on the need for covenant homes and marriages. That is only natural. We hear many sermons and read many an article and book on the subject of marriage. We emphasize the need to establish a good marriage, since there is no room for divorce and remarriage. We are taught the duties of husbands and wives toward each other in that marriage bond. We are taught that this relationship reflects the intimate bond of fellowship that exists between Christ and the church. Not only are we taught repeatedly of marriage, but we are constantly reminded as well of our calling as covenant parents. No doubt the baptism sermons in our denomination dealing with this subject can be numbered in the thousands! Covenant marriages, covenant children, covenant homes and families—we hear it all the time! The very life of the church quite naturally centres in and revolves around the family.

But, where does the single person fit in all of this? What is his or her role in the covenant life of the church? It is true: “God setteth the solitary in families” (Ps. 68:6). But God does not set all the solitary in families. What function does the single person serve in the church and covenant? That question is a real

one—especially when singles find themselves standing on the fringes of the life of the church. Here is how one single person expressed it to me:

*Your article (“The Fear of Single Life”) concludes that the church would be incomplete without us.... I believe that. However, experience often makes me feel otherwise.... It is my experience that many members of our churches look at the single (especially the never married) as not fitting. This accounts for the pressure people put upon their teenagers to marry. It also accounts for the fact that while people may greet the single in the vestibule of church, the fellowship often ends there.... For the person who already feels “inferior, worthless, and undesirable” such exclusion compounds the problem. The fear of single life (which is inherent in us) increases because there is very little if any support from our fellow saints.*

This thought has been expressed by several to whom I have spoken. Now, whether that is real or imagined on their part makes little difference. It places all of us as members of the church (whether single or married) before the question: where does the single believer “fit” in the sphere of God's covenant and church? If the church is incomplete without them, how, in fact, do they fill out that body of Jesus Christ? That is a difficult question to answer, of course, because there are so many varying circumstances in the life of every single person in the church. For example, some may be single, yet fully involved with the families of their own brothers and sisters. These feel their life complete. Other singles would just as soon be left alone and on their own. They enjoy their independence, and are involved in the church as much as possible. On the other hand, however, there are certain singles that are alone, away from family, and wanting so much to be a part of the covenant life of the church. The church and her members must be sensitive to the varying needs of these brothers and sisters in the church.



Still, where do singles fit in the sphere of the church? The answer lies in large part with the single saint himself. I can answer theoretically, of course. The Bible teaches us clearly that all have a place and function in the body of Christ. Paul instructs us of this in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. There he teaches us that the body is made up of many different members. Some of these members we may think to be more important than others, but in reality they cannot function well without the other members. Every member has his proper function and part in that body. Even those members that may seem more feeble or uncomely, on these we bestow, quite often, the greatest honour. The single saint may think of himself as one of those uncomely members of the church, but this is far from true. God has tempered the body together in such a way that He gives more abundant honour to that part which lacks.

What more really can we say? With that in mind, the single person in Christ's church must set himself the task of discovering what his particular calling in the church is. To do this requires of him, first of all, contentment. He must learn what each of God's people must learn, "in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." We all must learn that our value as a person does not consist in whether we are married or not. Our joy and satisfaction in life are found in belonging to Christ. Christ is our all! He has taken away our sin and guilt and has incorporated us into the body of the church. He has called us and separated us unto Himself that we might be His servants in all of life – no matter if we are a married person or a single. That is what is all important to us! And in that we can find contentment too!

With that joy in our hearts we then can set ourselves to discover what our function as an individual is in the body

of the church. As we do, we bear in mind the Word of God in 1 Corinthians 7:32-34: the single saint "careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord." This simply means that the child of God who is "unencumbered" with marriage and a family is able to devote much more time to the things of the Lord. A minister I listened to recently stated it well: "We must view single life not as an obstacle, but as an opportunity." What talents has God given me in particular? How can I use them in the service of the church? How can I be involved in the labour of the church in order that God's covenant might be carried on in the generations of believers I know and love? Can I be a school teacher? Can I be a Dorcas who is known for her almsdeeds? Can I serve on committees of the church that require the time and effort that a married man cannot give? How can I find my particular niche in the body of Jesus Christ? With that positive attitude, we will find our function in the church, and understand that we are as much a part of the body of Christ as those who are married.

There remains, however, another side to this whole question. Perhaps the single saint does discover this for himself. Yet, what about the feeling (whether perceived or actual it does not matter) left by others that despite all the single does, he or she simply does not fit. How sensitive are we to the need of the single person in our midst? It is true that those with similar interests often seek each other out. When we are married, it is natural to seek another married couple. When we have an infant, it is natural to talk to another person who has a baby. When we are raising teenage children, it is quite natural that we seek out others who have teenagers at home. But what room does this leave for the single man or woman of our congregation to be a part of our lives? With some singles,

as we said, this may not be a problem. With others it certainly is. (By way of an aside, the same difficulty often exists with couples who cannot have children, or widows and widowers in the church. They feel like a fifth wheel.) As fellow saints we must be sensitive to these needs.

What can be done to aid these brothers and sisters, to make them feel like they fit? Simple inclusion in our activities as families. When I visited one of our churches in the West I noticed a particular family that included a single woman of the congregation in all of their family's activities. She was a natural part in many functions; even meals of that family. She fit! And she felt like she fit too! Who can withhold their "bowels of mercy" to that single person who states: "The message needs to be told that it is so helpful to me when people invite me over for coffee after church." Is there scriptural warrant for this? There surely is warrant! 1 Corinthians 12:24-26: "...God hath tempered the body together . . . that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it." Galatians 6:2: "Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ." Matthew 25:40: "Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

By busying ourselves in the church as single members, and by including our single brothers and sisters in the Lord in the events of our families, we help alleviate the stigma that may belong to living the single life. In turn, this will assist in alleviating much of the fear of living single. Then, the blessed fellowship we experience together in the family of God will extend to all the members of God's household.

# Strangers and Pilgrims

>> Cornelius Boon

The apostle Peter wrote this letter to the persecuted saints who were greatly in need of encouragement. This letter focuses on the special needs of the pilgrim, especially those that suffer for

righteousness sake. What does being stranger and a pilgrim mean? Basically a pilgrim is someone who is passing through a land as a wayfarer and for a time, he is in a land that is not his.

He is on a journey from the moment of his birth until the moment of his death; and throughout this journey, he has no permanent place to call his own. The term stranger highlights his

actual experience as he makes this pilgrimage. From his point of view, he feels strange and out of place, never comfortable, and there is always a certain tension. From the point of view of others, the non-pilgrims, they view him as someone who is strange and different.

Let us first briefly go through what the book of 1 Peter talks about. In the first chapter, Peter exhorts the saints that their salvation is guaranteed because they are kept by the power of God (1 Peter 1:5). This preservation also includes trials that they must experience which will purify them like gold in the fire (1 Peter 1:7). The pilgrims are to live holy lives in the face of persecution (1 Peter 1:13-25), and it is only by Christ who redeemed us by His blood that we can live such a life (1 Peter 1:17-21).

In the second chapter, we are as living stones that serve Christ (1 Peter 2:1-10) and are to desire the sincere milk of the word as newborn babes (1 Peter 2:2). Peter points out that a pilgrim must abstain from fleshly lusts and lead a life that is glorifying to God (1 Peter 2:11-12). We are to submit to government as well as those that God has placed in authority over us (1 Peter 2:13-18). Christ suffered and died so that we may be saved, and we too must be willing to follow in His example (1 Peter 2:20-25).

In the third chapter, Peter talks about the duty of the wife, to be in subjection to her husband. Her beauty is to be the hidden man of the heart, in a quiet spirit (1 Peter 3:1-6). The duty of the husband is to give honour unto the wife that their prayers be not hindered (1 Peter 3:7). As pilgrims, we must expect to suffer for righteousness sake (1 Peter 3:14) and must always be ready to give an answer of the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:15). Again, Christ is our example – He was unjustly accused and persecuted, and He suffered for the elects' sake, that they may be saved (1 Peter 3:18-22).

In the fourth and fifth chapters, we read that we should no longer serve the lust of the flesh, but the will of God, and this means that we will face persecution as well (1 Peter 4:1-6). We are called to be sober and watch unto prayer, to use our spiritual gifts to minister to each other (1 Peter 4:7-11). May we rejoice in that we suffer with Christ, judgement must

begin at the house of God, and commit the keeping of our souls to God (1 Peter 4:12-19). Office bearers must be diligent to care for the flock and guard against the devil (1 Peter 5:6-9). God will preserve us through our suffering, and all glory must be given unto Him (1 Peter 5:10-11).

### THE HOPE

*1 Peter 1:4-5 – “To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith until salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”*

This beautiful text highlights the ultimate hope of a pilgrim on this earth. As pilgrim and strangers, we do not look to earthly things, but rather to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled. The things of this earth will fade away and as Job said: “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither.” This is why the pilgrim looks toward the day when he can once again be with his heavenly father in glory. But notice also in the second part, we see that by ourselves, we can never attain this everlasting inheritance. It is all by the power of God! It is He who has kept and preserved us unto that eternal salvation! So let us give wholehearted praise to Him for all His goodness and mercy that He has so abundantly shown to us, by living as strangers and pilgrims on this earth. But, what does it mean to live as a stranger and pilgrim? Let us take a look at some of its aspects.

### RESISTING LUSTS

*1 Peter 2:11-12 – “Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.”*

A pilgrim must always be conscious of how he carries himself, be it in action, thoughts, and desires. The inward principles that guide the pilgrim must have its outward manifestation. Just having head-knowledge is never enough. By the grace of God and out of thankfulness for all that He has done for us, we daily seek to live a life as a pilgrim and in accordance to His will. Here, the apostle calls the pilgrim to

abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul. The devil always seeks to work in the old man within us; this is especially true for youths. This is the age when we want to be free, want to try new and exciting stuff and do our own thing. Advice from adults or people who are older than us often go unheeded, and how many times have we said or thought this – “my parents do not understand me”? We want to enjoy the pleasures of this world. Be it in the ungodly theatre, where lusts and sexual perversion are glorified; in television, where love dramas teach the wrong values; in worldly music, on the radio, in games, in magazines, and novels and many others. Do we find pleasure in these activities? So much so that without these things for entertainment, we feel that our life has no meaning at all?

Yes, peer pressure is great, especially when everybody does it. Whether in school or at work, all the people around us indulge in such pleasures. Do we join in because we do not want to be a social outcast? Do we watch the latest movies and dramas so that we have something to discuss with them? But here God instructs us to abstain. This means that in no way may we indulge or make provision for these fleshly lusts. Do not try to find something good in something that has nothing good in it.

This, of course, involves a fight as these lusts war against the soul. They war against the soul which is regenerated and governed by a new principle of life. The Christian, a stranger and a pilgrim, fights against these lusts which have no part in the kingdom. The pilgrim prays for grace to overcome his weaknesses, and through his struggles, God is glorified and God continues to sanctify him. If there isn’t a fight, then he shall be overcome and walk in darkness.

On the positive side, the pilgrim is called to have an honest conversation, to live a life that is good and pleasing in the sight of God. Our outward walk should be in harmony with our inner life, which is also good, because of regeneration. Although the world persecutes us for our faith, we should continue to walk in all honesty. That by our walk, others might see Christ in us and the day of visitation might come where God in His sovereign grace uses us to call another to repentance. *Matt 5:16 – “Let your*

light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." The ungodly will not glorify God unless He works in their hearts. Only then will they see the walk of the Christian in a totally different light. When they once falsely accused the children of God, they now behold the good works of a Christian and glorify God for His grace.

### IN THE MIDST OF PERSECUTION

*1 Peter 2:19-22 – "For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:"*

When we live apart from the world, there will always be persecution. Many a time the world does not understand our actions and behaviour. They find it hard to believe that we do not partake in the sinful activities that they do. They cannot even begin to understand the hope that is within us. Why do we spend so much time in church on Sundays, listening to hour-long sermons when we could be out enjoying ourselves? Why do we deny ourselves better paying and more profitable jobs? Why do we give up a good career to be a housewife and to take care of the kids? Why do we serve in the various committees when to them, there is nothing to be gained? Why do we take offence to the things they do and say? The world cannot understand our life of self-denial and sacrifice. For how can they? They are blind to what is important and of true value. It is not the desire of a pilgrim to stand out and be noticed, to gain some sort of fame. We would rather lead quiet and peaceable lives here on earth. But we cannot help but be noticed and marked as different here on this earth.

As we live out the life of conviction of a pilgrim, and in accordance to the principles set forth in the bible, we will stand apart from the rest of the world. For God has made us distinctive! And as God continues to work His grace in us, we will more and more appear to be rather odd to others who do not share in that powerful transforming work of

God. We will be seen as strangers on this earth.

What should we do then, when we are faced with persecution? In the text above, we see that Christ who was blameless was not exempted from sufferings. He died the painful and bitter death on the cross to be the propitiation for our sins. If Christ who is perfectly just, suffered for our sake, why should not we, who are criminals, also suffer? What reason is there for us to be discontent in our sufferings? For we know that these sufferings are given by God and are all to mould us to be better servants of God.

*1 Peter 1:6-7 – "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:*

All trials that He gives us are meant for our good and are needed in order for us to grow in faith. He does not give us unnecessary trials, but only what is needed and for a season which is required. The trials of our faith will strengthen us and make us walk closer to God, for what is more important to a pilgrim than his or her faith? And through all of this, we will find true joy in God who has so abundantly blessed us with all things.

*1 Peter 3:14 – "But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled;"*

### READY TO GIVE AN ANSWER

*1 Peter 3:15 – "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear."*

When we as pilgrims are called to give an account to those that ask for the reason for the hope that is within us, we must not shy away from it. It is far easier to walk away, or give a vague answer and oftentimes we sinfully do so. But, this is not a valid option; we are called to give a good defence, for the hope that motivates us to live as we do in this world.

Often these questions will come in a spirit of hostility. The world does not

appreciate those that do not conform to their standards. And when we give them an answer, they are often offended by the truth. For this reason, the pilgrim sometimes becomes intimidated; he is afraid to give an answer and becomes ashamed of the gospel. This, in turn, leads to compromise in the pilgrim's life. If we find ourselves doing so, we must pray that God will grant us His grace to stand up for the truth. It takes courage to live as a pilgrim and face the hostilities of the world.

But we must have this courage if we are truly sincere in giving an answer to everyone that asks a reason for the hope that is in us. What then does it mean to be ready to give an answer? It means that we must be prepared and properly equipped so that we can give an explanation. Is our only explanation "because my church tells me that I must live this way"? Or, "because my pastor tells me that I should not do this"? This is not being ready to give an answer. To be ready with an answer means that we must be able to demonstrate from the Bible why we hold to such views. Are we able to answer questions about why we do not go to the movies or participate in social dancing? Or why our church does not get involved in social issues and community affairs? Or why do we hold so strongly to infant baptism? This readiness is never easy to attain, nor is it easy to maintain; it requires daily use of the Word of God and constant prayer. But yet it is important as God requires it of the pilgrim. He will use our answer for His glory, on the one hand to harden the hearts of the reprobate, and on the other hand to bring His elect to repentance and salvation.

But first, we must sanctify the Lord God in our hearts. God, in Christ, must be at the centre of our hearts, everything we do here on this earth must be for His glory alone. We must be dedicated to Christ, making Him our Lord and Master. And notice that this is a matter of the heart. Peter here is not talking about some outward conformity where we obey the law of God; but rather it is a deep and sincere desire that comes from the new man in Christ to live after the commandments of God, to be a humble servant for Christ. That desire that God places in our hearts is the beginning of a sanctified and holy life and will be seen by others. When we submit ourselves wholeheartedly to

the rule of our Lord Jesus Christ, our walk will be in accordance to what we profess, and it will give credit to what we say. Apart from that, no one will believe our answer.

Peter also warns the pilgrim to beware of pride. We answer those who ask of a reason of the hope that is in us in “meekness and fear”. Many a time, we look down upon others who live in sin and wickedness, often thinking to ourselves that we are so much better than them. But the truth is, that is NEVER the case; in ourselves we are no better than the world who asks of the reason for the hope in us. God, in His grace, has placed this hope in our hearts through the gospel, and our answer should always be out of humbleness and thankfulness to Him who has worked His wondrous work of regeneration in our hearts. If not for His grace and mercy, we too would be walking in the world and in darkness. Therefore always beware of pride, for it can sneak into our hearts if we are unaware and not constantly guarding against it.

### HOW WE SHOULD WALK

*1 John 2:15-16 – “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world”*

Although this text is not from 1 Peter, it is extremely important for the pilgrim to understand how he is called to live in this world. There are two extremes that must be avoided. On the one hand, there is the extreme of joining together with the world, to live along with the world in its lusts. On the other hand, there is the extreme of fleeing completely from the world in a physical sense, or “world-flight” as they call it. Let us first look at the two extremes, and then consider how we should live as God has commanded us. The first extreme is obviously wrong, from what we have discussed earlier about the calling of a pilgrim and from many instances in scripture (2 Cor 6:14, Rom 12:2), we are called not to partake in the sinful activities of the world and to live an antithetical life.

The opposite extreme of living is world-flight. World-flight is the attempt to

achieve a holy life by isolating oneself from the world. This principle can be tempting to a believer because the idea behind it is that if one puts himself far enough away from the world and its evil influences, one can escape them. But the fundamental flaw in all of this is a wrong view of sin. Sin is viewed by those that advocate world-flight as being the outward act almost exclusively. They fail to realise that by the fall of man, sin is upon the very nature of man and no matter how far man flees, he can never escape from sin. Furthermore, by doing this, they are ignoring God’s command to be a light in this world and to always be ready to give an answer. It is as salt that has lost its savour and is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men. *John 17:15 – “I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.” Neither are we to divide our lives into two separate compartments. Our “holy life”, where we go to church on Sundays, or when we meditate on God’s word and pray. And our “worldly life”, where we go about our work and daily business.*

The pilgrim should not consider the time that he spends praying or meditating on God’s word to be the only “real and worthy” part of his life, for His ENTIRE life should be dedicated to God. That means that even when he is working, or eating, or sleeping, it should also be for the glory of God, for God has called him to do these things as well. Strangely, the man who compartmentalises his life soon ends up putting too much stock in this earthly life. For anything that is cut loose from God and His Kingdom, anything that we desire to do independently from God, soon opposes itself against God and becomes an idol.

Our calling as pilgrims is to go about our daily work in the midst of this world. Not to seek the places of ungodly entertainment and sin, but rather, wherever our vocation in life takes us, in the office, in the shop, in school, in the home. And in all of these, we are called to walk honestly, to let our light shine, so that others may see Christ in us. Not with a view of converting or making this physical world a better place as some would have us believe today, but rather, showing the grace of God which is within us and to give all praise and glory to Him who has saved

us. There is a spiritual separation that a pilgrim has with the world, rather than a physical one. It is of upmost importance that a pilgrim maintains this spiritual separation because the devil seeks daily to draw us closer to the world.

*Eph 6:12 – “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”*

### THE COMFORT

*1 Peter 5:7 – “Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.”*

What a difficult calling it is to be a stranger and pilgrim on this earth. God requires so much from us that many times we feel totally inadequate in carrying out our calling. We experience many trials and cares in our lives, not only thorough persecutions and sufferings imposed on us by the world, but also the sorrows and anxieties of life, like the loss of a loved one, or sickness and diseases. All of which God in His providence has chosen to lay upon us. So much so that many times, we lie in bed unable to sleep, tossing and turning with worry. Anxieties over our daily needs, “will I be able to pay the bills?” Anxieties over spiritual matters, “will my church remain true to the faith? Why is it that I often seem to make so little or slow spiritual progress? Why can’t I understand the doctrines that are taught? Why do worldly activities interest me more than spiritual things?” Anxieties over the future, “what course of studies should I pursue? What job should I do? Will I be able to find a spouse in the future?” Anxiety usually occurs over that which we have no control. What should we do then?

Here Peter exhorts the pilgrim to cast all his cares upon Him! Upon Him, the Almighty, the Sovereign and All-Wise God! It under His mighty hand that you are humbled, that He may exalt you in due time, when you cast all your care upon Him! He is the most worthy object of our trust. He who knows the beginning to the end, shall He also not know of your need? He who has chosen us from eternity, shall He not continue to sustain us? Cast all your care upon Him! For He careth for you! Pray unto Him and in prayer lay all your cares at His feet and leave it there; trusting in

Him to provide for all things. Ask for the grace to be contented and to abide in His will, for His will is perfect and He

knows what is best for us! In Him alone can we find true peace and rest. *Psalm 4:8 – “I will both lay me down in peace,*

*and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety.”*

## OVERVIEW OF

# M A L A C H I

>> Cheryl Lim

## (CK BIBLE STUDY LESSON 1)

This year, our youth group Covenant Keepers (CK) embarked on a Bible Study on the book of Malachi. We are using the bible study guide by Rev. Carl Haak (published by the RFPFA) as our primary material and other resources include Rev. Ronald Hanko’s series on the book of Malachi “The Prophecy of Malachi: Covenant Faithfulness and Unfaithfulness” (published in the Standard Bearer), and Rev. Angus Stewart’s series of sermons on this last Old Testament prophet (published on the Covenant PRC website). The first lesson was conducted in January and we were given an overview of the book of Malachi.

### CONTEXT OF MALACHI

The book of Malachi is the last of the Old Testament prophecies and it was followed by 400 years of silence, until the angel Gabriel announced the birth of John the Baptist. It was written to the remnant of Judah who had returned from the 70 years of Babylonian Exile with Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah on three separate occasions, spanning the course of almost a century. Malachi was a contemporary of Nehemiah, as seen from the similarity of the sins dealt with in both books, such as mixed marriages (Mal 2:10-16; Neh 13:23-27), a corrupt priesthood (Mal 1:6 - 2:9; Neh 13:1-9) and the neglect of tithes (Mal 3:8-12; Neh 10:32-39). Furthermore, Malachi was likely to have been a contemporary of Ezra as well, who was still living at the time of Nehemiah (Neh 8:9). Estimates place the date of Malachi’s prophecy between 444 BC and 432 BC, the dates of Nehemiah’s two visits to Jerusalem.

The Jews living in this period were experiencing various hardships. Although the temple’s foundation was being laid, it was clearly seen to be a far cry from the former glory of that built by Solomon. Those who remembered

the first house “wept with a loud voice” (Ez 3:12), recognising that the new temple would be more modest than the former. Then, oppression from the Samaritans in the north threatened this work of rebuilding. They tried their best to frustrate the rebuilding of the temple, even writing to Artaxerxes to accuse the Jews of disloyalty (Ez 4). Work finally resumed with the urging of Haggai and Zechariah, and it was completed under the leadership of Nehemiah in 516 BC.

Furthermore, their outward circumstances were far from pleasant. They were under the Persian Empire, possessed only a small plot of land, were poor, and had a small population – hardly a force in the sight of the nations. They faced economic adversities with droughts and plagues consuming their harvests, resulting in crop failures.

### THE MESSAGE

Malachi brought a few key messages to the post-exilic Jews. These include the prophecy of the coming of Christ and His forerunner, John the Baptist,

*Mal 3:1 Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.*

*Mal 4:5-6 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.*

The calling for the Jews to turn from and repent of their sins, namely, *Divorce and mixed marriages*

*Mal 2:10-16*

*Neglect of tithes & offerings; robbing God*

*Mal 3:8-12*

*Profaning, formalizing and corrupting worship*

*Mal 1:6-2:9*

*Murmuring against and questioning God*

*Mal 1:2, 6; 2:14, 17; 3:8, 13-15*

and the great need for the coming of Christ.

*Mal 4:2 But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.*

### ITS RELEVANCE

The book of Malachi was chosen for our bible study in the hope that various lessons can be learnt. The sins which Malachi rebuked the Jews for are equally prevalent in our day and age as they were then, although they may be manifested differently. Do we not see all around us and perhaps even in our midst, cases of couples being unequally yoked, being divorced and remarried, co-habiting with one another and even exhibiting homosexual behaviour? Not only are these sins rampant, they often receive the tacit or open approval of church leaders. In our hedonistic, self-seeking society, do we not often rob God of time, energy, resources and even tithes? Is our worship as reverential and God-glorifying as it ought to be; or is it characterised by cold formalism and spiritual laxity? And are we not also at times guilty of murmuring against God in difficult circumstances, and questioning and denying the presence of our sins? The study of the book of Malachi can help us to re-examine our lives in light of all these.

Furthermore, the book speaks of covenant faithfulness and unfaithfulness. Despite the Jews' treacherous behaviour, God promised deliverance through the Saviour (Mal 4:2). The truth of God's everlasting covenant, as emphasised by the use of the name Jehovah, was evidence of the Lord's favour, amidst all the rebuke and judgement. Do we not need this reminder as well, as we daily struggle with our sins? Indeed, we can take comfort in this: Mal 3:6 "For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed."

Even as Malachi prophesied of the Lord's coming, so too can we look forward to the second coming of Christ. This book, despite its seemingly gloomy outlook, actually instils hope in us! As Rev. Hanko aptly describes, That promise of Christ's coming and of cleansing, given through Malachi, looked forward not only to the first coming of Christ but also to the second, so that the book of

Malachi retains its significance and relevance and is a revelation of God's faithfulness today and of hope for the church's final purification and salvation. (Standard Bearer Volume 81, Issue 21; The Prophecy of Malachi: Covenant Faithfulness and Unfaithfulness (1))

Through the course of this study, we hope that the youths will be reminded of this momentous event and prepare themselves by watching and praying. The great doctrine of election and reprobation is also taught here (Mal 1:2), to which Paul made reference in his epistle to the Romans (Rom 9:13). This fundamental Reformed truth ought to be taught to succeeding generations, that the sovereignty of God in our salvation may be accurately understood.

#### ITS DIVISIONS

The book of Malachi may be divided into six disputations, beginning with a superscription (Mal 1:1) and ending with a summary (Mal 4:4-6).

*First disputation (1:2-5) – General unfaithfulness of the people and their refusal to love and honour God*

*Second disputation (1:6-2:9) – Specific sins of the people and priests, such as the offering of polluted sacrifices*

*Third disputation (2:10-16) – Sins of mixed marriages and divorce*

*Fourth disputation (2:17-3:6) – Prophecy of the coming of Christ and His forerunner*

*Fifth disputation (3:7-12) – Neglect of tithes and offerings*

*Sixth disputation (3:13-4:3) – General warnings and reproofs, along with the promise of the triumph of the righteous*

*Conclusion (4:4-6) – Admonition to remember the law of Moses and another reference to the coming of Christ and His forerunner*

*Our Father's  
Handiwork*  
>> Shang Ren

Birds are amazing creations of God. They were created on the fifth day of creation *ex nihilo*, which means "out of nothing." (Genesis 1:20-23; Hebrews 11:3) Birds have characteristics that most other animals do not have; for example, wings, hollow bones, feathers, etc. All these special characteristics help them to "fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven." (Genesis 1:20) The only purpose for the creation of birds is the glory of God. Birds display the supreme wisdom and wonderful creativity of God. God uses birds not only to display His glory, but also to teach His people many important lessons of life. Birds are mentioned many times in the Bible and illustrate many doctrines.

You might ask, "Where do birds appear in the Bible?" The word "birds" and even the names of specific kinds of birds do appear many times. For example, Matthew 13:1-23: "And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way

side, and the fowls came and devoured them up." The fowls represent Satan who removes the seed of the Gospel from man. The passage uses birds to bring out a truth.

All of God's animal creations possess a special gift called "instinct." An instinct is "an inborn tendency to behave in a certain way." Animal instincts are evidence of and point to a God who created the world around us. For example, the Bristled-thighed Curlew and the Short-tailed Shearwater actually leave their young chicks before they even know how to fly. They just get up and leave, leaving the young chicks to fend for themselves. But God in his providence designed the young chicks to be very resourceful. They jump from their nests to look for food, fatten up for flight and then take off! They fly for 5000 miles without stopping, going to the very place their parents went to. The incredible flights of these young birds point to God, who designed His

creation to do things that would bring him glory and honor!

Psalm 84:3 "Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my King, and my God." If God cares so much about these small little birds, He will care much more about His people who are made in His own image. "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?" (Matthew 6:26) These passages show that God's people are the most important of all His creation and He will never let these precious gems of His crown be lost, destroyed, or forsaken. "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them will not fall on the ground without your father." (Matthew 10:29) God is sovereign; everything is under His control. So we need not be afraid when trials come.

“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; they shall walk, and not faint.” (Isaiah 40:31) God assures His people that those who trust Him will be blessed with His strength. “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” (Philippians 4:13)

So how ought we to apply this to our lives? We are to “cast all our cares

upon him, for he careth for us.” (1 Peter 5:7) We have to trust him for “all things work together for good to those who love God, and those who are called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28)

Birds play an important part in the Bible. Jesus used them in His parables and in other passages to drive home many biblical points. They help to assure God’s people of His precious and eternal promises to them.

May we learn from birds to place our utmost trust in God and wait upon Him, for, as this song reminds us:

*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;*

*They shall walk and not be faint.*

*Teach me Lord, teach me Lord,*

*to wait.*

## MUSIC XVII

Dear Young People,

We have been talking about singing the Psalms in the worship service. I have said about all I intend to say concerning that subject, although there is one other matter that I want to address briefly. You will remember that I mentioned in one of these articles that the history of Psalm-singing in the church has demonstrated that whenever a church or denomination introduced hymns into the singing it was because either heresy had already come into the church, or it had the result that hymns themselves brought heresy into the church. In other words, hymn singing has always been connected with heresy. I know of no exception to this rule. And it is true for Reformed Churches and for Presbyterian Churches.

I have wondered why this should be the case. I think there is one main reason for it. That reason is that it is difficult to sing in worship with the understanding. In writing to the Corinthians about the misuse of speaking in tongues, the apostle writes: “What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.

To sing with the understanding means that one sings in such a way that he is aware of the words that he is singing and knows what they mean. He makes the words his own confession and prayer. This is not as easy to do as one would suppose. Many songs become familiar to us and we sing them from memory without ever giving a thought to what we are singing. Or we are singing alto or tenor or bass, and we are concentrating so hard on the notes that we do not give the words we are

singing any thought.

The fact is that we are more concerned with and interested in the tune, the music, than we are the words. And that is why we like the tunes better than the words. Many of the hymns have, what I would call, catchy tunes, or lively tunes, or unusual, but pleasing harmonies. And so hymns are often more pleasing to people than Psalms, not because the words are better, but because the tune is more appealing. We like tricky tunes with syncopated rhythm, pleasing to the ear, and popular.

The Reformers in Geneva, including John Calvin, knew this and really wanted all the singing to be without harmony and according to tunes which, while stately and edifying, were not in themselves appealing. The Reformers did not want people to sing because the tunes were nice, but because the words expressed Biblical truth.

In other words, people like hymns because of the music and not necessarily because of the words. Some musicians have made millions on this appeal that the music has to people, and have gone so far as to write supposedly Christian music, at least music with religious themes to rock and roll rhythms and tunes, and have called their music, “Christian rock.”

Now, I think one can go too far with writing music that has no appeal in itself. Music is a gift of God and must and can be used for God’s glory. Not all music, but music which is genuinely music and follows the laws of music that God put into his creation. I am sure that no one will sing rock and roll or rap music in heaven. But the danger is always present that people like some songs better than others, not because the words are better, but because the music is more attractive and appealing.

And there is no question about it that hymns have more appealing music than Psalms – at least for our modern generation. Psalm singing goes back to the Reformation and carries with it the influence of the Reformation. Hymns are of more recent origin and were written to attract people by means of the music, not necessarily the words.

And, because people sing without giving much thought to the words, but captivated by the music, it is easy to introduce heretical ideas into songs sung in the church so that people do not even notice that the words are not Biblical; they are simply too caught up in the music.

John Wesley was a mystic and an Arminian of the worst sort. He hated Calvinism and even told George Whitefield that if Whitefield did not quit preaching the doctrines of grace, Wesley was not going to have anything more to do with him. Augustus Toplady, author of “Rock of Ages,” was a staunch Calvinist. He warned people against Wesley’s Arminianism. Wesley was so angry that he slandered Toplady unmercifully. Charles Wesley was the brother of John and went with John on his evangelistic campaigns. But Charles was the hymn writer. And, although Charles was a gifted musician and although he knew what kind of music appealed to people, he wrote hymns that fit his brother John’s theology. Yet, Charles Wesley’s hymns are widely used yet today.

Because people like the music better than the words, and because hymns have more appealing music than Psalms, people in the pew clamour for hymns in the worship. And, once starting on the road of hymn singing in the church, it usually happens that sound doctrine has to take a back seat. Many Reformed and Presbyterian Churches,

once Psalm-singing churches, have introduced “a few hymns, mostly for special Christian holidays, and have prepared books for singing that have both hymns and Psalms. But it is a well-known fact that when books of worship have both hymns and Psalms, more and more hymns are added, and more and more hymns are sung in the worship services, until the Psalms are not even sung except on rare occasions. When I was attending a Christian primary school, we used the Psalter Hymnal. I can recall that we only sang two Psalter numbers and those only on rare occasions. One was Psalter No. 1 and the other was Psalter No. 7. But we sang some awful hymns.

When I was a teen-ager, I used to sing in a male quartet. Did we ever sing Psalms? No, I cannot recall that we ever sang Psalms. I know that there are not many Psalms written for musical groups composed only of men, but I know too that our quartet liked what are called “negro spirituals,” because of their rollicking rhythms and catchy tunes, their syncopated beat and their close harmony. We did not give too much thought to the words.

Singing that pays attention to the music and ignores the words is singing that is not done with the understanding. And singing that is not done with the understanding is not God-glorifying.

Again, I emphasize, good religious music has its place, and is a gift of God, but singing that ought to be used in the worship must have both: good music and Biblical words. The nearer we can come to that, the more God-glorifying our worship will be.

We are talking about living the life of the antithesis. We must not forget that. The music we play and sing is one powerful way in which we show that we are different from the world.

Anyone can develop a “taste” (probably a sinful taste) for worldly music, when it blares from loudspeakers in stores, restaurants and even in one’s ear when he is put on hold while trying to reach someone on the telephone; but one develops such a taste more quickly when he/she deliberately has that kind of music playing when reading, studying or doing some chore. My wife and I have walked out of restaurants in which such music crashed so loudly against our ear

drums that we could not even talk while eating. I have complained to companies that subject one to dreadfully wicked music while they put one on hold. But the wicked world will not be deprived of its sinful music. Let it be said of us that we will not be deprived of our genuinely God-glorifying music.

With our love in the Lord, *Prof*

## Antithetical Living I

Dear Young People,

I finished our discussion on music and turn now to something else. You will recall that I am discussing the antithesis as it controls all the life of the people of God. I had talked about the antithesis between the music of a sinful world and the people of God.

With this letter I want to turn to a discussion of the antithesis between the world and God’s covenant people in their attitude towards and use of earthly possessions.

This is not such an easy subject to discuss, not because the teaching of Scripture is unclear on our calling, but because even God’s people quickly take offense when one begins to talk about their bank account or their retirement funds. Even God’s people are very touchy about these things and quickly close their ears to anyone who wants to bring to them the word of God concerning these matters. But I guess I will risk your anger and go ahead anyway. The matter is important.

I do want you to know, however, that what I have to say is not something that comes from a man who has attained perfection in the use of earthly goods. As is true when I preach, it is also true now: I write for my own admonition and instruction as well as for yours.

The difficulty is, in large measure, due to the fact that the Lord has given us many earthly possessions. We live in affluence. We live in affluent countries. We share in this affluence. There are many of God’s people, such as the saints in Myanmar, who know only poverty. One would think that we would be quickly satisfied when we have enough to eat for today and, probably next month – if not next year. But we are not easily satisfied. It seems that

the more we have, the more we want. While we would never be satisfied with a bone with a few shreds of meat on it and marrow in it, the people in Myanmar (and elsewhere) would think they were given a feast if such a bone were offered them.

I read once that the American people throw enough food away every day to feed another nation of equal size with a diet far in excess of what they need. I know that to be true. My sister once worked in a Christian nursing home. At the end of the day there were whole pies left, which had not even been cut. My sister took one home once, but her boss said to her, “If you do that again, you will be fired, for we would be breaking the law; the government makes us throw away every bit of food that we have left.”

I had a close friend who operated a wholesale food company. He sometimes went to food conventions. At one such convention, at the end of the meetings, a banquet was held in which liquor was served and a huge table, more than eighty feet long, was filled with foods of every sort. There were whole hams and whole shanks of beef for slicing. There were fish of every kind and cooked in every imaginable way. There were vegetables and salads. There were desserts that my friend did not know existed. After the banquet was finished, my friend noticed that only less than 20% of the food had been eaten. He asked the man in charge what was going to happen to all the food that was left. The man said, “It will all be dumped.” My friend said, “Cannot it be given to the poor?” The man responded, “No, the government will not allow us to do that. It has to be thrown away.”

Waste of God’s gifts is a terrible sin. Whole civilizations have been destroyed by God because of God’s punishment of the sin of wasting his good gifts and the things of his creation. One wonders sometimes how long it will take before God destroys our affluent countries where the waste of his gifts in a way of life.

I even remember a time, when I was a small boy, when my father brought me to a pig farm. These pigs were fed by garbage that had been collected from restaurants and hotels. The trucks would roll in and dump their garbage in huge pens where hundreds of pigs



were fed. While most of the food was very good when it was thrown away, there was also, mixed with the garbage silverware from some of the most luxurious and expensive hotels and restaurants in the whole of Chicago. The pigs did not eat this silverware, of course, and so it was salvaged. We were very poor at the time, and so some of that silverware was given to us to use. The names of all the expensive eating places in Chicago were engraved on the silverware, with the result that my mother did not dare to use it when we had people over for a meal. They thought: "How can this family afford to eat in all these expensive places? And how do they dare steal the silverware?" It was an example of waste that made my eyes bulge, but it was my first lesson in the terrible sin of waste. Then I understood why my mother made us eat everything she set on the table, whether we liked it or not. Nor could we leave the table until our plates were empty. And nothing ever was thrown away that was at all edible. Nor did we have a refrigerator to keep things cold; all we had was a homemade box that had been insulated and in which we could put a block of ice.

To this day, even though we are much richer than we were in those days, I still have a guilty conscience about throwing food away – even if sometimes it does

not taste very good any more.

One would think that when God gives us more than we can possibly use, we would be content. But we are not. We never are content. We always want more. We are, contrary to Jesus' words, always worried that we will not have enough for the future in a large savings account or pension plan– even though the future is far away. Matthew 6:24-34. Verse 34 reads: "Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought of the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

These words are so embarrassing that we simply dismiss them with a wave of the hand. We cannot take them seriously. And so we hide behind our justifications for how we live. We have our lists of excuses handy: I must be a good steward, and that means laying up for the future. God surely does not want us to live in poverty, does he? If I do not prepare for the future, then if I become sick I will have to be cared for by the deacons; and I do not want to be a burden to the church. Etc., etc., etc.

The trouble is that our preoccupation with earthly things and the need to enlarge our treasuries take our minds and hearts away from spiritual things. It is true, of course, that we do engage in spiritual activities as much as we have

time for them, but if it comes to the point where we have to give up the one or the other, we are quick to give up spiritual activities in favour of our continued pursuit of earthly possessions.

These problems make us wonder how we are ever going to do what Paul says, for example, in Colossians 3:1, 2: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." And, in connection with that calling, all kinds of questions arise in our minds that desperately need answering. Just a few of them are: Why do we go to school? Do we go so that we may get a good job and be financially successful? Why do we go overseas to study, sometimes in places where there is no good church? Is it perhaps because a degree from overseas will enhance our money-making ability? Or is it just possible that we go to school so that we may better learn to serve God and be of use in his kingdom?

These are questions that need answering if we are to live antithetically as God's covenant people in a world of sin. I want to explore with you in some articles what the Scriptures teach concerning these things.

With our prayers for God's blessing on you, *Prof*

## Book Review:

# Peace for the Troubled Heart

>> Sister Jean Lim

"Peace for the Troubled Heart" is composed of 37 meditations which Prof. Herman Hoeksema had written in the Standard Bearer between October 1924 and September 1947. They were originally written in Dutch and later translated to English. Prof. David Engelsma edited the translations and published them into a book.

The theme of this book is the struggle and suffering in the life of every believer as a pilgrim on the earth. It is divided into three parts, namely, pilgrimage, suffering and struggle. This book is targeted for believers who struggle with doubts and fears. It brings out the truth that the Christian life is never all exuberant joy and exhilarating power like what the Charismatics proclaim. On the contrary, many a time, we struggle

like the psalmist Asaph (Psalm 73). We may also suffer like Job in great catastrophe. In the midst of sufferings and sorrows, what is the comfort that sustains us and keeps us going so that we can live lives that are more than conquerors (Rom 8:37)? How can we experience the peace that our Lord Jesus Christ has left with us before He ascended into heaven (John 14:27)? This book leads us to the biblical insights that equip us to deal with the doubts and fears we experience in our Christian pilgrim life on earth.

### The Pilgrim's Journey

A pilgrim's confession is not mere lip service, but one that expresses what lives in his heart and rules his entire life on earth. By the grace of God and the Light of the Truth, he sees the

vanity of this earthly life and clings on the promise of everlasting life. Temporal things are in themselves not his goals but are the means to fulfil his life's purpose – God's purpose here on earth. He understands that there is none upon earth that he desires beside God (Psa 73:25). He lives with a crystal clear hope for a city that is prepared for him by our Lord Jesus Christ (Heb 11:16), and "this hope and longing never makes ashamed". With this hope strongly secured in his heart by the powerful work of the Holy Spirit, he sojourns on earth with the confidence that he will reach his destination safely.

### The Pilgrim's Sufferings

A pilgrim has a true understanding and biblical view about his suffering. He understands that in order for him

to grow spiritually, he needs trials and sufferings. Even as gold is tried in the refiner's furnace, so God tries His people (Psalm 11:4). God is the *great shepherd of His flock, and He employs the devil and all His servants as His dogs. They are mere instruments in His hands and nothing more. The devil's persecutions are God's trials meant to purify the church.* (Page 69)

The pilgrim even rejoices in his suffering knowing that the powers of darkness are instruments for the confirmation of God's people and the preparation for their glorious inheritance with the Lord. What a sweet peace, more precious than all the world, fills his soul in the assurance that he may be a partaker of Christ's sufferings (which are sufferings for the sake of Christ's righteousness). After a little while, he shall rejoice with exceeding great gladness, for as he has suffered with Christ, so shall he be glorified together with Him (2 Cor 4:16-18).

A pilgrim like Apostle Paul, *wants to know, taste, prove and experience Christ. He wants to know the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings. He wants to become conformed unto His death.* (Page 71) He knows that the fellowship of Christ's suffering is crucial in his new life in Christ. Why is it crucial? *It assures him that he is born of God and not of the world. If the world hates Christ, the world will hate him because he is living a life in Christ. Consequently, from the depths of that suffering the pilgrim cries*

*out and makes known his needs to God in heaven. He experiences the grace of God in His power and love to lead him to desire things which are not seen and things which are from above.* This experience will strengthen his hope to be with God. (Romans 5:2-4)

### The Pilgrim's struggles

Although he wills to love God and obey His will, the pilgrim has to struggle fiercely with the three enemies in his life. The old man within him, the devil, and the sin cursed world are constantly on their prowl to take the pilgrim's mind and heart away from God. (1Peter 5:8; Eph 6:12; Rom 7:15-17)

Is it wrong for a pilgrim to have struggles? No, and in fact, a pilgrim will never stop struggling in this earthly life. It is by the grace of God that he struggles, for God will lead him to self-examination. He is convinced that he is a wretched man and is spiritually dead when he stays apart from God. He realises that he needs God every moment of his life; he needs God and must live in Him.

How can a pilgrim live in Christ?

- *He must die to his physical pleasure and earthly desires.*
- *He must live in trust as he walks in darkness.*
- *He must be patient in tribulation.*
- *He must fulfil the 3-fold requirement – deny yourself, take up the cross and follow Christ.*

old can come together as one to listen to the Word of God being preached, play games together, and even to raise our voices in praise together. To say that I learnt a lot through this camp would be an understatement. For one, it was a new experience for me to learn to sing The Doxology, Psalter 197, in parts. The process of learning to sing in parts was definitely not an easy one, but the end result of hearing the church sing together is a beautiful and memorable one. The Lord willing, may our church have the chance to sing together again in parts.

The messages brought to us during the camp were edifying for our souls. The illustration of a seed growing to a mighty maple tree helped in the

• *He must, through the word of God, in the power of the Spirit, by prayer and supplication, persevere.*

• *He must appropriate the faith.*

• *He must labour for the rest and not labour to gather the treasures of the world.*

• *He must believe in the blessed assurance that God is for us and nothing can separate us from the love of God.*

• *He must not fear, not seek earthly things, and not be anxious about meat, drink and clothing; but rather, he must seek the kingdom of God.*

And lastly, he must believe that the battle he is fighting in is the Lord's. *Only through God's own fighting does the church's war in the world become a world-conquering battle. And in the battle he protects His own people.* (Page 293) He gives us grace to be faithful.

### Recommendations

The author has drawn out the truth of Scriptures and clearly expounds them in a way that enlightens us. It is as what Prof. David Engelsma has commented:

*"Hoeksema's meditations are gospel, every one."*

I would encourage you to read this book to gain the reformed spirituality from Prof. Hoeksema's writings which is, according to Prof. Engelsma, always exegetical, always biblical, always doctrinal and instructive as well as moving. I totally agree with him and I am sure you will agree too!

understanding of how God's truth must be preserved and endured through the ages. As we adopt the Reformed faith from our forefathers, we also learn that the faith was developed through a battle. The Lord has been gracious unto us, preserving the Faith through the means of faithful Bible translations and the Reformed Confessions.

The first message on the necessity of being established in the faith was a timely reminder of our calling as God's people to hold fast to an antithetical and distinctive faith as which we have been taught by the preaching of God's Word (2 Thes 2:15). We must be established, rooted and grounded in the knowledge of the truth lest we be tossed to and fro by the many winds

## CAMP ECHO

>> Melina

Thank God for the blessed time we had during CERC's annual church camp! This is the very first church camp I have attended with CE and there are plenty of things for me to be thankful for. Thank God for His grace in making the camp possible, for providing us with the camp committee who worked very hard to plan for the camp, for using Rev Smit to expound the Word of God to us, for the sweet fellowship with the saints, and also for the lovely voices He has blessed us with.

It was truly amazing to see the church as an organic whole, where young and

of doctrine and false philosophy (Eph 4:14). Our knowledge of the faith must be more than a fleeting fad. It certainly must never be secondary, placed behind our life, our job, our vacations, our marriage, or anything at all!

God demands pure worship; and through catechism instruction, we learn how to worship God in spirit and in truth. It is our duty to maintain, cherish and grow in the faith. It is necessary for us to have a firm conviction and persuasion accurate to scripture. Saints of the past like Noah and Abraham were fully persuaded and convinced when Noah built the ark and when Abraham had to offer Isaac as a sacrifice to the Lord. They understood their calling as strangers and pilgrims of the earth and were willing to be persecuted and die for Christ (Heb 11:13). We too, have to fight the good fight of faith (1 Tim 6:12). We have to believe unceasingly in the Word of God that would destroy the temptations of the devil.

Believing the Faith reaches beyond intellectual exercise and God will work a knowing faith (James 2) that will set forth the truth from our hearts. The believing heart is given, by the Holy Spirit, a spiritual knowledge of Christ. It is not used to gain the praise of men. This truth must be applied to our daily life; and, it is through the truth of the Reformed faith that we know our Saviour – the Lord Jesus Christ.

Being established in the Faith serves as our personal comfort and hope. This is because we are all sinners who are wicked and depraved in the sight of God. Even our best works are spotted with sin! We are preserved and grounded in God's truth; and apart from Him we are nothing. How often are we not as thankful as we ought to be to God for His mercies? Let us live a life

abounding in thankfulness. Let us live with our hearts lifted to God and our eyes fixed on Him, walking with Jehovah God just as Enoch did. Soli Deo Gloria!

## CAMP ECHO

>> Sister Leh Wah

“Established in the faith” is the theme of this year's church camp. Sometimes, I think I should be established already in the faith since I have been a Christian for so many years. But, I am also reminded of this verse, “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” in 1 Corinthians 10:12. Yes, even the apostle Peter can deny Christ thrice after he had made the confession, “Though I should die with thee (Christ), yet will I not deny thee” (Matt 26:35). Indeed, God needs to uphold us and drive His Word into us more and more until our faith is firmly established on the solid rock of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and we become His beautiful bride.

The four messages on this theme focused on the necessity, the faith, the manner and the fruits of being established in the faith. They were delivered with much clarity and depth, and are very profitable for us as we sojourn in the midst of a spiritually hostile environment, where we have to “Beware lest any man spoil (us) through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” (Col 2:8). In addition, we still have the old man of sin within us who is easily tempted to deny the faith, like Peter, when our own reputation or very life is at stake.

Besides enjoying the messages, we

also had discussions on the messages where we could learn from one another what the indwelling Holy Spirit has taught us individually. There were also opportunities for getting to know some brethren better as they shared the Lord's work in their lives and the struggles in their pilgrimage. Something special about this camp is the young people leading us to sing the Psalter in four harmonious parts, and promoting the knowledge of the Psalter by organizing a quiz on it. It makes me realize how precious the Psalter is to us spiritually. Thank God for giving us appropriate songs to sing for the many situations in our pilgrimage – when we are happy or sad, or when we need instruction, and even when we are struggling with doubts and temptations. The Psalters must have been sung many times by some brethren so that they could remember so many details of these Psalters during the quiz!

Thank God also for giving my non-Christian niece the opportunity to attend the camp. It is indeed not by chance that she can be at the camp to hear God's Word. This is also the first time I have had so much opportunity to share the gospel with her without much distractions. May the Lord use these means for the gathering of His own.

Though the camp is only for a few days, we can say with the Psalmist in Psalm 133 “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! ... for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.” We can look forward to the perfection of this dwelling together in the new heaven and new earth, when “the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.” (Rev 21:3)

## Prayer and Thanksgiving

1. Pray for the appointment of a Chairman for Family Support Ministry
2. Thank God for the establishment of sisterly relationship between PRCA and CERC
3. Thank God for our new Elder and Deacons
4. Pray for injection of new leadership to help plan and execute Vacation Bible

School 2012 and beyond

5. Pray for planning of Reformation Day Conference 2012 to be held in last quarter of 2012
6. Pray for conviction in our families regarding Christian Education
7. Thank God for keeping the Audio Ministry strong for the past years

8. Pray that God will provide a Minister-on-Loan to CERC for the years to come
9. Pray for God's leading hand to brother Beng Young as he guides the Primary School children in the Sunday School on the Lord's Day
10. Pray for God's grace to rest upon Mdm Loh and Mdm Tan, for health and strength in their golden age



### Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church

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

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

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

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