

"...you recall how we both laughed together and cried together." - *Lessons from the Past*

"The church that prays together stays together."
- *Why Prayer Meetings?*

"...we study in school... because we love our Heavenly Father..." - *Sight-giving Light*

"...the faithful spouse, who does not remarry, leaves the door open..."
- *Prof's Corner*

"...forgiving ...in marriage is...at the very center of our calling in Jesus Christ..." - *Husbands, love as Christ loves!*



salt shakers
joel 3:16 matthew 5:16

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Blessed 25th anniversary CERC!

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Life in the Church: The Calling of Covenant Dwelling (Part 2)

In the last Editor's note, we had the opportunity to discuss Christ's command to the church to dwell in unity. We discussed positive ways of how that dwelling should be; how covenant dwelling is loving one another, dwelling in close spiritual proximity, and having communion with one another. Such care and love shown must also be impartial in the Church. In this editor's note, there is more on this topic to be written; because while there is Christian love in the church now, our love for the saints can, and must, grow deeper and deeper. As our hearts and minds conform more and more to the Scripture's instruction to dwell together in unity and to love thy neighbour as thyself, CERC, although tucked away in an unassuming industrial building, through the grace of God, ought to grow to one of the most beautiful and sought after place to be at. Because the child of God knows it is a place overflowing with Christian love, elegantly decked with care, and adorned with warm Christian hospitality. Ah, then Christ's holy church becomes distinct from a spiritually dark world. In the backdrop of a violent and cruel world, peacemakers and those given to hospitality take in

wounded soldiers of Christ and nurse the wounds of sin with the healing balm of God's Divine Word. The first threat against Covenant dwelling that we must watch out for is the bold lie that it is unimportant for saints to dwell together. Simple as it is, this lie is very subtle and has injured many righteous men and women. The devil would have us think that believing in Jesus Christ has nothing to do with believing in the communion of the saints! That serving our Lord Jesus Christ has little to do with using our gifts for the body of Christ. That there is no relationship between a believer as one part of the body of Christ and the rest of the body of Christ (Eph 4:16) and so we need not love the body of believers. Some are lured to think that as a lively stone, they have no relationship with the rest of the lively stones that make up God's Spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5). Believing such deadly lies of the devil is to actually believe that the body of Christ should be gruesomely mutilated and that it is alright to have body parts cut up, separated, and left lying around. No, this is not exaggeration. Not knowing the blessedness and truth of the communion of the saints makes one proud and delusional, and without their knowledge, set members against one another. A

member that makes the gathering of God's sheep, the church, peripheral to his life for whatever reason soon becomes a despondent and lonely sheep who leaves fold of Christ and is now subjected to the vicious attacks of ravaging wolves. Brothers and sisters in the Lord, it is Christ who has given us the preaching and the communion of the saints, how can the church then become a mere footnote our lives? The gathering of God's elect must be at the heart and core of our lives! Look not at the earthly, for earthly families will in heaven be no more; there will be no earthly marriage in heaven. In eternity, we will be with Christ, and all He has made, to be His beloved family! The family of God is real and eternal! (Eph 3:15) Here lies the question we all must ask our own souls, "Can we excuse ourselves from the body of Christ manifested here on earth (the church) and yet confess that we are looking forward to the kingdom of heaven in eternity? We all must be warned not to become like Lot of the Bible. Esteeming riches or personal comforts more than company of the elect, he left the church and made himself comfortable with what Sodom and Gomorrah had to offer. Did he lose his soul? No, he was counted righteous before God, in Christ. But he lost his wife to the

world, and soon after his children showed bad fruits of leaving the church (Abraham was a picture of the Old Testament church) Satan is cheering on saints who make the church a low priority in their pilgrimage on earth. If Satan cannot have your soul to join him in darkness, he will settle with your child's— like in Lot's case. To whom you have taught, "Ah, you want to go to church? Make sure you have finished your CCAs (co-curricular activities), tuition classes, art class, piano class, and enrichment classes before you go." God has commanded all Christians with no exception, "Seek ye first the kingdom of heaven!" Is not a

manifestation of the kingdom of heaven the church? Does not the church represent Zion? Where Christ rules through the elders, where we hear the words of Christ brought to us from the pastor. Oh, it is as great a struggle to be passionate for spiritual and church meetings for youths as it is for parents, but do we parents kill the little flame our youths have for church events? A question, we have to answer ourselves. When parents act on their love for Christ and sacrifice much for the church, then will our children learn to also put God first, and aim not to be first in class but seek to spend and be spent for Christ, in school work and church work alike, for all is done

to the glory of God. We must not follow what Lot did; leaving the company of father Abraham and the saints was forgoing life in the church. Pitching his tent towards Sodom? We, too, can do that if we teach our children that a high paying job is to be esteemed greater than the sufferings for Christ and the reproaches of cross bearing. We must renew our zeal for covenant dwelling; make God's church your high priority, for it is part of your high calling. Teach your children by word and deed, to have a zeal for God's house. In the next editor's note let us look at some of the commands in the Divine Word of God to dwell in unity.

Can practicality be the measure of truth?
 >> Wee Gim Theng

Many of us use practicality or pragmatism to decide on many of our day-to-day activities. When we use this approach in our decision making, whatever is most practical at that point in time shall be the deciding factor. It can therefore, in an extreme case, make one take the opposing position when the original decision is no longer practical. It is what works best at that point in time that matters. For example, I may take a certain route today to one destination, but based on some practical considerations such as traffic congestion, inclement weather, traffic conditions etc., I may take another route on another day to the same destination. What is most practical decides!

However, there are many things in life that

we may not use practicality as the overriding factor in our considerations, especially when the truth of God's word is concerned or when we are dealing with moral and ethical issues.

In such situations, using practicality as a measure of truth is really an unwise and a dangerous thing to do. In effect, it is not only dangerous but also sinful and God displeasing.

This is what we want to focus on in this article.

Those who advocate practicality as

the measure of truth undoubtedly believe that truth is not absolute under different circumstances, cultures, eras and even personal needs. To them truth is relative. For example, they may say that the law in each land can be different depending on the culture of the people. Nudity in certain public beaches may be permitted but will certainly be frowned at in the more conservative Asian countries. Open sex is acceptable in some western countries but is an offence in other eastern nations.

There is a growing number of Christians who use their needs as the standard measure of truth. They believe that their needs, be it emotional, physical and psychological, or even personality traits determine how they interpret the truths of God's word pertaining

to spiritual issues and practices. For example, if they need a life partner, they would go to a Church where their needs could be met. Truth of God's word is secondary to their needs. Others would use personality traits or their personal make-up to determine which Church they prefer to attend. So long as they could 'connect' with the preaching and 'feel' their needs are met, they would remain in the Church. The moment such connections and feelings are no longer there, they would make their move. Whatever the truth is, it has to centre around their needs and personal make-up or satisfy their personality traits.

Many attend Church for various reasons. Some are based on practical reasons like 'it is near my home', 'it is more convenient', 'the fellowship is good', 'the Church is not so strict' etc. as opposed to whether the truth of God is being preached in the Church. Some even say, 'as long as I know what I believe in my heart, it does not really matter which Church I worship in'.

There are those who feel that there is no 'one truth' as different people may have different opinions of things. There are, according to such people, many different interpretations of the Christian doctrines. None can make absolute claim that they have the truth. Everyone has the right to interpret the Bible in his own way and understanding. So long as they are sincere, their view should be respected. This is a humanistic reasoning where truth is determined by the individual. This is the problem with proud fallen men who continue to think that they are the standard of truth.

There are yet those who think that the Bible was written in an age

and culture that is so different and remote from today's society that it is no longer relevant or only relevant in part. Such individuals do not accept the Bible as the measure of absolute truth. According to them, we have to 'tailor' or 'adapt' the Bible to our present space-age era.

The crux of the matter is then, is truth relative? Is truth dependent on the culture; one's circumstances in life; thinking of the era; emotional, physical, psychological needs; or personality traits; etc.? Should one decide spiritual and moral issues purely based on such reasons? Should such reasons be the standard measure of morality? Is the word of God an absolute standard of truth?

As Bible-believing Christians, we believe that the Bible must be the absolute measure of truth. Our Lord Jesus says in John 14:6 that "I am the way, **the truth**, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me". There is no other way, and no other truth except in Christ! There is no life outside Christ! Jesus says that He is **the** truth. He is the Word of God personified, John 1:1. He is the wisdom of God (1Cor 1:24). And 2 Tim 3:16-17 says that 'All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works'. God's word is infallible. This is because it is inspired by God Himself. The word of God is God-breathed. God, using the personality, talent, training and background of the writers, 'breathes' in them the word of God. The Bible is the word of God. The Bible is the standard measure of truth regardless of era,

culture, needs, etc. All our decisions must use the Bible as the basis. If you were to look at the history of the Bible, you would marvel how God in His infinite mercy had preserved the Bible for His people. God knows how important it is for His standard to be maintained and preserved so that His Church will continue to raise His banner in this world. God did not say in His word that man should adapt His word and commandments according to the culture, thinking of the era etc. God did not say that His truth is relative and subject to each individual's private interpretation. On the contrary, 2 Pet 1:20 tells us that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. We do not and cannot interpret the Bible in any way we like to suit our own needs and situations in life. The truth as found in God's word is absolute and does not change over time! We are to walk in obedience to His word and not to modify it.

As such, as Christians, our great calling is to know, maintain and confess the truth of God in every circumstance in life.

We must base our decisions and our values on the word of God which transcends time and space. Let us therefore be a good student of God's word, rightly dividing the word of truth for our own spiritual good, for the defence of God's truth and for the preservation of His Church on this earth. 2 Tim 2:15.

HOLD THAT FAST WHICH THOU HAST: THE LOVE OF THE REFORMED TRUTH

>> Jonathan Langerak

The love of the truth was restored to the Christian church in the sixteenth-century Reformation. It is true that the truth itself was restored to the church; the church prior to the Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church, had lost every vestige of the truth, and, indeed, opposed the truth and persecuted to the death those who preached and proclaimed it. But the truth had been taken away from the church because she had left her first love: Christ (Rev. 2: 4, 5). In the Reformation, not only the truth was restored to the church, the love of the truth was restored at the same time. Many Protestant, indeed Reformed, churches commemorate the Reformation today. They speak glowingly of the reformers and their writings, their learning and their commitment to their principles. But because even many churches and denominations that call themselves Reformed, that is, who claim to derive their doctrine and confessions from the Reformation, have lost the love of the Reformed truth themselves and are now in the process of losing the truth entirely, they are hypocritical in their commemoration of the Reformation. As Prof. Engelsma writes: "In the language Jesus used in exposing such hypocrisy on the part of the church officials of his day, Protestant churches build the tomb of Martin Luther and garnish the sepulchre of John Calvin (Matt. 23: 29-31). Indeed, so far have some of them gone away from the truth that they are sunk deep in dialogue with the Roman Catholic

Church.

We who, as Protestant Reformed and Evangelical Reformed people, also claim to be children of the Reformation must see that the love of the truth restored in the Reformation is the only thing that gives us the right to this honorable title of Reformed. So far is this love of the truth from being our own work that, were we left to ourselves we would hate and damn the truth like all the world and the false church have always done and do increasingly in our day. Rather, the love of the truth is none other than a gift of God's pure grace, given to the elect alone through the in-worked faith of the Holy Spirit, and for Christ's sake alone.

So, let this stand as the first lesson without which it is impossible to learn any other: that in ourselves we are the children of our Father the devil, who is the great Liar and the father of the lie, and that as his offspring we are opposed to the truth of God, that we hate the truth, are the implacable enemies of it, and resist it with all our might. Instead, we cleave to the lie, love the lie, are the incorrigible lovers of the lie, and embrace it with all our hearts. And this is that total depravity, in which all of us are sunk beyond the minutest hope of rescue, as Paul writes: "Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit, the poison of asps is under their lips: whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness" (Rom. 3:13, 14). And let this be the second lesson, or rather, the second

part of the first lesson: that God, according as he hath chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world, and without any regard to who we were, what we would be, and wiping away all the works which we do or might do, so that they are of no account whatsoever, has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ, including the love of the truth, which truth begins with our total depravity and God's grace. Therefore, it is only because of God's mercy and fatherly lovingkindness in Christ, which the Holy Spirit brings into our souls, giving us the knowledge and experience of it, that we may count ourselves among those who love the truth and who now oppose, hate, flee from, and bury the lie wherever and in whomever we encounter it as the proper invention and work of the devil.

Secondly, the love of the truth is *part of* that faith which is the gift of God's grace (Eph. 2: 8, 9). For true faith, as the Heidelberg Catechism instructs us, is in part "a certain knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in his Word..." (LD 7, Q&A 21). This is what the apostle John writes in I John 2: 20, 21, 27: "But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things. I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth... But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth

you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.” John writes to his audience and to us: “Ye know the truth.” And, signifying that he is speaking about something more than mere head knowledge, John begins by saying: “Ye have an unction from the Holy One.” An unction is an anointing, like that whereby kings and priests were anointed with oil in the Old Testament. And this anointing refers to the Holy Spirit, Spirit of God and of Jesus Christ, which Christ calls “the Spirit of truth” in John 15: 26. And this Spirit of truth is poured out only upon the elect. He causes us to know the truth *in love*. That is, the Spirit gives us the eye of faith, so that we see Christ as he himself describes himself to us in John 14: 6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me.”

Thirdly, the love of the truth present in him by the operation of the Holy Spirit is one of those infallible proofs to the child of God that he may count himself among the elect and beloved of Jehovah. And this serves that second essential part of true faith explained by the Catechism, “an assured confidence, which the Holy Ghost works by the gospel in my heart; that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness, and salvation are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ’s merits” (LD 7, Q&A 21). The unbeliever, whether in the world or in the church, has no love of the truth, whatever his pretensions to the contrary may be; he does not at all concern himself with it. The believing child of God knows and loves the truth.

When we see the love of the truth

operating thus in us, we respond with thanks to God, for thereby we know that we are the objects of his grace, and have been given the faith to believe for truth all that he has revealed in his Word. On the other hand, the love of the truth does not operate in the wicked, including hypocrites who dwell in the church, because the love of the truth is a part of graciously-given faith, and God’s grace and faith comes only to the elect, and is never in any way bestowed on the non-elect.

And what do these illustrate to us except three of the Reformation’s great Solas: *Sola Gratia* (by grace alone), *Sola Fide* (through faith alone), and *Soli Christe* (in Christ alone), applied now to the love of the truth. Let it be sounded forth, preached from the housetops, and blown like a trumpet, which no opposition can muffle: The love of the truth is not our work in any part whatsoever but is a gift of God’s sovereign, particular, irresistible grace to lie-loving sinners, and is a part of that faith which is the gift of God (Eph. 2: 8,9). And this is bestowed only upon those who are in Christ and his cross, who have been elected in him before the foundation of the world and justified by his blood, and now have the Spirit of truth working in them to cause them to abide in the love of Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life.

The truth which we love is the truth of God as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, which Holy Scriptures the Reformation harmonized and summarized in the Reformed confessions, or, as they are now called, the Three Forms of Unity. We who love the truth love Holy Scripture. The Spirit of truth in us draws us—and sometimes drives

us, because we are slothful, and do not want to do what we must—to the Holy Scriptures. And loving Scripture, we love doctrine. The doctrine of Scripture itself and that contained in them which we must believe have been summarized for us in the Reformed confessions: the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dordt. We learn this doctrine first of all by reading and studying the Bible and our Reformed standards. We read the Bible and study the standards in our private devotions, where we seek God in his word and bring our own personal praise and needs to him in prayer. We pray that the Spirit will apply the truth of Scripture to our hearts, root out our unbelief, and give us the strength to do what the Scriptures require of us. We set aside time every day, if possible the same time every day, to read the Bible and to pray. And we count it as our chief duty and delight to delve into the Scriptures, which are a treasure chest wherein all the riches of our salvation in Christ are opened unto us. We all know from experience that Scripture, although it is perspicuous (that is, clear) is not easily understood or comprehended after one or two readings, but must be studied, and the more difficult passages clarified in light of the other passages. Our strength is Christ’s promise, “Seek, and ye shall find” (Matt. 7:7). Do we struggle to find an answer to a certain problem in our life? Let us seek an answer in the Scriptures, which is the sole rule for faith and life. We believe what Luther wrote, that “the Holy Scriptures are a spiritual light far brighter even than the sun, especially in what relates to salvation and all essential matters.”

Secondly, we who love the truth are drawn by the Spirit to hear the public proclamation of the Word, with the gospel of grace in Christ at its heart, in church on Sunday. We want to come to church and hear the Word preached, for it only by hearing that faith comes and is strengthened (Rom. 10: 17). In the gospel, our sin is shown unto us in the light of the law of God, so that we see no hope of salvation is to be found at all in us, and we are among the condemned if another does not come to rescue us. Secondly, we are shown Christ

as the only way of salvation, that in him we are justified before God’s tribunal by faith alone through grace, and that in him we are made the sons and daughters of the Most High. Finally, we are shown our duty to live in thankfulness, when this gospel of grace is applied to our lives by the preaching and we are exhorted to live in holiness before the face of God, by the in-dwelling Spirit of God who sanctifies us. Luther exhorts those who have this gospel preached to them Sunday by Sunday, which, praise God, we have in our Protestant Reformed

churches and the Covenant Evangelical Reformed of Singapore: “Therefore let those who have the pure Word learn to receive it and to give thanks to the Lord for it, and let them seek the Lord while he may be found.” To be continued...

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The implications for the Doctrine of the Covenant in Divorce and Remarriage II

••••• >> Prof Hanko •••••

In this second article on the implications of divorce and remarriage for the doctrine of the covenant, I want to concentrate on what precisely these implications are.

I have stressed, in the last article, that the real marriage is the marriage of God (in Christ) and His elect church. Those who hold to the legitimacy of divorce and remarriage want to change that picture radically. What does that do to the **real** marriage/?

I am assuming that many of the readers of *Salt Shakers* firmly believe that God’s covenant with His people cannot be broken. There are those who do believe that God’s covenant can and often is broken. They are the Liberated Churches, of which branch of the church the Free Reformed Churches of Australia are a part. They believe that God can and does break His covenant with some. He breaks

it because they will not fulfil the conditions of the covenant. When they are baptized, they are included in God’s covenant, but they can become “covenant-breakers.”

Because there are people who teach this, I am going to mention just two texts that prove that God’s covenant cannot be broken.

One is found in Psalm 89. The whole Psalm is written by Ethan as a joyful song of praise to God to celebrate God’s covenant with David. It is a Psalm that is prophetic of Christ, the one with whom God establishes His covenant first of all. There are several references in the Psalm to the everlasting reality of God’s covenant. See, for example, verses 24 and 28, but especially in verses 30-34. I will quote them here. “If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; Then will I visit their transgressions with the

rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.”

Very clearly, God says that He is aware of how those with whom He establishes His covenant will break His statutes and not keep His commandments. What then? Are they covenant-breakers who are no longer in the covenant? No! God will chastise them for their sin, but He will not break His covenant with them. And remember, chastisement is always given in love.

The other text is Ezekiel 16. It is a powerful passage. It tells how God found a baby girl lying dead in its blood on the side of the road. He took that baby, cleaned it, fed it, nourished it and watched the baby grow into a beautiful woman. He made that grown woman His wife;

and because He was King, He made her queen and gave her all the treasures, clothing and ornaments that belong to a queen. What did she do? She committed fornication with everyone that came along. She even set up a tent on the side of a frequently travelled road and lured into her tent every man of wealth and strength. How awful! She broke God's covenant (verse 53).

Did God divorce her? What do we read? "Nevertheless I will remember my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth, and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant. Then thou shalt remember thy ways, and be ashamed, when thou shalt receive thy sisters, thine elder and thy younger; and I will give them unto thee for daughters, but not by thy covenant. And I will establish my covenant with thee; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord; That thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God" (verses 60-63).

Now, if the picture does not correspond with the reality, then the picture is useless and ready to be discarded. If I have a picture of my mother that has my mother with red hair and a long pointed nose, then I will do one of two things. I will deny that that is a picture of my mother and will throw it in the

trash; or I will say, "If that is truly my mother, she must have had red hair and a long pointed nose."

This is what people do when they teach that it is legitimate to divorce one's spouse. They either say, "Marriage is, after all, not a picture of God's marriage with His elect people," or they say, "Because marriage is a picture of God's covenant, God must sometimes divorce His people, or they Him." It is the latter that so many people teach. We may divorce and remarry, so God must also be able to divorce His people and marry another person – somewhere, perhaps in the jungles of Borneo.

So, although I have the testimony of my father that my mother did not have red hair and a long pointed nose, I claim this picture is of her, and therefore, she did have red hair and a long pointed nose.

I may divorce my spouse, and so God may divorce His people. Regardless of the testimony of all Scripture, God may divorce his people because I may divorce my spouse.

The men who promote the federal vision carry this to its extreme. They understand something that the Liberated do not, that the doctrine of God's covenant of grace is at the heart of all the truth of our salvation. They all, so far as I know, hold to the idea that divorce and remarriage are legitimate. They

all hold to the idea that the earthly institution of marriage is a picture of the heavenly marriage between Christ and His church. In the light of Ephesians 5:22-33, they can hardly do anything else.

They are fully aware of the fact that we know only the picture in our marriages. They also know that the reality must correspond to the picture. If we may divorce our spouses, therefore, God may divorce His people. But, because the covenant is the fundamental blessing of salvation, all salvation suddenly loses its certainty. God's covenant with His people is conditional – as is our earthly marriage. And so election is conditional. Justification is conditional, all salvation is conditional, our everlasting glory in heaven is conditional. It is all dependent on our fulfilling the conditions of faith and obedience.

So, if we must talk about the implications of divorce and remarriage on the doctrine of the covenant, we may conclude that the legitimacy of divorce and remarriage pulls the rug from under the certainty of our salvation. We do not know. We cannot be sure. Maybe... Heaven? If I can keep the conditions, then, yes. But can I? Will I? How am I going to do this?

Salvation rests on us and our faithfulness – if this were really true, I would never get to heaven. I know that with absolute certainty.

The implications for the Doctrine of the Covenant in Divorce and Remarriage III

>> Prof Hanko

In the last article, I discussed how the legitimacy of divorce and remarriage can affect the truth of God's everlasting covenant of grace. If marriage here on earth is a bond that can be broken, and if marriage relationships here in this life are pictures of the heavenly relationship of Christ and His church, and if the picture accurately portrays the reality, then Christ (God) can and does divorce His people, and can and perhaps does marry someone else.

If what I write is not true, then our marriages are no longer pictures of Christ and His church. And this is exactly what the churches teach, who approve of divorce and remarriage. They believe in a conditional covenant, which can be broken because of the unfaithfulness of one of the parties. So we may turn the whole matter around: If God's covenant of grace in Christ is conditional and can be broken, then it ought not to surprise us that these churches who teach this also approve of divorce and remarriage.

But other implications follow from claiming that divorce and remarriage are permissible. I want to mention some of these implications and consequences in this concluding article.

To approve of divorce and remarriage is destructive of the family. A covenant family is also a picture of God's covenant. God is Himself a family God; for in His own divine being, Father and Son live in unity of essence and covenant

fellowship through the Holy Spirit. Scripture often speaks of God's relationship to His people as a family relationship. In that family of God and His people, Christ is the Elder Brother, who, through His work of redemption, obtains the birthright for Himself and all His brothers and sisters (Heb. 1:5, 2:17). All God's people are God's sons and daughters (II Cor. 6:18). God is their Father who begets them, a truth we confess whenever we begin our prayers, "Our Father who art in heaven." We have a home in heaven where we will live forever with Christ and through Him with our Father (John 14:1-4). The blessedness of heaven is even described as a wedding feast (Rev. 19:7-9). So meal times in our own families are times of fellowship between parents and children. And the reality of a heavenly wedding feast is pictured in the Lord's Supper where Christ is the host and all God's people eat with Him and of Him.

Both divorce and remarriage destroy the family. Antagonism between husband and wife results in anger and separation. Divorce breaks the marriage bond, it is said, and the family is destroyed. The children, whose greatest sense of stability, certainty, love and protection, are now cast out of the security of the marriage they once knew. Books have been written about the trauma of divorce and remarriage on children. And when one of the marriage partners remarries, confusion results. The

children belong to two families, one of their own parents is gone out of their lives (even with visitation rights) and their safe world is now shattered on the rock of the lust of one of their parents.

The result is the same as divorce and remarriage itself. If the picture is destroyed or badly mutilated so that it is beyond recognition; then that reality of which the family is only a picture is obliterated from the lives of those who succumb to the temptations of divorce and remarriage.

Those who engage in divorce and remarriage leave a trail of broken homes, shattered lives, spiritual wreckage and the blessedness of God's favour behind them.

The consequences for the church are equally evil. In the worship services of the church, God's people consciously experience fellowship with God in Christ. Christ is present. God speaks to His people as their Father. They speak to Him as His children. But in that church are men who live with women other than their spouses and who think they can worship and partake of the Lord's Supper with their real wives sitting a row or two ahead of them with another man. It would be like a family in which husband and wife are still in the same house, but are there with others: a husband with another woman and a wife with another man. And the children are from husband and wife, from the adulterous relation of husband with another woman, and from the wife in an adulterous relation

"If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; Then will I visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips."

with another man. Three kinds of children, all supposedly forming one family. It is confusion and makes a wreck of God's heavenly family, for the picture reflects the reality. Is this what God's marriage with His people is like?

Well, once again, some teach that. Some teach clearly that God, the Father of His people, actually loves others than His wife. God introduces a third party into the marriage relationship with His love for all men. And God does this with others **and their children**, for he loves the children too. How awful things get to be.

Divorce and remarriage are not taught in Scripture and are not permitted by God's revealed Word. Believers are deeply conscious of this and are very jealous of their marriages. They strive to make their marriages a true picture of the blessed and everlasting covenant of grace between God in Christ and His elect family.

I know there are problems in marriages and troubles arise. But to hold to Biblical doctrine means that believers work things out between themselves, and before God's face, that they may know unity and love once again, They do this for

their own sakes and for the sakes of their children. When believers are married to unbelievers, their lot is a particularly heavy one; but Scripture gives guidance on how a believer is to live even then (I Peter 3:1, I Cor. 7:13-17). When one is unfaithful, the faithful spouse, who does not remarry, leaves the door open to his wife who returns through repentance and reconciliation – as God does with His often unfaithful wife. Our marriages are precious gifts of God, and they remind us daily of God's grace to us in making us His wife.

systems of reward and merit, because of the nature of the god before which it bows.

But Christianity is not that way—because our God is not that kind of god. He does not just exist; He lives a full personal life in a fullness of personal love and fellowship within Himself throughout all of eternity. Here is the wonder of the doctrine of the Trinity. Our minds may not be able to grasp it in full, rational understanding, but through it we know that there is a personal fellowship, Father, Son and Holy Spirit within the eternal oneness of the divine Being.

Loneliness is a terrible thing. We all know it instinctively. It is one of the sorest pains a person can know. Those who are lonely die their own kind of death.

We learn to hide it when we get older, but look in on any group of children and you can soon see it. That which counts to them most is to have friends, others with whom to play, others by whom they are accepted, someone with whom they can feel together. I have often asked groups of young people what, in their day-to-day living seemed to concern them more than anything else. It usually takes a little while to get through to them that one is not asking for what they think they should answer or even what their peers might expect them to say, but in the end it will almost always come out that they are mostly concerned with having friends, people with whom they can talk freely and be accepted for what they are, people with whom they can freely share.

And this is not all so superficial as it might at first seem. It reflects something basic in the nature of

man, according to which he was made to be an image-bearer of the Creator God, as Genesis 1:26 says, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."

Accordingly Solomon; blessed with a sage's power of observation by God, made note of it thus in Proverbs 15:17, "Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith." And again in Proverbs 17:1, "Better is a dry morsel, and quietness therewith, than a house full of sacrifices with strife."

In a much more profound way David brought out the importance of friendship to life when he reflected so often in the Psalms upon the suffering which was his when this was denied to him. So we read in Psalm 31:11, "I was a reproach among all mine enemies, but especially among my neighbours, and a fear to mine acquaintance: they that did see me without fled from me." Psalm 38:11, "My lovers and my friends stand aloof from my sore; and my kinsmen stand afar off." Psalm 55:12, 13, "For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it: neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him: but it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and my acquaintance." But it is the next two that strike us with a special force. Psalm 22:6, "But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people." And Psalm 41:9, "Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me." These are important because we know that especially these latter two Psalms do not represent the mere weakness of a

sinful and troubled man; they are Messianic Psalms which anticipate the nature of the suffering of our Lord and Saviour, when He would come to take the anguish of our sin upon Himself. This was His suffering, too.

And what does it all mean? Actually we are touching very closely here to one of the deepest principles of Scriptural thought—the truth of the covenant of grace.

Not infrequently it has been recognized in both Reformed and Baptist traditions that there is something basic about the truth of the covenant, which runs through the whole of the Scriptures and serves as a unifying principle. Moreover, especially in light of recent archeological and linguistic findings, it is increasingly apparent that the historical Reformed objection to the idea that the covenant could be a sort of two-sided agreement between God and man is quite correct. Very apparently, the whole idea of a covenant, even in secular practice, was that of a relationship imposed by a sovereign ruler upon his subjects, and so the covenant of God in Scripture must be a unilateral covenant too.

When, however, effort is made to give some substantial content to the concept of the covenant, so as to give meaning to its unifying function in Scripture and theology, efforts seem to flounder. Almost invariably what comes out is another sort of legalistic relationship which simply cannot do justice to the organic nature of the relationship between God and His people.

There is, however, one striking exception to this. Rev. Herman Hoeksema, when writing about the essence of the covenant in *Believers*

The Covenant Life of God

>> Rev B Woudenberg

A WORD OF INTRODUCTION

Anyone who sat with any regularity under the preaching of the Reverend Herman Hoeksema knows that there were few subjects that gave him greater satisfaction than the subject of the Covenant of Grace. Anyone who took part in the pleasantly informal study classes which he so fondly conducted in church and school also knows that one of his great regrets in life was, especially in his latter years, that he had never been able to find the opportunity to bring to development the doctrine of the Covenant of Grace in its interrelation with all of the rest of theological thought. It has often seemed to me that the responsibility to remember and to pursue this goal remains as a kind of legacy upon the Protestant Reformed Churches.

The present series of articles does not presume to be a fulfillment of that purpose. The author lacks both the theological and literary abilities for

that. But what is hoped is that these articles may serve to remind us of the need and to provoke some thoughts in that direction; and, if they so do, the efforts will be satisfied.

Strikingly beautiful is Genesis 1:26, "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."

Imagine what it would mean if we read here, "And God said, I will make man..." Something would be missing; something would be wrong. The picture that would be left us would be of a God who was all alone in eternity, a God speaking to Himself, creating man, as it were, because he needed someone with whom to speak and share His life. It would be hard to escape the feeling that God was creating man because of a lack in His own nature that needed to be filled. But could such a God even be a real God at all?

Allah, the god of the Muslims, is

really like that. Mohammed, in setting forth his concept of god, borrowed a great deal from our Scriptures, with the result that there is much in his concept of god which is similar to ours. But one thing he missed was the doctrine of the Trinity, and with that he missed the heart of the whole matter. The result is that his Allah is a lonely figure, who in spite of all of the greatness ascribed to him dwells all by himself in a cold and distant eternity. Even the most devout of Muslims feels no closeness to Allah on a personal level. All one can ever do is to bow fatalistically before eternal whim. Allah is not one who can share life, and therefore not one who can be looked to for compassion and understanding. A person can only submit himself in cold legalism before Allah's impersonal demands. And so Islam is a cold and fatalistic religion, functioning through legalistic

and *Their Seed*, p; 62, puts it this way, “That life of God is a covenant life, a life of the most intimate communion of love and friendship, resting in the unity of God’s Being, and living through the personal distinction. The Lord God is a covenant God.”

There are particularly two things that we should note about this statement.

In the first place, it designates the essence of the covenant life to be “a life of the most intimate communion of love and friendship.” This is much more than a mere legalistic arrangement by which various persons come under obligation

to each other, such as various treatments of the covenant concept purely in terms of oaths, promises, testaments, pacts, etc., would seem to intimate. It is true that some of these things do relate closely to the covenant in the presentation of Scripture; but the essence and importance of the covenant goes much deeper than that. It touches the communion of spiritual life, whereby the inner realities of spiritual experience are shared together in the living fellowship of the covenant. It is this which reaches out through the history of covenant development to give new meaning and content to the whole of theological conceptions.

And in the second place, it is to be noted that the source of this covenant is to be found in the very nature of God Himself—the triune nature, wherein Father, Son and Holy Spirit dwell together in a perfect and eternal covenant communion of life. Here is where all spiritual realities begin. They were not created. The spiritual realities belong to the nature of God in eternity. It is only our privilege of grace to be able to see them through the wonder of divine revelation, and to be able to live in them through the wonder of the covenant which this God has established with man.

unmarried, male or female, young or old. Jesus said in Luke 6:29: “And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloak forbid not to take thy coat also.” He said further (v. 35a), “But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest.” Now if that is the general rule for the Christian (we are to return good for evil), how much more in our marriages!

These commands of God in Jesus Christ to return good for evil do not stop when one gets married. Marriage is an opportunity given by God to exercise that grace. In marriage we must find a way, standing before the cross, to maintain covenant-keeping love and forgiveness. But the grace of God does more. That is good news for us in the married state.

The grace of God gives us to do something else as well. Not only does the grace of God give us the power to forgive and to endure when we believe that we have been sinned against, but it is also the power to change. It is also the wonderful power to stop sinning. The apostle Paul could say in I Corinthians 15:10, “But by the grace of God I am what I am.” He was a *changed* man, by the grace of God! Christ’s grace to the church, to us the bride, changes us. If you look at the text that I read in Ephesians 5 you will note that the apostle says that Jesus “might sanctify and cleanse [the church] with the washing of water by the word.” In other words, the grace that is in Jesus Christ changes the church.

If the emphasis on grace in our marriages was only that we are

called to forgive and to forbear, you might get the idea that I am saying to married people, on the basis of God’s Word, “Well, there is little hope. You just have to put up with this. Marriage is ‘grin and bear it.’” No, there is more. Grace sanctifies, that is, makes holy. Grace changes. By the grace of God, before the cross we begin to learn how to live pleasing to God in marriage. In fact, if you read chapter 5 of Ephesians, you will find that the *whole* chapter is talking about the transforming power, the renewing power, of the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

Therefore, husbands and wives are indeed to be ministers of the grace of God one to the other. We are, then, as husband and wife, to see our calling to be to help each other, to conform each other more and more to Christ and the church. The words “You can’t change him” are not true. Well, it is true in the sense that *you* do not have that power. But it does not mean that husbands and wives are simply to be stuck in bad patterns of behaviour. We may be instruments of God’s grace to each other—to change each other.

In other words, marriage is not simply: turn the other cheek. But as Christ loved the church, so must be our marriages. God’s grace and word *do* sanctify us in our Christian life. We *do*, while never becoming perfect, mature in faith. So also in marriage. Marriage is the place where we are called to grow in grace. Marriage is not a static union. Marriage is an institution in which God will produce change, in which we are to grow up spiritually. We are to learn to *stop* some of those foolish, selfish, sinful things that we do, hurting each other. We do not just keep on doing them.

Yes, there must first be the grace to forgive. That is the foundation. If we do not begin there, then it will not work. If we do not from the heart forgive, then all of our efforts to change the other person in marriage will sound like an ultimatum. “If you don’t..., then I’m out of here.” No. That is not Christ and the church. We do not become His by our obedience, but by His blood. And when He, our husband, calls us to change, then that call is the fruit of His wonderful grace. Because He forgives us, His grace makes us want to be pleasing to Him, to change from a sinful way to a way that is pleasing to Him. In fact, the Christian experiences a burning desire to put away his sins and be like Christ.

Is marriage, then, to be the picture of Christ and the church in which we exercise forgiving grace? Yes, but a grace to be conformed to, to change, and to be instruments of change in each other so that we become what is pleasing to Him.

So husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church.

The whole passage in Ephesians 5 impresses on husbands that they are consciously and deliberately, out of an obedience and allegiance to God, to conform their actions and attitudes after Christ. God is saying something very simple here. “Husband, you have to mirror to your wife, what Christ is to His church.” The comparison runs through the whole passage. We read in verse 23a: “For the husband is the head of the wife, *even as Christ is the head of the church.*” Then, later on, we read that we are to nurture and cherish our wives as *Christ the church*. And the apostle makes it very plain in verse 32 that all that he is saying about marriage

HUSBANDS, LOVE AS CHRIST LOVES!

>> Pastor Carl Haak

Ephesians 5: 25-27

God intends marriage to be the picture of Christ and the church. God has created marriage to be a model, to be a mirror, of something that is dear to Him, of what He calls His covenant, a covenant that He has made in the blood of His dear Son with His people in Jesus Christ. As God loves His bride, the church of Jesus Christ, so a husband is to love his wife. That is the burden of the Word of God to us today.

We find it in Ephesians 5:25-27: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but

that it should be holy and without blemish.”

One reason why you cannot say too often that marriage is to be the picture of Christ and the church is that this reminds us that our marriage is based on grace. Marriage is not 50-50. Marriage is not, “Well, I will if you will.” If we look at the relationship that exists between Christ and the church, we find that it is, after all, all about grace. Christ chose the church by grace, eternally, in election. Christ, by His power and faithfulness, preserves the church. Christ obtained the church by His own blood. Christ pursued the church and made the church His own. And He will perfect the church by grace. We do not deserve any of this. Salvation is all of His grace.

So marriage is based on grace. The

definition of marriage would be this: Two sinners, knowing the grace of Christ to them, and now bound for life, showing each day, grace that they have tasted from God.

Remember, God’s grace gives us as a husband and as a wife to forbear and to forgive one’s spouse the annoying idiosyncrasies, the sins, and the weaknesses that become apparent in married life. Grace gives us to obey what we find in I Peter 4:8: “And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.” Grace gives a husband and wife the ability to live together in marriage.

The emphasis on forgiving and forbearing in marriage is, after all, at the very center of our calling in Jesus Christ—whether married or

has to do with Christ and the church. That means, husbands, that the one thing that you must do is to drink in Christ. If you are to be a good husband, you must immerse yourself in Jesus Christ. With the apostle Paul, as he says in Philippians 3:10a, you must have one holy passion: “That I may know him”, my lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Now, you do not get yourself immersed in Christ by sitting in front of the television night after night. You do not get that by looking inside of yourself. But you get that in this blessed book called the Bible, and in its blessed doctrines, its beautiful truths.

Let me give you a few suggestions of passages for your meditation, your study, your intense, heartfelt quest to understand.

Look into Colossians 1, especially the passage beginning after verse 15, where Christ and the church are so beautifully explained for us. Look into Hebrews 1, where Christ is taught to be the express image of God. Read Proverbs 8. Make the Song of Solomon in the Old Testament an object of your study. And spend some time with Ephesians 5. Pore over such passages and ask God to make you know Christ, to walk with Christ, to obey Christ, to be like Christ to your wife.

Now when I say that we are to be like Christ to our wives, immediately I want to guard that statement from an abuse. I will not play into the hands of an attitude that is shown toward wives, an attitude of a small-minded, selfish, controlling husband who takes that statement “be like Christ” to mean: “She had better be what I want. I will

change her to suit me.” When you hear the words that you must be like Christ to your wife, it should not register in your mind as a lever and as a place of great prominence over her so that now she has to be what you want. But it should make you tremble.

The apostle says, “Husbands, love your wives as Christ also loved the church. Be as Christ.” But he does not say, “You *are* Christ.” “As” does not mean that in every way you are like Christ. You are not. We are not—as husbands. Christ is infinite. Christ is perfect. Christ is omnipotent. And we are not. Christ is infallible. Christ is sinless. And we are not! The goal that we have as a husband is that our wife serve Christ.

Love your wife as Christ loved the church. The word “love” here is a reference to the pure and the holy love of God in Jesus Christ. It is a cleaving together. It is a faithfulness to be together in holiness. We find this statement in Colossians 3:14, “And above all these things put on charity [love], which is the bond of perfectness.” Charity, or love, is a bond in holiness.

Now note with me that God gives it as a command: “Husbands, love your wives.” In other words, love is not primarily, or first, a feeling. But it is a grace that God gives to us when we are born again. The apostle John says in I John 4:7 and 8, he that loveth is born of God. To love means that you have been given, in your heart, by grace, to know the amazing love of God to you, a faithful love that will not let you go, an infinite love, that He gave His own Son for your foul sins. Love, now, your wife, as Christ loved the church.

To do that means that you will, by faith, see your wife as God sees her. You will see her as she who is chosen in love and is given God’s Son to die for her, so that God will hear no charge brought against her as to any condemnation. You will see your wife as Christ sees her—Christ working in her, Christ placing her close to you. It is by faith that you see that God in His all-wise and infinite love gave your wife and your children to you. And they are perfectly right for you.

This love is an exclusive love. Love your wife as Christ loved the church. Christ loved only the church. He says in Isaiah 43 and Jeremiah 33 and many other places of Scripture, “You alone are my love. You are my fair one. I have chosen you out of all the world to be my own.” So when you as a man say “I love you” to the girl that you marry on your wedding day, then that love is not simply a rush of emotions in a dark spot. But you are saying, “God has given me to know His love. And you, my wife, you alone, will reign in my heart. Without you I am not complete. I will give my life for you. My thoughts, my heart, my body. I will protect you, I will guard you from evil.”

This love is a self-denying love. That is the most amazing part of this. “Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church, *and gave Himself for her.*” In His love, Jesus, our eternal husband, died on a cruel tree, a cursed tree of Calvary in order that we, foul sinners, might be His forever and ever. The debt and the filth of our sins, which called out for our damnation, He took that upon Himself. He died. The Scriptures declare (I Pet. 3:18) that it was the Just One who died for the unjust, that He might bring

us to God. The apostle Paul says in Galatians 2 that the Son of God “loved me, and gave Himself for me”. He emptied Himself. He took on Himself the awful death and the punishment that is due to us. His love for us was unfathomed, immeasurable, unending, uncaused by us. He did not love us because we loved Him. No, we love Him because He loved us.

Now, as husbands, you and I must love our wives as Christ loved the church, by dying to yourself, by seeing your life as expendable for her spiritual good and growth. It means that you go to work 10-12 hours perhaps to support your family. When you come home, you are tired! But to love your wife means that you listen to her. You talk to her. You hug her. You care for her. You pray with her. You encourage her. You counsel her. You comfort her. Because she is more important to you than yourself.

And when we get beyond the romance of that, and we realize after awhile, that “I am not that way. I cannot do that. And, besides, my wife is not always the kind of person who makes it very easy to do those things,” then we get on our knees and we listen to God, to the God who made us, the God to whom we belong. Marriage, your marriage, is to be a picture of Christ and the church. Love her as Christ loved the church. Be like Christ in this aspect, that you love her with a self-denying, sacrificial love.

This is the most radical thing that the gospel has to say to a Christian man, to a married Christian man. You love by dying to yourself. To the unbelieving world, that is a conundrum. They cannot figure that out. But it is no riddle to the

child of God who stands before the cross. We are to love. And then we understand that the love that we are to show always comes at the cost of our own self and our own pride. This is exactly what offends men. The gospel goes into all the world—into the United States, into India, into Asia, into Africa—and we hear that all cultures are equal and that we must leave these cultures alone. No, they are not. In Africa and Asia and the United States women are viewed as slaves to the pleasure of men. And the Christian gospel comes into those cultures and contradicts those cultures and says, “Man, you are to love her by dying to yourself. And find your treasure in the cross of Jesus Christ. How do you approach a woman? You must die to yourself. You must seek to lead, direct, counsel, and comfort her in such a way that she grows up into her Lord Jesus Christ. You are a servant to her.”

May God give us to know what it means to love our wives even as Christ loved the church. May He give us to know that out of a rich experience of His grace—to know the love of Christ to us, to people so undeserving. And may God give us to measure our love by the sufferings of Jesus Christ. May our love, then, for our wife be a vocal love (that we *tell* her); a thoughtful love; a strong love in Christ that provides for her protection. For the church is certainly safe in the love of Jesus Christ. The church never needs doubt the love of Jesus.

And may our love for our wives be practical. Maybe you come home and say, “Honey, I’d die for you.” And there she is in the kitchen after a busy day, with all the kids and the supper dishes all around, and she responds, “Well, that’s nice,

dear. But while you are willing to die for me, would you please load the dishwasher?” That is the way you love your wife. You help her. You make your wife feel that she is treasured and that you will lay down your life for her in serving her spiritual good.

May God give us that kind of love.

Love your wife as Christ loved the church. The word “love” here is a reference to the pure and the holy love of God in Jesus Christ. It is a cleaving together. It is a faithfulness to be together in holiness.

SIGHT-GIVING LIGHT

>> Lim Yang Zhi

We know him by two means: first, by the creation, preservation and government of the universe; which is before our eyes as a most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many characters leading us to contemplate the invisible things of God, namely, his power and divinity, as the apostle Paul saith, Romans 1:20. All which things are sufficient to convince men, and leave them without excuse. Secondly, he makes himself more clearly and fully known to us by his holy and divine Word, that is to say, as far as is necessary for us to know in this life, to his glory and our salvation. (Belgic Confession Article 2)

Introduction

Article two of the Belgic Confession mentions that there are two ways to know God: one by Creation and its history, and one by His Word. Both are beautiful means by which we know God. We know about God as we live in His creation; we see trees, plants, insects, the moon, and the sun. We also learn through the history of this creation. Events such as World War II and the Cold War are all part of history. As for the Word of God, we are privileged to have a nicely printed-out hardcopy of the Bible on our desks every day for us to read and to meditate on. John Calvin describes the Word of God as being eyeglasses for us to properly interpret what we see in Creation. So common are these two elements to us that we forget to see them as instruments by which God makes Himself known to us.

But at times, we forget to use them

to know God. We start to not have a God-centred perspective on everything that surrounds us. Once we start to lose our God-centred perspective, worldliness would subtly creep into our minds. Once we cease to sharpen the lenses of Scripture, the darkness of the world would slowly, but surely, blind our eyes, disabling us from seeing the glory of God in His creation.

Thus, it is of great need for us youths to know what our perspective on creation should be and how we should continually nurture that perspective.

Our Christian Lenses

It would be appropriate to state what our perspective on creation and history should be. On a side note, I would wish to make mention that both creation and history can never, ever be separated from each other. Both of them co-exist with one another. With creation comes history; and without creation there can be no history. Thus, when referring to creation, I am referring to both creation and history.

Our lenses should, first of all, view the universe as the creation of God. Creation is from God. God is the source of life in creation, just as He is man's source of life. Without God, there will be no creation. There would be nothing but God. Nothing will exist; there will be no atmosphere, no earth, no sun, no planet, and no galaxy. Not a single star would exist to shine in the midst of darkness. Genesis 1 states this very clearly to us: 'And the earth was without form, and void; and

darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.' (v.2.) Furthermore, as already mentioned earlier, without creation, there can be no history. The content of history is creation and its happenings. So, we can justly say that God is also the source and controller of life in history. Proverbs 21:1 states, 'the king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.'

Secondly, creation is to be viewed as being upheld and governed by God, as stated in the Belgic Confession article. God, through His providence, sustains life throughout the earth, from the smallest bacterium to the largest animals. Even the gigantic galaxies in the universe are sustained by God! The Heidelberg Catechism proclaims this truth: 'herbs and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, meat and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, yea, and all things come, not by chance, but by His fatherly hand.' (Q&A27, LD 10) God is also in control of the events that occur in the world. God willed for the two aeroplanes to crash into the Twin Towers during the 9/11 disaster. God willed the British army and Singapore to fall under the mighty hands of Japan in World War II. All events occur only because God willed it to happen. Proverbs 21, as quoted previously, states this fact very clearly.

Seeing that creation is under God's full control, we can confidently

say that creation is, thirdly, a tool that God uses to glorify Himself. All things in the universe exist to glorify God. That includes the people and events of the world. It is true that the world is wicked, but yet God will be glorified through their wickedness. Revelations 6:8 speaks of the pale horse and its rider, Death, having ‘power...over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.’ But yet this horse is under the control of God, and its actions, no matter how cruel and terrifying it may be, will be for the purpose of God to glorify Himself.

These three points are basic and fundamental in the Reformed worldview of a Christian. However, these three points come from one core truth. The Word of God is our sole authority in life: that is the basis of our worldview. *Sola Scriptura* was what the Reformers proclaimed in the Protestant Reformation, and *Sola Scriptura* is what we must proclaim in this present day.

The World’s Lenses

With these three points on creation, it is fitting to see what the world thinks of God’s creation.

The world, in the first place, does not consider the universe as creation. It is not something created by a superior and powerful Being, but is matter and energy being developed into what we see today around us. An example of such a teaching is the theory of evolution. Evolution teaches that all living creatures mutated into existence over the course of billions and trillions of years through ‘trial and error.’ When the creature realizes that it is lacking an organ, it mutates and ‘adapts’ to the situation and develops a new

organ for itself. Blasphemy! Where is God in that? God has been left out of His own creation!

You might say, ‘Oh, well, they might not know who God is.’ Romans 1:20-25, however, says:

‘For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.’

These six verses state explicitly that the wicked deliberately, not ignorantly, deny the existence of God, go against the six-day creation that is clearly stated in Genesis 1, and give no glory at all to the Creator of this universe.

Secondly, the world thinks that history comprises merely of the works of men over the span of time. You might think, ‘That sounds all right!’ But the problem with such thinking is that God is omitted completely from it. Consider this: If the British did not colonize Singapore, the Gospel might have never spread to Singapore, and

we might not even have a church today! Strange as that might sound, it is true. But, the world does not see God’s powerful hand working in the hearts of men to do as He wills (cf. Proverbs 21:1). The world merely sees what men do outwardly and does not consider his actions in connection to God’s will.

Thirdly, and most deadly of all, the world does not have Scripture as the foundation of their worldview. This is rather apparent, from the previous two points. They deny God, and subsequently, will deny His Word and the authority of it. So, what makes up their worldview? Simple: their vain thoughts and philosophies. Romans 1 speaks of the world being ‘vain in their imaginations.’

The main point I wish to bring up in this section is the relation these three points have to the education in our country. Remember that the public schools are of the world. This means that they will uphold and teach the vain philosophies of the world, along with the false theories concerning the universe. This is because the world does not see creation with God in mind; they deliberately leave Him and His word out of the picture and create a man-centred view on the universe. This exclusion of God and His Word ‘makes public education not merely non-Christian but antichristian.’ (Reformed Education, by Professor David J. Engelsma, pg. 21). Replacing God and His Word are man and his philosophies as the foundation of our studies. The school is godless; its curriculum is godless; all of its teachings are godless. ‘To banish the Word is to banish God, and to banish God is to incite the devil;’ (Ibid, pg. 22) this is what the schools uphold,

and they will continue to uphold this in the future to a greater and even more dangerous extent.

Of course, the schools do not go around proclaiming ‘We hate God!’ in the classrooms. Satan is much more deceiving than that. He uses the schools to attack us in a very subtle manner. They attack our minds, where all our thoughts and actions come from. Not only do the schools defend the false theory of evolution, they also infiltrate the core of our brains with various thinkings that have its roots in worldliness and humanistic philosophies. The schools also pressurise us with heaps of school work. From there we are tempted to push ourselves to study till the point that our whole life revolves around it and nothing else matters – including God. This could be one of the many ways the devil attacks us through the schools; it certainly is not the only way. Rest assured that the devil will continue to lurk in the schools, patiently scheming of different ways to persecute the people of God studying in public schools.

This is a frightening circumstance. What makes things even worse is that we have to face this every single weekday in our schools. Being surrounded by so much false teachings and ideas is extremely dangerous, and we are more than likely to fall into these teachings. We as youths are at the stage of our lives where we are growing spiritually; learning the wrong things will simply lead to serious consequences if we are not discerning and careful. The question we need to ask ourselves is this: Do we know of the circumstance we are in? Are we aware of the dangers we are being faced with? Do we

even see this as a danger, or have we been in this circumstance for so long that we have become numb to its danger and take it as something which is all right? I pray that we have not become numb! Many have fallen into the traps of these false teachings, and that includes both churches and Christians. So, may we always be prepared to face all these oppositions of the Word of God, and not be ‘tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine.’ (Ephesians 4:14)

How do we sharpen our lenses?

So far, we have seen and contrasted between the perspectives of the world and the Christian, and we have considered the extent of ungodliness and wickedness in the schools. So then, what must we do?

Hopefully, the answer is not to sit on our hands and do nothing. We should never do that! Rather, we must fill ourselves up with the Word of God. If we do not equip ourselves with the Word of God, we will never be able to see anything in the light of Scripture. How can we expect ourselves to see all things with the eyeglasses of Scripture if we do not refine those glasses? Colossians 2:7 states, ‘Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.’ Truly, we have been rooted and built up in God through Christ. But we must continually strive to be even more rooted and built up in Him. This goes for the analogy of Scriptures being our eyeglasses. God has put on these glasses for us; but we must continually refine these glasses so that we might interpret Creation to a clearer extent.

But, how do we continue to be rooted and built up in God’s word?

In general, there are two parts to the answer.

First, and most fundamentally, parents must train the child up and guide him to be rooted and built up in God. This is primary responsibility of parents. Deuteronomy 6:4-9 states that very clearly to us:

“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. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.”

Note that, in the text, it says, ‘and thou shalt teach them diligently.’ The word ‘them’ refers to the command God gives to Israel, to love Him with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. This command is to be our purpose of all our actions. The reason why we study in school is because we love our Heavenly Father, and we want to know more about Him through His creation. This is what the parents must teach their children. Not only must parents teach this command, but they must do so diligently. The development of the child’s perspective and thoughts always comes from the home. It comes from the home, and it starts in the home.

It is essential for parents to help their child be able to relate what

they have studied in the secular school back to the Word of God. The child is still developing in the knowledge of the Word of God, and still has more to learn about God's truth. If God's Word is not in his heart, he will be influenced by the false teachings of the world and his perspective on God might be changed for the worse. And so, the parents must continually teach him the doctrines of the Bible, and its practical applications. I cannot emphasize this enough; the upbringing of a child is highly essential, and whatever he is taught during this upbringing will affect his worldview. The family is the root of a child's upbringing.

But, it is not just merely about the parents instructing the child. As youths, we must be willing to be taught. Thus, secondly, concerning being rooted and built up in God's word, we ourselves must seek the Word of God diligently. Christ has commanded us in Matthew 6:33, 'But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.' Note that Christ does not say, 'Seek ye the kingdom of God.' Rather it is, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God.' That is how important God's Word should be in our lives! Earthly treasures should not (and should never be) the top priority in our lives. We should not be seeking what the world seeks for – the most fashionable clothes, the coolest gadgets, and a host of other material things. Rather, being children of God, we seek to know more about our Heavenly Father who has adopted us unto His love. We seek to know His wonderful creation that proclaims His glory. We seek to know what the Bible has to say about His creation. We seek to know how the teachings of the Bible

relate to our daily lives. Seeking first the kingdom of God means, also, that we seek to acknowledge the Bible as the sole authority in our lives. Seeking God's kingdom and not earthly treasures means that we will lack, to some degree, in earthly pleasures. We must sacrifice the earthly treasures that seem so attractive to seek God's kingdom. There is no way we can seek both at the same time; seek one of these, and you will not get the other. This is a sacrifice we have to make, but it is a worthy sacrifice that will benefit us eternally. There is never a price too high for the truth. Do not ever forsake the truth, do not ever forsake God's kingdom, and do not ever forsake His Word. The world will scorn at us, mock us, laugh at us, and persecute us; but fear not! We seek God's kingdom – a kingdom that never passes away, a kingdom that lasts for eternity, a kingdom where we as God's children together with our heavenly Father may dwell with each other in perfect and sweet communion. We seek His kingdom, knowing that we will enjoy this communion one day. Seek the world, and we will never enjoy this communion.

Conclusion

Truly, it is essential for us youths to cultivate our Christian lenses. The devil and the world attack us in countless ways – trying to dim our spiritual vision of physical things. It is also never easy for parents to help cultivate Christian lenses by teaching their child the fear of the Lord. We children often are rebellious and wilful, sometimes to the point that we wish not to learn God's Word. But yet, both parents and children must strive to do what God commands us to do. Struggles will befall us; the calling to be

a faithful parent and spiritually matured youth is not an easy task to fulfil. We can only fulfil it through the grace of God. Though at times we fail at it so miserably, we must still strive to fulfil our callings on this earth. We do it, not for our own glory, but for the cause of Christ and for His church. We have been chosen to be God's people, and thus we must have the Word of God fill us up. Martin Luther wrote in one of his works: 'God's Word cannot be without God's people, and conversely, God's people cannot be without God's Word.' How true that is! And so, may we always pray, not just for ourselves, but for one another as well, that God would continually give us the grace to seek His Word diligently, that we might be able to see all things in the light of Scripture, that we might proclaim with the Psalmist, 'The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.' (Psalm 19:1-2)

Discussion Questions

1. There are many ways the devil attacks us in the public school. However, Satan is extremely deceptive, and so does not reveal his attacks so clearly. Can you think of any other ways Satan attacks us through the schools?
2. What are the subjects that you study? Jot them down one by one, and summarize what each subject covers. Then, search in the Scriptures what God says about each subject, whether it be math or a particular type of science.
3. What are some practical ways we can seek God's kingdom? How can we do this as a youth group, or as a family?

OUTWARD MORALITY IS NOT CHRISTIANITY

>> Tiang Loong

Imagine the Pharisee. The legalistic, obnoxious, self-righteous Pharisee. The proud Pharisee that desires the praises of men. The Pharisee described as a white-washed tomb that is corrupt on the inside. The Pharisee who despised the publican and was justly condemned. The Pharisees that made themselves look the holiest so as to gain the respect and recognition of men. The Pharisees that crucified the Lord Jesus Christ. Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees (Matt 16). Woe unto the Pharisees.

How could we ever arrive at such a judgment? How can we know the truth about a Pharisee? Undoubtedly, the Scriptures instruct us thus. Read the gospel accounts and such a judgment is clear to all – the Pharisees are evil. No one in church would like to be called a Pharisee – it is an insult. Avoid being a Pharisee at all costs. (This does not mean that we intentionally refuse to have any manifestation of good works just so that others may not call us "Pharisee"; for true godliness will manifest itself outwardly and may appear not much different from a Pharisee.)

But now, for a moment, imagine the Pharisee again. Imagine the Pharisee without having our current knowledge of the Scriptures. Imagine a Pharisee as viewed with our own eyes. Imagine walking on the streets of Jerusalem 2000 years ago, watching as the Pharisees go about their activities. How would we have viewed the Pharisees?

O the noble Pharisees! The respectable Pharisees! The devoted and pious Pharisees! Look at how much they love God; they fast, they pray, they devote their lives to religious studies, they have scrolls of Scripture on their foreheads and arms. Oh, you have a theological question? You need guidance for your life? Well, who else better to direct you other than a Pharisee? You need an example of godly, moral religious living? Just look and imitate the Pharisees. You wish to be a Pharisee? Wow, that's a noble aspiration!

Likely, I would have thought that way of a Pharisee. A Pharisee would have been highly esteemed. They had the praises of the people – they wanted it, and they got it.

Yet, Scriptures point us to a totally different direction. So, what went wrong? The answer: Christians, because of the work of Christ, possess both inward and outward morality. Therefore, one with a mere outward morality cannot possibly represent Christianity.

Concerning morality, Christianity is about the righteousness of Christ as the only righteousness. In other words, apart from Christ, all that is left is either blatant immorality or self-righteousness – and both are abominable to the Lord.

Since it is not the scope of this article to discuss why immorality is abominable to the most holy God, my purpose, therefore, is to explain the wickedness of self-righteousness. From there, we shall see how self-righteousness manifests

itself as outward morality. Finally, we will look into the danger of taking outward morality as the standard of righteousness and how we must avoid viewing things from that standard.

Self-righteousness, or any form of external "obedience" to the law of God, is a confusing problem. If mankind, since the fall, has become utterly corrupt so much so that there is none that does good, why should there be any form of [external] "obedience" to the law of God? Why should there be laws in a country that forbid murder, stealing and adultery? Why do institutions have a code of ethics? Why are there social organizations that care for the welfare of this creation or humanity? Could it be that mankind did not become as corrupt as it is written in the scriptures? Could it be that perhaps while some are utterly corrupt so much so that they become murderers and fornicators, others are "quite good", or, "not as bad"?

No. All men are utterly corrupt, without exception. Depravity hits every human and its corruption is total. There are, therefore, reasons why mankind seems to have some form of "good":

First, humans are aware of the negative consequences that God ordains when certain laws are broken. For example, a society cannot exist when its citizens are constantly murdered. Neither can companies have business with each other if there is often betrayal and breaches of trust among them.

This is plain when the choices one makes is based upon “pros & cons” or the consequences of an action; and an action is moral or immoral depending on how they affect the society or an individual. That is why civilizations enact and enforce laws to deter such negative consequences.

Second, there is the conscience. Romans 2:14-15 tells us of gentiles doing “the things contained in the law” as it is written on the hearts. Does it then mean that those who obey the conscience do good? Not at all. Rather, their consciences testify of a Judge that will punish sin, and that causes them to avoid evil acts. Also, since the conscience knows good and bad, humans also know how others would perceive them when they sin. It is the “feeling bad” for sinning that prevents them from sinning to the uttermost. Furthermore, the “obeying” of the conscience is for the purpose of suppressing the truth about their own unrighteousness and God’s demand of perfect obedience, since we can fool ourselves that what we have done is sufficiently righteous. Having done so, it goes on even further and puffs the person up in pride because he thinks that he is righteous.

Third, there is the incentive of pride. All men want to be recognized and praised, having the desire of “being as gods”. We want to be praised and worshipped – something which only God alone deserves. Since mankind retained glimmerings of natural light and knows that good is praiseworthy, he does what is good to receive the praises of men. Connected with this point, the conscience can be more effectively suppressed, or seared, based on what is praiseworthy to mankind.

For example, if immodestly dressed women are exalted as fashionable, then nakedness becomes less shameful to us. Or, if homosexuality is exalted, then, we may suppress the truth that God hates it.

Fourth, self-righteousness and outward morality is man’s self-deception to earn divine favours. Mankind, though proud, knows of its own limitations and how it needs the help of someone or something greater than itself to achieve its goals. For example, a farmer knows that he is at the mercy of the weather. A student knows that despite the hard work he puts in, his results may not reflect those efforts. Since it is a common idea that the good ought to be rewarded and the bad punished, mankind, with its pride, thinking that his “goodness” is worthy of reward, does “good” to earn rewards for his own purposes and glory.

Fifth, connected to the second and third point but more explicitly, it is the vain attempt of man trying to show that he does not need God nor the Saviour to be righteous. He tries to prove so by showing himself to be more loving and righteous than God, and by trying to be more loving and righteous than the church; while at the same time denouncing the values upheld by the church as old-fashioned, irrelevant, unloving, unkind, unaccepting, bigotry, and narrow-minded.

What can we observe, then, about self-righteousness? 1. It is about self, and not about loving God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength. 2. It is not of faith, and whatsoever is not of faith is sin (Rom 14:23). 3. It is a cover-up of our inward corruption; just like a beautifully decorated coffin with a rotting corpse within. Since there

is nothing righteous about the inward man when it comes to self-righteousness, apart from Christ, all “righteous” acts of an unregenerate person can only be at best, outward and thus, outward morality.

It is not without reason that the title of this article is about “outward morality” (and it is not titled ‘Self-righteousness is not Christianity’). What I have in mind is to warn against viewing things based upon outward morality; for we are prone to view things based upon outward morality.

What then is the danger of outward morality, or viewing things based on outward morals? Outward morality pretends to be righteous when it is not. It is worse than a lie: a half-truth. It is a lie that pretends to be true. It lowers our guard and allows sin and seemingly “good” worldly philosophies to creep in. It denies the need of the Saviour. It tries to make vain the work of our Saviour. It tries to deceive us: “perhaps there is another good”. It tries to remove Jesus Christ as the only good, the only way, the only truth, and the only life.

We must, therefore, be very careful not to trade Christ for self-deception. We must be very careful not to put on an appearance of outward morality so much so that we appear pleasing to the church and to the world but Christ is missing from our lives. And this is as dangerous, if not more dangerous, as immorality; for we fool both ourselves and those around us, and there is no one who can correct us. If our outward morality deceives us, so much so that we think that we are “good people” and become dull to the Word of God and spiritual matters, is that not the pathway to destruction? Rather, we ought to

seek to be found righteous only in Christ and live by the power of His resurrection.

This affects how we view things too. It affects the way we view the world, society, and every institution that we are in. Are we in a “moral”, “well-regulated” and “highly-disciplined” institution (such as a workplace or school) with a “love for society”? Are immoral acts forbidden and restrained? We must remember that even so, great wickedness and deception is present. We must therefore be on guard, and teach our children to be on their guard, to make sure that the philosophy of “good” does not influence and

deceive us. For, while pleasing our eyes that “good” is being done, they subtly draw us away from the True and Only Good – our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and His precepts.

This affects how we choose our friendships. Our friends (in the truest biblical sense of the word) must only be those who worship in truth the true God through our Lord Jesus Christ. The Psalmist says, “I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts” (Psalm 119:63) and not a companion of those who are merely outwardly moral.

Therefore, neither good manners, nor conduct, nor attitude, nor outward appearance are our criteria for friendship. Rather, Christ (and His truth) is the criterion of who our friends ought to be.

Yes, the road is narrow. More narrow than what we naturally would like to have. Yet, it pleases God to subject all things (including righteousness) to, and be glorified in, Jesus Christ alone.

Psalter 27 (Psalm 16): O God, preserve me, for in Thee, alone my trust has stood; My soul has said, Thou art my Lord, my chief and only good. Solus Christus!

Why Prayer Meetings?

>> Aaron Lim

“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” - Matt 18:20

For the Reformed believer, prayer is the chief part of thankfulness which God requires of him. Prayer is his daily habit, his conversing with his heavenly Father. At the throne of grace, the weary child of God finds refuge. He approaches it with the confidence that his loving Father will hear him for Jesus’ sake. He draws nigh to fellowship with his covenant Friend in prayer. Pouring out his secrets before his God, the child is assured that his Father will give him all things necessary for his salvation.

Every other Tuesday, CERC gathers for prayer meetings. The church gathers to pray. These meetings usually begin with Psalm singing and an exhortation from the Word. Then the meeting breaks up into

small groups where each member can share about his situation and concerns in life, his burdens and cares for the church, or his peculiar struggles. Usually, each group closes their sharing by having each member pray for another.

There are important reasons for God’s people to be gathered for prayer. God’s people are a covenant people. They have God as their Friend, and are siblings with each other in Jesus Christ, their elder Brother. While personal and family prayers are part of the covenant life of God’s people, there is also a corporate responsibility for the congregation to pray together. Individualism and self-love must not characterize the Reformed believer who acknowledges it to be his duty to employ his gifts for the advantage and salvation of other members (HC Q55). He prays not

only for himself and his family, but also for the other members who make up the body of Christ.

Every member in the family of God has a duty to care for the other members. Each of them is plagued by a common sinful human nature. Each has his own unique struggles and problems in life. These problems are sometimes grievously difficult to tackle and require the help of other saints. God in His grace has provided the communion of the saints to assist those with such difficulties. He always uses means, especially the means of like-minded saints, to assist His children in their afflictions.

While not every problem may be shared during prayer meetings, there are burdens that God’s people can freely share with each other. They have the confidence that each member of God’s family

is deeply interested about their spiritual welfare. When they come together to pray, they are especially concerned about the needs and welfare of their church. They pray for their leaders, whom Christ is pleased to use to lead His flock. They ask their heavenly Father to strengthen their leaders with grace and wisdom, so that they rule in love over them.

God's people also pray for the sick and afflicted among them. At the throne of grace, they bring to remembrance those whom God is putting through trials. They request their heavenly Father to bestow grace to them, and to grant their healing in His due time. When God's people pray for each other's needs, they manifest the body of Christ which is made up of many different and unique members.

Another reason why prayer meetings are important is because it provides an opportunity for the saints to praise God together.

Prayer is not only fellowship with God, but an adoration and praise of His infinite perfections. He is the sovereign Creator and Ruler of His people. He reigns over the universe in supreme majesty and glory. His counsel guides the course of nature and every detail of history. Throughout the period of time, He is gathering His beloved church, His elect people, bringing them to faith and salvation in Jesus Christ. God's people praise Him for all His mighty acts, especially His great work of salvation in the cross.

Explaining the benefits of communal prayer, Professor Herman Hanko writes:

“Communal prayer is often a great blessing. God's people are a praying people. To pray together

strengthens the ties that bind in the communion of the saints. It is the beginning of the perfect fellowship in heaven itself where all the saints of all ages shall be forever united in praise to God.”

(Herman Hanko, RFPA, 2006, p. 110).

The bonds among members of the church are strengthened when they pray together. God's people are strengthened in their earthly pilgrimage when they go to the throne of grace together to seek heavenly refuge. The church that prays together stays together.

Second, God is not material, for He is not made of “stuff” and He cannot be measured, for He has no length or area or volume or limits. Third, He has no scent, flavour, texture, sound or colour. Man cannot smell, taste, touch, hear or see God because He is spiritual and above and beyond such characteristics which belong merely to the world He made and rules.

The truth of God's spirituality is necessary for His simplicity. If God were material or non-spiritual, He could not be simple. Consider something material, like a book. It has front and back covers and pages, some of which are filled with print while others are blank. Its pages and covers are glued or stitched together. Clearly, that which is material cannot be simple. Since God is simple, He must be spiritual. Moreover, since God is omnipresent or present everywhere, He cannot be material, for this would make Him visible and He would occupy the space of all the universe! So the spirituality of God and His simplicity go hand in hand, and His spirituality is necessary for His invisibility and omnipresence.

The first two attributes of God mentioned in Belgic Confession 1, His simplicity and His spirituality, are the bases of the first two of the ten commandments. The first commandment rests upon the simplicity of God and the second commandment flows from the spirituality of God.

The italicised portions of Heidelberg Catechism, Q. & A. 94-95 highlight the connection between the first commandment and God's simplicity:

Q. 94. What doth God enjoin in the first commandment?

A. That I, as sincerely as I desire the salvation of my own soul, avoid and flee from all idolatry, sorcery, soothsaying, superstition, invocation of saints, or any other creatures; and learn rightly to know the only true God; trust in Him alone, with humility and patience submit to Him; expect all good things from Him only; love, fear, and glorify Him with my whole heart; so that I renounce and forsake all creatures, rather than commit even the least thing contrary to His will.

Q. 95. What is idolatry?

A. Idolatry is, instead of, or besides that one true God who has manifested Himself in His Word, to contrive or have any other object in which men place their trust.

Lord's Day 35 of the Heidelberg Catechism on the second commandment declares that we must not “represent God by images, nor worship Him in any other way than He has commanded in His Word” (A. 96) for “God neither can nor may be represented by any means” (A. 97), because of the spirituality of God. The spiritual God “will have His people taught, not by dumb images, but by the lively preaching of His Word” (A. 98).

Other Divine Attributes

The first “half” of Belgic Confession 1 deals with the Being of God: “God is one only, simple and spiritual Being,” and sets forth two divine attributes, Jehovah's simplicity and spirituality, as we have seen. The remainder of the article gives other perfections of God:

He is “eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, immutable,

infinite, almighty, perfectly wise, just, good, and the overflowing fountain of all good.” Nine attributes are listed here, if we take “good and the overflowing fountain of all good” as one perfection, the divine goodness.

The first six attributes are what we call incommunicable attributes, those that are not “communicated” to man. God is eternal but He does not make us eternal or outside of time. God is incomprehensible; we are not. God is invisible, immutable, infinite and almighty, unlike us.

The next three divine perfections are communicable; that is, by God's grace and through the work of the Spirit of Christ in us, He makes us, in a creaturely way, like Him in these attributes. We become wise, for the Spirit of wisdom gives us wisdom. We are made more and more just, for our covenant God enables us to walk in righteousness. We become good for Jehovah communicates His goodness to us.

It would take too much space to go through these nine divine attributes in depth and such would not really belong here, but I should, at least, make some brief statements concerning them. First, that God is eternal does not merely mean that He is without beginning and without end. God's eternity means that He is without succession of moments and outside of time, for time is a creature; God made time. Second, that God is

The Attributes of God
Belgic Confession 1B (II)
.....>> Pastor Angus Stewart.....

Belgic Confession 1: There Is One Only God

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

God's Spirituality

So far we have discussed the first assertion of Belgic Confession 1, that God is “one only simple” Being.

Now we turn from God's simplicity to His spirituality, which is the second divine attribute mentioned in the first article: “We all believe with the heart, and confess with the mouth, that there is one only simple and spiritual Being.”

What is meant by “spiritual” with regard to God? First, God does not have a body, unlike human beings. We should not, however, think that God is somewhat inferior to us because we have hands and feet, whereas He does not. Rather, we have hands and feet because the

omnipotent God, in effect, says to us, “You, being so small and weak, need to be able to do a few things, so I will create you with hands and feet. But the real hand is My hand that created the world and governs the universe, and I need not feet for I am omnipresent!”

incomprehensible does not mean that we can know nothing about God or know nothing about Him that is certain or sure. That God is incomprehensible means that though we do know a lot about Him that is true, for it has been revealed to us in Scripture and sealed on our hearts by the Holy Spirit, we can never plumb even a fraction of one percent of God because He is infinitely deep. Third, that God is invisible means we cannot see Him, nor can even the holy angels in heaven. No creature has ever or will ever see God, and if someone could it would kill him (to speak as a fool for a moment). Fourth, that God is immutable means that He cannot change in anything, either in His Persons, perfections, Being or decree. If Jehovah could change, He would either become better or worse, but if He were to become better, then He would not have been perfect before He became better, and if He got worse He would no longer be perfect. God's perfection requires His immutability. Fifth, that God is infinite means that He cannot be limited, either with respect to time or space or knowledge or in any divine perfection. Sixth, that God is almighty means that He is powerful to do all that He wills according to His own Being. Seventh, that God is perfectly wise means that He always adapts everything outside of Himself to His own glory and everything in Himself serves His own infinite and perfect blessedness. Eighth, that God is just means that He is eternally in perfect conformity to Himself as His own absolute standard. Ninth, that God is good means that all peace, righteousness, truth and everything positive and beneficial resides in Him. That He is the overflowing fountain of all

good means that all that is good flows out of His own infinite riches to us. Later, the Belgic Confession speaks of God's "mere goodness" in connection with election (Article 16) and His "pour[ing] forth [His] goodness on us" through Jesus Christ and His cross (Article 20).

Those who would like to know more about God's wonderful attributes could read the relevant sections in Rev. Ron Hanko's excellent *Doctrine According to Godliness* and in Rev. Herman Hoeksema's first volume of *Reformed Dogmatics*. A. W. Pink's *The Attributes of God* contains some fine material. More detailed is the two-volume work of Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*. Also my recent series of ten sermons on Jehovah's incommunicable attributes, "God's Glorious Perfections," is available free on-line in audio and video (www.cprf.co.uk/audio/otherseries.htm).

A Bit of History

Finally, we should understand a few things about the composition of the Belgic Confession 1. Belgic Confession 1 is similar to, and leans upon, two earlier Reformed confessions. It is similar to French Confession 1 because the Belgic Confession builds upon, develops, omits and adds to the French Confession, which was drafted by Calvin and which Guido de Brès used as a sort of template. Not only is the Belgic Confession like the French Confession, but also its wording and structure is often very similar to Theodore Beza's confession. Beza was Calvin's friend and successor in Geneva. So you can picture Guido de Brès in Belgium leaning on the French Confession and Beza's confession that he wrote in Switzerland, both of which

documents betray the influence of John Calvin!

Would you believe that Belgic Confession 1 was attacked by the Arminians? They seem to manage to find fault with all that is good! The Arminians complained that Belgic Confession 1 did not list various divine attributes such as "omnipotence, mercy, severity, anger and hatred." There are various ways to answer their charge.

First, "hatred" is not an attribute of God. Indeed, God hates the reprobate wicked (Ps. 5:5; 11:5) but, unlike grace, holiness, justice, etc., hatred is not an attribute of God. Hatred is God's love of His holiness reflected in His will to punish and destroy the wicked.

Hatred is the outgoing of God's spotless justice towards the reprobate. An attribute of God is something that eternally resides in Him without respect of any creatures. God is one, holy, invisible, just, good, gracious, loving, kind, etc., but He is not hatred. So the Arminians, when they talked about hatred as an attribute of God, blundered. They also spoke of God's "anger," but anger is not an attribute of God either, nor is "severity," for God is not anger or severity. So, in response to the Arminians, we say, "Some of what you listed are not even attributes of God at all."

Second, it is ironic that the Arminians wanted omnipotence added to Article 1. "You want omnipotence? You, who believe

that the sovereign will of the eternal God can be thwarted by the free will of man who is a speck of dust, do not even believe that God truly is almighty!" Why should Arminians, who deny God's irresistible grace in salvation, want to include omnipotence among the attributes listed in Belgic Confession 1?

Third, the simplest answer to the Arminian attack on the first article of the Belgic Confession is, in short, that the list of divine attributes given here is a summary; it does not claim, and was never intended, to be exhaustive. You could add a half a dozen more from various passages of the Holy Scriptures that mention divine perfections not listed in this article. We too often list attributes of God without including them all. For instance, if someone prayed, "Father, we worship Thee who art sovereign, holy, loving, kind, gracious and just," and then ended there, you would not tap that person on the shoulder afterwards and say, "But God has several other attributes that you left out!"

The question is: Why did the Arminian ministers and theologians criticize Belgic Confession 1? The answer is that the Arminians were not just criticizing Belgic Confession 1, they were criticizing many, if not all, of the articles of the Belgic Confession. They were doing

this because they had subscribed to the Belgic Confession and they knew that the creed which they had signed condemned them as false teachers; for example, they believed and were teaching doctrines contrary to Belgic Confession 16 on eternal, unconditional election and reprobation. So they criticized every part of this creed they could possibly oppose in order to try to devalue, or bring down, the Belgic Confession. Then, if someone said to them, "You contradict your creed, especially Article 16," they would answer: "It is not a very good creed and it is not authoritative for it is poor in various regards and inaccurate in many articles." This is what heretics will do, especially if given time: attack the orthodox creeds or the formulas of subscription to them, so as to try to save their own evil consciences.

When the Synod of Dordt (1618-1619) began, the Reformed churches in the Lowlands had two Reformation creeds, the Belgic Confession (1561) and the Heidelberg Catechism (1563). The great Synod drafted a third document, the Canons of Dordt, which explained and developed the truth of God's sovereign grace taught in the two earlier creeds. The Synod of Dordt also examined existing copies of the Belgic

Confession, in Latin, French and Dutch, and adopted a standard, authoritative text in French and Dutch (the new Latin text was never officially approved). In doing this, Synod made a few, non-substantive changes, clarified some things and made it read more smoothly. Our Belgic Confession is not exactly as it left the hands of Guido de Brès in 1561, but it is essentially what he wrote with slight revisions, the occasional comma changed and the odd clause or word put in or taken out.

This brings us back to the Arminians and their criticism of Belgic Confession 1. Though the Synod of Dordt did not add "mercy, severity, anger and hatred," as the Arminians had suggested, the Synod did insert the word "almighty" in the first article, when it was revising and standardizing the text of the Belgic Confession. The German theologians from Bremen (who were too sympathetic to the Arminians) also proposed this.

This little bit of history on the Synod of Dordt and the Belgic Confession, especially Article 1, is interesting for it gives some insight into the text of the first document in our Three Forms of Unity, the work of the great Synod and shenanigans of the Arminian heretics!

God is good means that all peace, righteousness, truth and everything positive and beneficial resides in Him. That He is the overflowing fountain of all good means that all that is good flows out of His own infinite riches to us.

Lessons from the Past

>> Pastor J. Kortering

Psalm 77:11, "I will remember the works of the Lord; surely I will remember thy wonders of old."

These words are written for the 25th anniversary of CERC.

Such an occasion forces us to grapple with our past.

With Psalm 77 as an example, we see Asaph expressing mixed emotions. For the present he writes with melancholy; verse 7 is a case in point, "Will the Lord cast off forever and will he be favourable no more?" Yet, these reflections force him to remember better times, vs. 11, "I will remember the works of the Lord; surely I will remember thy wonders of old." Then he goes on to make obvious reference to the deliverance from Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea.

These inspired expressions help us to understand our own experiences whether in our personal life or church life. Our lives are marked with ups and downs, and seasons of victory and seeming defeat. Asaph's inspired record of the history of Israel demonstrates that this is the norm for Christians everywhere.

When we lived among you and served as Minister-on-Loan, we had the blessed privilege to assist you as a fill-in pastor; so many of you recall how we both laughed together and cried together. We became attached to one another as a shepherd does to his sheep and the sheep to the shepherd. This extended over a period of 11 years and beyond. This was true for you personally and as a congregation.

There were times when we identified with Asaph in his melancholy. We rejoice in the experience of God's deliverance from such seasons and can once again declare that God is a God of wonders Who is worthy of our praise.

The history of the church is not a repetition of cycles as the world declares, "what goes around comes around." Rather, it must be viewed as a pathway upon which each of us walks individually and as a church communally. This is biblical as, you will recall, the contrast the Bible gives is between the broad and crooked way that leads to destruction and the straight and narrow way that leads to heaven.

Because the pathway of life is a pathway, we have to come to grips with our past; it will never be repeated, true, but what purpose does it then serve?

There are two errors to avoid.

First, we must not live in the past. This is a temptation when we focus on the blessings and strengths of the past. Many of them are so precious that we do not want to let go of them. Change affects our personal and church life and often that change is cruel and hard to accept from our earthly perspective. We want those good times to return and we are tempted to measure the present by them and feel the pain and hurt of change. This we must not do.

Second, we ignore the past. This is equally wrong and it is easily done. We live for today and try to cope with the present by putting out of mind our past experiences whether they were pleasant or difficult.

The correct way to deal with our past is to learn from it. God leads us individually and collectively as a church through our own pathway of life for a purpose. It is very important that we ask ourselves what God teaches us from our past. Obviously, this requires us to take time and reflect upon our past. We have to read our Bibles and take the instruction learned there and apply it to our lives. Psalm 77 is a beautiful example of Asaph doing this, and by reflecting on this Psalm, we can learn lessons on how to do this for ourselves. In a few words, we learn from this Psalm not to allow the difficulty of the past to discourage us. Obviously Asaph experienced much discouragement and melancholy as he expresses it in this Psalm. Learning from the

past does not require us to put on ice all of our feelings and imagine that if we are spiritually strong we ought not to even have doubts, not to even cry in the night, not to even experience discouragement. It is alright that these emotions are present. The point is that we do not allow ourselves to be brought down to despair. The struggle to understand God's leading in the past arouses deep emotions of tears and despair, yet these very emotions move us to discover the answer for God's leading.

Surely God does not lead us personally or as a church through tough times so as to break us down. No, while we respond to difficult times with deep emotions, we see how God led Asaph to rise above them.

It is all summarised in that beautiful clause in vs. 13, "Thy way o God is in the sanctuary; who is so great a God as our God? Thou art the God that doest wonders; thou hast declared thy strength among thy people." This wonder was a way of deliverance. That deliverance was through Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah. The waters through which they passed in the exodus from Egypt was the typical washing of the blood of Jesus that made them worthy of God's favour and life.

As always, when we take our eyes from Jesus, we sink into melancholy and despair as Peter did when he looked at the storm after he jumped

from the ship to walk to Jesus. Even then, Jesus helped him. Jesus reached down and caught him, and restored him to the safety of the boat and calmed the storm. Always, God teaches us that the events of our lives help us to "die to ourselves that we may live unto the Lord."

I am glad that you entitled this article, "Lessons from the Past". What can I share with you from my experience as Minister-on-Loan is that which I have learnt out of the past. I enumerate four things.

First, that salvation is the wondrous work of God's sovereign grace. One of the main tasks I had was to prepare new converts for baptism. Some attained the goal, others failed. I often pondered what made the difference? Measured by human standards, some seemed likely candidates while others not so much. Yet, human standards failed and I learned to recognize that grace alone made the difference. What was true in the early church, "The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved," Acts 2:47, was also true here in Singapore.

Second, this work of salvation is not a complete and perfect work, but a work in progress. This is true whether we may be born within the covenant to covenant parents or whether we are converted to faith from unbelief. God does not make salvation perfect until we arrive in glory. Meanwhile, through our pilgrimage here, we have to contend with obstacles both within and without. As we worked with new converts, God showed this to us and we learned to have a realistic expectation of what God did and was doing in the life of the church. Because of this lack of perfection, we had to learn how to deal with our sins and encourage one another

to grow in faith and obedience. We learned to deal with one another in love and patience.

Third, spiritual growth is also the work of God's sovereign grace. One frustration both for the new convert and the congregation is the rate of spiritual development. It never seems to go fast enough, and there is a great temptation to put a time-clock on God to get the work done now! God dispenses His grace according to His own pleasure and though we must make use of the means God provides, the fruits of spiritual labour depend entirely on God. This makes earthly judgment on spiritual progress so precarious. I learned that God works at His own time and as God's servants, we had better wait upon God to do this work. Practically, this means that we do more praying than complaining about the spiritual condition of the church.

Finally, it gave me the opportunity to marvel at God's wonderful work in gathering His church. Because it is all of grace, there is no boasting in human effort. Yes, God uses means to attain His goal. Yet, even human instrumentality is nothing in itself; it is effective as God's tool. This kept us humble at all times, especially when the work went well. In those seasons when we thought it did not go so well, it taught us to depend upon God and pray with greater intensity. My personal relationship with God prospered much in such seasons of labour.

May God richly bless your congregation as the church of Christ, and may these lessons we learned from the past encourage you greatly as you rejoice in your 25th anniversary.

Celebrating CERC's 25th Anniversary

>> Elder Chan Chee Seng

“For the Lord did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: but because the Lord loved you, and because He would keep the oath which He had sworn unto your fathers...” (Deut. 7:7).

These words of Moses come to mind when I was asked to write an article for the young people for the 25th anniversary of the CERC. The Lord chose to set His love upon this church 25 years ago. Sovereign grace alone chose us, few in number, to hold the banner of the reformed truth in Singapore. That the banner is still in our hands today can only be attributed to our faithful covenant keeping God. History bears record to that. It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. (Lam 3:22)

In these short 25 years, I saw the church was tried many times. I saw common grace elbowing its way into the church. The divorce and remarriage controversy almost caused us to slip into oblivion. I saw how we had to relearn our confessions. Grace alone kept the reformed heritage in the bosom of CERC although we were weak, insignificant. There is no room here to relate history but spending a little time here to take stock will help us to gather some lessons from the past. Let us first observe the happy things. There are many but I can only highlight two.

One thing that is hard not to notice in the last few years is the teaching

of hard doctrines and the emphasis on teaching the confessions of the CERC. Sermons which explained and applied doctrines replaced “practical” preaching. More instructions in turn induced more craving for knowledge of God and His word. In this way, God led and blessed us with a vibrant CERC that it is today. The faithful preaching encouraged many to bring their friends to church and were glad to see them coming back week after week. This is the testimony of scriptures: When the word of God was tucked away in some corner of the temple, Judah languished. When God caused it to be brought out and taught, as in the days of King Josiah, God's people flourished spiritually. The history of CERC once again testifies that only by way of instruction and faithfulness to our creeds, God is known and honoured in the church. We are thankful to God for the professors and ministers of the PRCA who were here to instruct and preach.

The other happy thing which I am thankful to God is that in all our years, even in time of lack of supply for the pulpit, the elders very strictly guarded who was at our pulpit and what they bring. It is very tempting for a small church like CERC to compromise the pulpit by allowing different people from different churches with “minor” doctrinal differences to fill it. CERC guarded against it. Faithful preaching is one of the signs of a true church and the chief means of grace which God

uses to gather, defend and preserve His church. History is witness that when a small crack is allowed in the chief means of grace Satan quickly turns it into a wide open door for heresies to enter the church. By the grace of God, the elders of CERC have done well in this area over the years and it is commendable.

I am thankful to God that CERC is stronger today and these good things we must maintain. But the devil is not going to let the road ahead of CERC to be any easier or less dangerous. There will be very few who will walk this way with us. The way will be strewn with many obstacles. This is nothing new or strange. Our Lord has warned that the way is going to be strait and narrow. The road ahead for CERC is going to be lonely and dangers abound while the devil will be like a roaring lion, walking about, seeking whom he may devour.

There are many, but I see 2 eminent dangers at our door or even within us that the church must watch closely as we move ahead.

The first is the lack of depth of knowledge in the church. I am not saying we have no knowledge but we lack depth. Lack of depth knowledge in the church is the root cause of tolerance of errors. Errors in the church world are getting more subtle and so enticing that ‘if it were possible, they deceive the very elect’ Matt 24:24. Of course it is not possible, but if it were possible, these subtle doctrines deceive and rob the elect of their salvation just as they deceive the

reprobate. Historically, as doctrines are developed in the churches due to emergence of false ones, these false doctrines almost always reappear in a fancier coat. History keeps repeating itself. The error, at first glance, seems so insignificant that voices within the church and in the church world will make light of them, calling for tolerance. Steadfastness to confessional truths is branded as hair splitting. The prophet Hosea warns us, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children Hosea 4:6”. Members of CERC, not just the elders and deacons, must be diligent and know what they believe so that they can defend it. It is possible because it is God who gives understanding. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. James 1:5 God uses faithful men who knows His word to defend and preserve His church.

Another danger to watch for, which is the new flavour of the day, is reformed ecumenism. Ecumenism has taken on a new fanciful name but it still has the same ugly head. Reformed churches, which would reject ecumenism that leads the way back to Rome, flocks together in reformed ecumenism, seeking refuge and fellowship in one another. The lesson I learnt from our own history, which conforms to the testimony of scripture, is this: God strengthens the church in the way of the faithful instruction of the uncompromised word. Tolerance and compromises is

never the language of scriptures. Ecumenicity is a threat to the church because it requires compromises for the sake of unity so that there can be activities together. Without compromises, neither ecumenism nor reformed ecumenism can work. Compromises have been the death nail of many once faithful churches, the seed of weeds the devil sow in the church while the watchmen sleep.

Take heed to the warning of the Prophet Isaiah. “Woe to the rebellious children, saith the LORD, that take counsel, but not of me; and that cover with a covering, but not of my spirit, that they may add sin to sin: That walk to go down into Egypt, and have not asked at my mouth; to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt! Therefore shall the strength of Pharaoh be your shame, and the trust in the shadow of Egypt your confusion.” Isa 30:1-3

God chided the rebellious children for seeking their safety outside Jehovah. If any thinks reformed ecumenism is a refuge, a “cover of a covering”, let me suggest that there is no safety in compromised truth.

Turning our attention now to the mission and vision of CERC and ponder for a few moments.

Our Mission

As salt and light in this world, we proclaim a sovereign, powerful, saving gospel to a fallen, sin-cursed and dying world, setting forth Jesus Christ crucified as the only hope for mankind, and the Bible alone as the basis, rule and foundation for all of life and faith.

Our Vision

1. We aspire to be a vibrant

and faithful Reformed Church, establishing ourselves as a pillar and ground of biblical truth as they are expressed in the 3 Forms of Unity (Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism and Canons of Dort).

2. We seek to be salt and light in this world, setting forth the antithetical, Christian life as the only life worth living.

3. We will build up the Church with the pure and lively preaching of the Word of God, submitting to the rule of our King Jesus Christ through His properly ordained office-bearers and cheerfully employing our gifts for the salvation of His people.

I believe with all my heart that CERC as it is now is a vibrant and faithful Reformed church. I believe we are the pillar and ground of truth expressed in our confessions. By our faithful preaching of the pure word of God and our insistence on the antithetical Christian life, we certainly are the salt and light of the world.

This is not to say that we have arrived. It means that God is merciful to us and has entrusted us and our children with the Reformed heritage. Will the truth of the reformation remain with us beyond my generation? A more appropriate question is whether our members and youths only know the truth or do they love the truth with such love that it compels them to be steadfast and unmoveable in the reformed heritage they have been taught, always abounding in the work of the Lord.

May God help us and our youths. Let us pray that God may establish us in the faith, as we have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving Col 2:7

Happy 25th Anniversary CERC.

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Professor David Engelsma | 10 Nov: 2-5pm
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Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church

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

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Time of Worship

Morning Service:
9:30am to 11:00am
Afternoon Service:
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