



# salt shakers

joel 3:16 matthew 5:16

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"The Reformed student in a state school is a lonely Daniel, not necessarily in a lions' den, but certainly in the impressive Babylon... The culturally impressive, and morally decadent, Babylon is even more dangerous than a pride of lions..." *Living the Rejection of Common Grace at School* by Prof. David J. Engelsma on page 15

"This dangerous mode of thinking can lead a child of God to have an unbalanced pursuit of truth at the expense of the endeavouring for love..." *Truth and Love – Which is more important?* By Josiah Tan on page 4

"Next time you see a baby, remember the handiwork of God in forming that little child, but even more importantly remember that our heavenly Father is forming and shaping us each day, through each circumstance we face, to be more and more like..." *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made, Completely Dependent* by Lynette Kleyn on page 19

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**THE CHURCH'S PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING  
FOR THE MARRIAGE OF PAUL & ANTHEA**

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>> Pastor Andy Lanning

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*Rev Andy Lanning* is minister-on-loan to Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore. Rev Lanning began his official labours here in end Nov 2012.

Our faithful covenant God and Father in heaven,

We thank and praise thee for bringing together in marriage our dear brother Paul and dear sister Anthea. In joining them together as one, thou hast bestowed upon Paul and Anthea a great gift. With them, we marvel at thy goodness, and confess that our cup runneth over. Thy gifts overflow us! How wonderful thou art! And how wonderful is thy gift of marriage! Great mystery of Christ and His church, lived out in the life of earthly husband and earthly wife!

And now, Father, how shall we

profess our gratitude? Can our creaturely thanksgiving match thy divine bestowal? Can our lifetime of praise, or even our eternity of praise, adequately answer the infinite depths of thy grace? Oh, Father, we know not what to pray for as we ought! Teach us to pray! Among all thy other gifts, give us this gift too: teach us to pray! And hear the sighs of thy Holy Spirit within us, who maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered; and hear our precious Saviour at thy right hand, who ever liveth to make intercession.

We thank thee for Paul and Anthea's marriage, for truly, their union is the work of thy hand. Not only hast thou controlled all the details of their lives to bring them to this union, but thou art the God who instituted marriage from the beginning. From Adam's rib, cradle of his heart, thou didst make Eve, and brought her to him. And so it is yet today, for with thine own hand thou dost bring to every man his wife. To Paul, Anthea. And to

Christ, His church!

And here, Father, we almost stagger with wonder. To Christ, His church! It is one thing for us to live in marriage, and to be pleased by marriage. But to think that thou thyself dost live in marriage through Christ, and art pleased by that marriage? It is a thing almost too much for us! It is a great mystery! But how we love that mystery, that glorious mystery of Christ and His church! In that mystery is our salvation. In that mystery is our life of fellowship with thee. In that mystery is our hope and our inheritance. For in that mystery is our blessed union with our exalted Head and Lord and Husband, Jesus Christ! Praise be to thee for Paul and Anthea; but above all praise be to thee for Christ and His church!

So, Father, bless Paul. Give to him the heart of Christ as he lives with his wife; the heart of love. Give to him the mind of Christ; the mind of humility. Give to him the works of Christ; the works of self-sacrifice for the sake of his beloved. Give

to him the headship of Christ, that leads his bride in the way of obedience and service to God.

And, Father, bless Anthea. Give to her the heart of the church as she lives with her husband; the heart of honor and submission. Give to her the mind of the church; the mind that seeks how she may please her husband. Give to her the ornament of the church; the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit. Give to her the works of the church: the works of a chaste conversation coupled with fear.

Plant Paul and Anthea at the foot of Christ's cross, and fill them with His Spirit. Thus, may their selflessness never become selfishness; may their love for each other never become lust for another; may Paul's headship and Anthea's counsel never become tyranny; and may their communion with each other always serve their communion with thee.

Make this union fruitful, Father, according to thy will. Through this marriage, and through all the marriages of thy saints, build thy church. We love thy covenant word

that thy promise is unto us, and to our children, even as many as thou shalt call. And so, Father, bless our marriages with covenant seed, and make the young wives of thy church like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel. In this, we submit to thy will, for we know that children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is His reward.

We pray also, Father that thou wilt use the marriage of Paul and Anthea to make all of us thankful for the state in which we ourselves are called. Some, thou hast also called to be married. Give us grace to be examples to Paul and Anthea, and give us humility to learn from their godly example. Some, thou hast called to contemplate marriage and make preparations for marriage. Give us grace to make our decisions wisely and in accordance with thy Word. Some, thou hast called to be single. Give us grace to submit to thy will patiently and joyfully, and help us know how we may use our gift of single life to serve our Saviour.

And now, Father, at the end of our prayer, our eyes turn to the end of all things. We rejoice that the end of all things is a marriage! Or, rather, the consummation of a marriage. Already now thou hast betrothed us to Christ; already now we are blessed to be His bride; already now we enjoy the marriage fellowship of thy covenant of grace. But thou hast promised a coming day when the bride shall be complete, all of the elect having been gathered; thou hast promised a coming day when all of our sinful weaknesses as Christ's bride shall be forever removed; thou hast promised a coming day in the new heaven and new earth when we shall be presented to Christ, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. Blessed day! Blessed hope! Blessed marriage!

Forgive our sins now, and hasten the day of the great Bridegroom. He has promised that He comes quickly. We long to see Him! And so, the Spirit and the bride say, Come! Come, Lord Jesus; yea, come quickly.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.

### - Salt Shakers Committee Speaks! -

The Salt Shakers committee celebrates with Paul and Anthea in their joyous wedding last month. May the Lord bless them in their covenant with God and with each other. May the Lord bless their union as one flesh and may they always be a faithful picture of the great marriage between Christ and His church.

Let us consider the verses below in light of this wonderful event for them and for our church.

Eph 5:31-32 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

Rev 21:2-4 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

Deu 7:9 Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations;

### Paul's Vow to Anthea

*"I love you Anthea, and as long as God in His mercy shall give both of us life together on this earth, I vow to love you unconditionally. Just as Christ remains eternally faithful to His church, so I will remain faithful to you all our days. Just as Christ lovingly cherishes His church, so I will cherish you. Just as Christ gave His life for His bride, so I will give myself for you. I will love you for the sake of my King, that I may be a small light in this world showing forth the faithfulness of Christ my Lord.*

*In poverty, I will work harder as we pray for contentment and seek together the heavenly riches of Christ. In plenty, I will bring us to help the poor, and remind us that this world is not our home.*

*In sickness, I will hold your hand, and remind you of the perfect life to come. In health, I will spend my life with you, and bring us to help the weak.*

*In times of labour, I will toil with you, and remind us of our blessed calling as servants. In times of rest, I will bring us to God's Word, that we never forget our eternal home.*

*In sorrow, I will stand with you, and point you to the day when all our tears will be wiped away. In joy, I will dance with you, because we know that the Lord is always good.*

*When you're wrong, I will run to the Cross to find you. And when I'm wrong, please look for me there too.*

*In this life we have the privilege to be a picture of Christ and His bride, helping one another prepare for the life to come, when we shall enter into the fullness of our relationship with our Saviour in heaven. Till death do us part."*

### Anthea's Vow to Paul


*"My beloved Paul, you are God's good and precious gift to me.*

*Today, as God joins us together as one, I embrace you as my husband and joyfully enter into this covenant of marriage with you.*

*God has prepared me for you, and with His grace and strength, I promise to lovingly help you fulfill Christ's calling for your life.*


*I submit myself to you as unto the Lord, so that our marriage may be a beautiful picture of Christ and His Church.*

*Trusting with you in God's plan for us as husband and wife, I vow to love you and cherish you, to honour and remain faithful to you, in all the joys and sorrows of this life. Till death do us part."*



## Truth and Love – Which is more important?

>> Josiah Tan





Josiah is a youth who is a confessing member in Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church. He heads the Salt Shaker's committee and is actively serving in the youth group committee (Covenant Keepers).

**John 15:9 As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.**

Christ commands us, His beloved sheep, to continue in His love. In reflection, we must ask ourselves, "Are we continuing in God's love?" In the Bible, God reveals to us that He is love (1 John 4:16) Because God is love and commands us to love, we as Reformed Christians believe that love is of utmost

importance. 1 John 4:8 teaches us that if we do not love we do not know God! For Christians, loving is not an option. It is a clear command of God to love Him first and then to love our neighbours. As Reformed Christians, when someone mentions love, we may also think, "But love is not everything; God is not only a God of love, God is also truth!" While these statements are right and true,



we may not quickly glance over the deep truth that God is love, especially when God's Word calls us to love.

A battle hardened soldier of God knows very well that the world has abused the word "love". He becomes wise and cautious with how people use that word. Hearing the word "love" can even sometimes make a child of God feel shameful. Shameful because he knows how much he falls short in loving his God and his neighbour. And shameful also because of how the world and many professing Christians have abused the word "love". There are three ways the love of God has been grossly twisted. First, this dark world we live in has grossly mixed up lust with love. It confuses the two and uses them interchangeably. Secondly, many professing Christians have reduced the love of God into a pathetic and resistible kind. Last, many professing Christians use love as an excuse for them to discard God's Word and dwell in error and sin. Often, the principle in most churches is that if it feels good and a brother's conscience seems right, we ought to encourage him in his way. Even when the way of a brother is against the Word of God. This is what nominal Christianity terms "loving a brother".

In the world around us today, wicked men and women use "love" to justify their own sin and the sin of others. One example is how love is used to justify the gross sin of homosexuality. Often we hear the charge, "If your God is love, why does your God hate homosexuals? Does He not love everybody equally? True love is to accept people regardless of who they choose to love." What is love?

Movies and music of the world perpetually and consistently scream out and cunningly try to convince us that if something is pleasurable and convenient, even if it does not involve any kind of self-sacrifice, it is love. An example would be to say "If you love a girl enough, it is okay to be to be physically intimate with her, even if God has not joined both of you as one flesh.", or, "Surely God loves me and wants me to enjoy myself. Surely doing \_\_\_ cannot be sin." These notions of love appeal to our old man of sin. Instead of leading one into greater love, they lead to a miserable life of lust.

The battle hardened soldier of God also knows that because the world has severely twisted the meaning of love, he is at risk of discrediting the need for love. This may sound counter-intuitive, but there are three reasons for this. First, in reaction to the world's twisting of love, a child of God can be so caught up in the controversy that he falls into the trap of exhorting truth over love. This can lead to a slippery slope of losing our "first love". The second reason is that after battling hard for the truth of God's love, the child of God may be lured into the trap of thinking that knowing the right definition of love is good enough. Being contented with much knowledge, he forgets it is an imperative to put the knowledge of God's love in to actual practise. The third reason why one might be at risk of discrediting the need for love is that after the child of God learns how tall the order is for true love, he may be discouraged and not practise it at all for fear of failure. Suddenly, the lure to compromise for an "easy love" becomes all the more tempting.

Our sinful nature loves unnecessary extremes. Sometimes we wax strong in understanding God's love in light of His word, but neglect to even pursue it in our own lives, to love as Christ loves. Other times we act with strong resolution of what we think love is but in actual fact it is based on our own passions and imaginations, not God's word. Neither insisting on the pure word of God nor acting with ardent zeal is wrong in themselves. But the human nature has a deprave way of turning to one and turning a blind eye to the other.

When we speak of our nature swinging to extremes it means the battle for truth should not leave us Reformed Christians, in the slightest, undermining the important call to love God and our neighbour. It is a deep pitfall for us Reformed Christians to think that love is just the cherry on top of the Christianity cake and our walk of faith. Or, to think that emphasis on godly Christian love is too amateurish in comparison to understanding the depths of the doctrines of Christ. Shall a man say God is more truthful than loving or vice versa? No. One cannot be exalted above the other. Neither can one have the priority over the other.

The world and many nominal churches have sought out to set love and truth against each other. They claim "love" should be preserved at the expense of God's truth. While that is truly violent and unloving, we may not make the same error and claim in retaliation that God's truth is more important than God's love. This dangerous mode of thinking can lead a child of God to have an unbalanced pursuit of truth at the expense of the endeavouring for

love. Setting these two attributes of God, love and truth, against each other makes it as if God is at war with Himself. Does the attribute of God's love fight against God's attribute of truth? Let us examine our own hearts. Do we set the two attributes of God against each other? Or do we believe they actually explain each other and reveal the glory of God we adore?

Thus far, it is clear that because God is love, we therefore ought to be compelled to pursue growth in love and never to undermine that which is greater than faith and hope (1 Cor 13:13). But let's continue to make this point even clearer.

God is love, according to 1 John 4:16. When we scan the whole of Scriptures, we would find God speaking of His unbreakable love for us. God is truth according to John 14:6. The whole of Scripture speaks of the battle of the God of truth against the great deceiver and his lies. It is the war of God's truth against the vain imaginations of man, not God's truth versus His love. We may not confuse the two. May we be cautious not to pit truth and love against each other, but rather to continue in rigorous pursuit of both. Even as God is perfect love and perfect truth.

Asking "How then should we love?" helps us understand deeper the relationship between love and truth. For it is impossible for us to understand one without the other. When we love, we must love only by speaking God's truth, purely and sincerely. All true love is on the basis of truth. If love is a present we are giving our loved one, the present had better be made up of truth on the outside and inside. The life-giving Word ought to be embedded in every fibre of the

present. Love and truth may not be separated.

If truth was a song that we sing to our loved one and if that song's lyrics were filled with all the deepest doctrines, all the prophecies, in perfect knowledge, but just without love, imagine what that song would sound like. A song of perfect knowledge but just without love sounds like a mad cymbal constantly banging. That song of truth without love is noisy, annoying and pointless. How important is love? Without love, that whole song that is sung misses the point. Emphatically we say, it is utterly useless and profits nobody (1 Cor 13:1-3). Love and truth must always go together.

So important is love, that as a Reformed church, we insist on constantly learning about love. We learn from God's truth about the unconditionality of God's love. We learn also of the unbreakable bond of perfection between God and us. We learn of the timelessness of God's love for us and the peculiarity of it. God's truth teaches us the depths of love and how to love. But when we rightly grow in the knowledge of God we ought to be just as strongly reminded to go further than just getting the right definition of love, but to actually go out and love. "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth." 1 John 3:18. The Holy Spirit knows well we all need that admonishment. So we ought to ask ourselves; have I taken the time to show love to my family and the saints in the church? And we know we have a long way in growing in love (1 John 1:8-10).

Sometimes, God's love seems almost impossible for us follow. But we are comforted to know

that the Holy Spirit constantly sanctifies our hearts to be more and more Christlike. In Thessalonians 2:10, we learn that the Holy Spirit powerfully puts into God's elect the love for truth. That is the love for Truth is one and the same for the love for Christ; for Christ is the Truth, and Christ is the Word in eternity. God will first cause us to love God and His Truth before he teaches us to love our neighbour.

Mat 10:34-38 "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.

For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.

And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.

He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me."

May the Spirit of Truth, that proceeds from God the Father, bear the fruit of truth and love in our hearts (John 14:17, 15:26, Psalms 31:5, Eph 5 1:13, 1 John 4:6). To fear God, and always honour His Word.

To conclude, let us, by grace, learn diligently how to fight and defend true love and truth; from our God who teaches our hands to war and our fingers to fight (Psalm 144:1). God will bless all those who uphold God's truth at all costs. God will bless all those who are ready to give up all earthly relationships and possessions for the sake of God's truth. This is true love for God

(Matt 10:34-38). From this true love for God flows the love for our neighbour – true, self-sacrificing, tender and nurturing love for our family members and for all of God’s people. When we walk in the way of truth, love will compel us to dare to point our own and our brothers’ hearts to Christ, who is the Way, the Truth and the life. May God help us today to love boldly. One

way to start loving is to converse. To have conversations with our neighbour about things that really matter.

This issue marks our 3rd anniversary of Salt Shakers. We cannot but thank God for this gift of the work of Salt Shakers. The very privilege of serving God in any capacity is most humbling. The 9 of us can but testify that this work is most

trying and at the same time most rewarding. We hope you have profited deeply from the magazine. 2 John 1:3 sums up our committee’s message to you our beloved readers from around the world.

“Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.”

To God be the Glory.



## WHY I LOVE SINGING THE PSALMS: PSALM 53



>> Jonah Chua



Jonah is a youth who is a confessing member of CERC.

*Psa 53:1-6*

*(1) To the chief Musician upon Mahalath, Maschil, A Psalm of David. The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. Corrupt are they, and have done abominable iniquity: there is none that doeth good.*

*(2) God looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek God.*

*(3) Every one of them is gone back: they are altogether become filthy;*

*there is none that doeth good, no, not one.*

*(4) Have the workers of iniquity no knowledge? who eat up my people as they eat bread: they have not called upon God.*

*(5) There were they in great fear, where no fear was: for God hath scattered the bones of him that encampeth against thee: thou hast put them to shame, because God hath despised them.*

*(6) Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! When God bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad.*

Psalm 53

There is a whole trove of riches that can be found in Psalm 53. You might find Psalm 53 very familiar because a similar Psalm, Psalm 14, was entrusted to King David earlier. However, it must be emphasized that Psalm 53 is

not copied from the fourteenth Psalm. It was not edited and revised before being placed back into Holy Write. In fact, Psalm 53 is actually another edition written by King David, rewritten for a different purpose. God thought it good for His children to learn the valuable lessons in this Psalm.

In this Psalm, we are brought face-to-face with the evil nature of man for the second time. The importance of having the knowledge of our sin and depravity cannot be emphasised any greater. Although we see that the words in Psalm 53 are almost the same inspired words used in Psalm 14, we must know that not all repetitions are vain, especially with regards to God’s Word. I would like you for a moment to picture yourself back in your primary school days. Ask yourself this question: How long did it take for you to memorise the multiplication

table before you could confidently answer your teacher when tested?” Well, it certainly took me quite long to figure that out. We are slow to listen. We are slow to grasp. We are slow to learn. And so it is with God’s Word. We need line upon line. We need to be supplemented. God’s Word never repeats itself needlessly; there is certainly a good cause for having this Psalm, Psalm 53. Now when we read and sing it, let us do so more intensely and meaningfully.

One may read Psalm 53 and find it distasteful to the carnal mind. Who would like to be told that they are corrupt (vs. 1), gone back (vs. 3) and filthy (vs. 3)? This, however, does not subtract anything from the truths that are set forth in this Psalm. We are exposed to the fact that we are corrupt and filthy because of the consequences of sin. The truth from God alone stands. No one can demolish the truth given by God and begin to decide what is true and what is not according to their sinful standards.

Verse 1 describes who a fool is. It clearly records that “The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God.” The fool says that because he is a fool. He speaks according to his own nature; and what a great fool he is, being in his own folly. He denies the existence of God. When the fool says, “no God”, he means to declare “no God for me”. It is plainly evident that there is a living God manifested in both creation and the human conscience (Romans 1: 19-20). The fact that some men insist on denying the existence of God does not erase God from the universe; instead, it speaks to their own standing as fools. As written in Romans 1:22, “Professing themselves to be wise,

they became fools.” We see this in the wicked world today. They will tell you that there is science but there is no God. They believe only what can be proven by scientific methods, such as evolution, of which I shall mention briefly. People believe that species of one kind evolves into another kind. That is contrary to the Word of God found in the book of Genesis which says that God is the creator of all living creatures. He is the designer of each and every species present on earth. God upholds His creation and He ordains everything to come to pass.

Apart from David finding out what a fool says about God, it is also important to know where it comes from. We clearly see that it was from the heart of the fool. It is then correct to say that the fool not only preoccupies himself with intellectual objections regarding the existence of God, but further, in his heart, he wants no God.

The result of denying God then leads to corruption and abominable works. As David carries on to consider the sin of the people who deny God, he looks upon the whole of the human race and concludes that there is none who does good, not even a single person. The whole human race fell into spiritual darkness after the fall, the whole creation “groaneth and travaileth in pain together (Romans 8:22)”. All of our deeds are tainted with evil and selfish motives.

God looked down from heaven to see if there were any who loved Him. If there was even one man who understood God, who sought after God, surely God’s divine eye would have discovered him. But no one had the sincerity and right desire after God. God looked at all

nations, all men in those nations, all the hearts of those men, but yet He could not find a pure heart among them all. Man who initiates the search for the true and living God will never be successful; he will only find the idol he makes for himself. Imagine for a moment a white cloth now dipped into black paint. The whole cloth is now stained and is no longer white anymore. This illustrates our filth before the sight of God. No man can remove the filth from themselves except it be by the blood of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

In the first part of this Psalm, David deals with the fallen nature of man. Now, he deals with God’s people in the midst of this wicked world. It seems that the wicked are great in strength and have the upper hand against God’s people. One may then wonder if God’s people would be abandoned and devoured by the “workers of iniquity” in this corrupt world as mentioned in verse 4. From that same verse, we read that the workers of iniquity “eat up my people as they eat bread” – we see how the wicked are so quick to devour, with delight and greed. To see this in a clearer light, we can take prayer as an example. Do you bow your head in prayer and call upon God when you are before unbelievers? If you do, you will soon begin to suffer ridicule and the unbelievers would want to have nothing to do with you. They will be quick to devour you. We see that the words of David are so true.

David then brings us to see the great triumph of the spiritual seed. The wicked are alarmed, they are seized with panic. They were once afraid of nothing and they boasted greatly about everything they could do. But now, what they see before



them is death. There is no way out. They are battling against God and they can never win. Indeed, it is hard at this present time to see the victory of God's people at hand. Trials and tribulations come in the way of the child of God every day. However, God will definitely protect and deliver His children, because He bought them with the precious blood of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. He had chosen

them "before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4)". God will not allow His people to be devoured by the ungodly. That is our great assurance. We long for the day that God will bring the victory and deliverance He had promised to His people. We will be delivered from our oppressions caused by the ungodly, and we will be loosed from the chains of injustice.

Our Lord will come again to deliver. Let us rejoice.

Let us sing of the mercies of the Lord. He brought us out of darkness into His marvellous light. All honour and glory be to Him alone. Let us sing of God's grace in which He so willingly bestows upon us His children. It is His unmerited favour given to us. There was not even a slightest good in us for Him to have chosen us. Let us sing of our salvation and of our faithful Father in heaven. "Faithful is he that calleth you, who will also do it."

## GRACE — REDEEMING AND SUFFICIENT



>> Rev. Van Overloop



*Rev. Ronald Van Overloop* is pastor of Grace Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where he has served for the past four years.

Grace! God's grace! Marvelous grace! Amazing grace!

What is grace? It has been variously defined. Undeserved love. God's Riches At Christ's Expense. A plaque in our home says, "Grace is when God gives us what we don't deserve." Grace has a few different connotations.

First, grace is an attribute of God with the basic meaning of pleasantness and beauty. When someone walks or moves beautifully, then we say that they are graceful. God is the implication of perfect goodness, and as such He is perfectly beautiful and lovely. He is grace.

In I Peter 5:10 we read that God is "the God of all grace." This means that He is gracious (beautiful) in Himself; that He is the source and author of all grace; and that He is the sole source and author of grace (there is not grace apart from Him).

Second, grace is an attitude of pleasantness and graciousness. It is an attitude of favour or love, a gracious disposition. This is the idea of the Scriptures when we read that Noah found grace in the eyes of God (Gen. 6:8) and Lot found grace in the sight of the angels of God (Genesis 19:19). To find grace in the eyes of another is to read in their eyes that they are favorably disposed toward you and that they look at you with favour.

Third, this favorable attitude of love is undeserved. All the objects of God's grace are undeserving of it - they have forfeited the right to the favor of God. The term "grace" stands opposed to obligation and therefore to works. This

is clearly the thought of Romans 4:4, “Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.” Grace is an attitude of favour, but it also includes the freedom and sovereignty of God to have favour for someone who deserves His wrath and displeasure. This is stated positively: we are “justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24).

Fourth, the word “grace” speaks of the power of God. God’s favorable attitude is not like man’s: merely an attitude. God’s favourable attitude is a power which makes the objects blessed. It is the power to save and deliver the sinner from the guilt and bondage of sin. In the work of salvation God powerfully regenerates and sanctifies the sinner, making him pleasant and beautiful in God’s sight. This is taught in benedictions of grace: “Grace be to you” (Romans 1:7; I Cor. 1:3; II Cor. 1:2). And this is the obvious meaning in Ephesians 2:8, “For by grace are ye saved.”

Fifth, the Scriptures use the word “grace” in the sense of thanks. The Greek word for “grace” is translated “thanks” in Romans 6:17 and 7:25 (cf. also I Cor. 15:57; II Cor. 2:14; 9:15). The objects of God’s grace (those who have experienced the power of His grace) ascribe grace to God as praise to Him for the gift of that grace.

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God’s grace is the powerful attitude of favour which saves or redeems sinners (undeserving ones). There is absolutely no reason why God would have a favourable attitude of love toward a sinner. The gracious nature of God’s love is evidenced and is still being evidenced in the

fact that Christ gave His precious blood for those who are ungodly, yet sinners, and without the strength to do anything good (Romans 5:6-8).

And what does this favourable attitude of God accomplish? It justifies and saves from wrath (Romans 5:9). It reconciles us to God (Romans 5:10). The grace of God is the free gift which justifies many (Romans 5:15,16). The abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reigns in life (Romans 5:17,18). “Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound” (Romans 5:20), and this grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 5:21).

Grace powerfully redeems the undeserving sinner unto eternal life.

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God’s grace is sufficient! Of this we read in II Corinthians 12:9. Paul asked the Lord to remove from him “a thorn in the flesh.” He asked this three times. Each time God answered, “My grace is sufficient for thee.”

First, this means that God’s favourable attitude is a power which strengthens the sinner saint, enabling him to bear the cross of affliction which his heavenly Father lays upon him in His infinite wisdom and perfect love. This is the idea of I Corinthians 10:13, where the faithfulness of God is evidenced in that He will, with every trial, also make the way of escape, namely, “that ye may be able to bear it.” The picture is that of a balance scale. On one side is a difficult trial God gives and on the other side is God’s grace; and God’s

grace is sufficient (yea, more than sufficient) to match the trial. The idea that God’s grace is powerful and ever sufficient enables His child to bear or carry the tribulation.

But there is much more to God’s answer, “My grace is sufficient for thee.” Remember what grace is. It is the undeserved love of God. This is not the love of another human, but divine love, the love of One who is infinitely full of every perfection. He is so far above everyone to whom He gives this grace. He dwells in eternity and is the absolute perfection of holiness. He must condescend to see and know the things of heaven, let alone of earth below. And He loves. And whom does He love? Sinners, spiritually filthy sinners, who have not done even one thing which deserves divine approval. Rather, every single thing done by these sinners has to be washed in the blood of God’s own Son. This high and lofty One has nothing but love, nothing but a favourable attitude to save the sinners He chose to love in eternity past into eternity to come. There is nothing more undeserved than the love of God for His adopted children!

To Paul (and to every believer) God says, “My grace is sufficient for thee.” The word order in the Greek is: “sufficient for thee is my grace.” This word order makes emphatic the first words: it suffices for thee. It makes equally emphatic God’s attitude of undeserved love. God declares to every complaining saint, “Let it suffice you that I still love even you.” Hear God say, “You want something from Me. You want Me to take away a difficult thorn in your life. And that is all you are thinking about as you repeatedly ask Me to remove it from

you. When you are busy asking me to deliver you from a most difficult trial, you are overlooking something. You are forgetting and not appreciating what you have. You have something so wonderful and so undeserved: My love!!!”

God declares to Paul and to us: “Let it suffice you that I love even you still. Isn’t it enough to know that I love you?! For when you are seriously contemplating that I love undeserving you, then you

will realize that it is my love which has sent you this difficult thorn or trial.”

This is what makes grace so amazing and so marvelous.

And it is this thought which enabled Paul to respond, “Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in

persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong” (I Corinthians 12:9b,10).

Grace. God’s grace. The undeserved love of God which saves a wretch like me. To know that I am the undeserving recipient of such divine love is sufficient! It is more than sufficient to know that He loves me at all. That He loves even me. That He loves me still.

## Judge Othniel – God’s Lion

>> Sarah Lim



Sarah Lim is a youth who is a regular worshipper in Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church.

The book of Judges is set in a time when Israel needed a king to rule her, but since that king was yet to come, the responsibility of ruling Israel fell into the hands of the judges. Israel desperately needed leaders who would call her out of her sin and turn her back to God – leaders who would guide her and keep her on the right path. The period of time during which the events in Judges occurred is probably one of the darkest

periods of Israel’s existence, for she repeatedly fell into idolatry.

The basic plot of action in the book of Judges is as such - Israel forsakes God to fulfill her lustful passions by pursuing the sinful habits of the world around her, thus giving herself over to idolatry. She stubbornly carries on sinning in spite of being warned. God teaches her a lesson by giving her over to her sins and consequently letting foreign enemies invade her and hold her in bondage to them. She suffers the consequences and finally sees the error of her ways, repents and comes crawling back to God on her knees for forgiveness. God forgives her and sends a judge to deliver her from her bondage and rule her. The judge rules over Israel in godliness and guides her back to God and peace is restored to the land...till the judge dies.

The moment the delivering judge is no longer around, Israel slips right back into idolatry. Then the cycle repeats itself. Remember, the subsequent generations that “knew not The LORD”. They blatantly gave themselves over to idolatry and heinous sins came just after a generation which had lived in peace and joy with God and were on the path of righteousness.

We would think that Israel would have learnt from the errors of her past, but she did not. Every time after she had been delivered, she fell back into sin. She was freed from one bondage only to be enslaved by a new one, once her incumbent judge had passed on.

It seems absurd to us that Israel could be such a foolish, blind ingrate, but in stark reality, the exact same things that happened to her



“Othniel freed Israel from eight agonising years under the cruel rule of king Cushan-Rishathaim of Mesopotamia.”



also happen to us. I personally feel that Israel's life mirrors mine with painful exactness. Sure, we do not worship idols by physically bowing down to statues made of stone or metal. However, we do idolise things like our goals or pursuits by becoming so obsessed with them that we put them first before God. Something becomes an idol when it becomes the only thing we can think about and shoves everything out of our focus to become our number one priority.

We become so bent on pursuing it that we are willing to break God's law and forsake Him to chase after it. Anything can become an idol, really. Even things which are perfectly good and legitimate in themselves can turn into idols which we develop into an all-consuming pursuit - our education, jobs, money, fame, material possessions, an innocent hobby, or even our family members. It is in the intrinsic corruption of our depraved humanity to take any imaginable thing, which may not necessarily be evil in itself, and contort it into an all-consuming idol.

Though God may outrightly rebuke us and scald our consciences candidly in chastising us, sometimes He disciplines us in the way that He disciplined Israel. Sometimes, when we stubbornly refuse to repent of our sins and

wilfully persist in them, God in His wisdom and mercy says to us, “Okay, have it your way” and lets us go down the wrong path so that we eventually end up crashing, landing flat on our faces and learning the consequences of sin firsthand. God sometimes lets us be given over to our sins so that we will learn the horrors of disobeying God.

Furthermore, we come under the bondage of the sins which we have given ourselves over to. We start to realise that we sin even when we don't deliberate to do so, so that our sin becomes a bane to our lives. We feel great spiritual anguish because our consciences sear us for the sins we wilfully commit and refuse to turn from.

It is then that we see the errors of our ways, repent of our sins and run back to God begging for forgiveness. In His everlasting mercy, God forgives us and delivers us from the bondage of our sins, just like how He delivered Israel when she cried out to Him in repentance. One of the ways that God delivered Israel was by using Othniel the judge as an instrument. Othniel freed Israel from eight agonising years under the cruel rule of king Cushan-Rishathaim of Mesopotamia. Under Cushan-Rishathaim's bondage, the Israelites, as Pastor Lanning mentioned, experienced intense, merciless persecution and desperate hardship. How painful it must have been for the Israelites, for the cruel treatment that they had endured, day in and day out without fail, at the hands of the Mesopotamians. This must have searingly reminded them that they had sinned against God and that they had gotten what they had deserved.

So, how elated they must have been when Othniel finally delivered

them from the bondage of Cushan-Rishathaim's iron fist. How ecstatic they must have felt in knowing that they were once again able to worship God freely and in peace. We probably cannot even begin to imagine how immensely grateful the Israelites must have felt when Othniel was able to restore godliness, orderliness and peaceful equity during his reign, given what they had gone through under the Mesopotamians.

However, Othniel was but a symbol of Israel's True Judge who was to come. Othniel was a strong and mighty warrior who gloriously vanquished the arm of king Cushan-Rishathaim. Christ has even more gloriously triumphed resplendently over our enemies, grandly and awesomely smiting the reprobates and all who hate His church into the sod of unending destruction in Hell. Othniel was called God's Lion, for lions are symbols of unequivocal strength and victory over all. Christ is God's True Lion of Judah, Who had all things in total and utter subjection to Him and will announce His victory with His righteous and terrifying roar at His second coming.

Othniel ruled Israel fairly. Christ Who rules over all and everything is God's Righteous Justice Himself. Christ had delivered His People from the most terrifying consequence of eternal damnation in hell. The Great Overcomer has freed us from the bondage of sin. Your God is greater than your sin and know that there is no stronghold so great that He cannot crush it. Finally, Christ's rule will bring a peace that surpasses any human rule and will go on forever and ever, world without end.





# READ & STUDY!



>> Rev. Daniel Holstege



Rev Daniel Holstege is a minister of the Word at First Protestant Reformed Church of Holland in West Michigan, United States of America. The congregation there consists of approximately 70 families. In March 2012, he came to Singapore to assist our church in her pulpit needs.

*“Till I come, give attendance to reading...” (I Tim. 4:13).*

*“Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (II Tim. 2:15).*

Originally these two exhortations were made by the apostle Paul to Timothy, the pastor of the church at Ephesus. Primarily, therefore, they are intended for pastors, or aspirants to the ministry of the gospel, and have to do with their work in the pastorate. However, I make bold to apply these two admonitions more broadly to all of you, more particularly to you men, even more particularly to you young men of the CERCS. Here is a calling for you to prepare yourselves to lead in many areas and functions of the Church, such as Bible studies, committee work, writing or editing articles in your

magazine, becoming future office bearers, and engaging in good, godly conversation, among others.

Give attendance to reading. Study to show thyself approved unto God.

Those are two exhortations that we urgently need to hear today. Oh, perhaps it is true that in general we do already follow the good advice to read and study. But how often is it not the case that we are mainly reading superficial novels and primarily studying the television screen? Or how often do we not find ourselves perusing frivolous magazines or staring at mindless video games? Or how often are we not seeking to gain from sports much more than the little profit that bodily exercise affords (I Tim. 4:8), since we are constantly on the basketball court or soccer field? To be sure, none of these activities is wrong for us to enjoy when kept in its proper place. But all of them tempt us to shove more important work aside and to fill our time with fun and leisure. But there are also other threats which make these exhortations urgent. One threat is laziness. I do not refer so much to laziness in general, but to spiritual laziness. This is a great evil today which tempts us constantly. We are tempted to be spiritual sluggards. We are satisfied with our average level of knowledge. We do not feel like reading and studying. We need to go to the ant, consider her ways, and be wise (Prov. 6:6). But another

threat is pride, that is, intellectual pride. This too is a great evil which threatens us. We are tempted to think that we do not need to read and study. We know it all! At least we know all that we need to know. Yes, it is urgent that we hear these two exhortations.

Read and study!

Read and study what? Clearly the apostle is not referring to secular subjects here. Nevertheless, to prepare for leadership in the Church, you would do well to read very broadly. Read books and articles in the whole realm of secular learning: in the sciences, philosophy and world religions, history and literature, politics and economics, and many other subjects. Keep up on the news and current affairs in your country and in the world. Some of you no doubt already read and study in these areas in the university. But all of us would do well to read broadly. There are many good reasons to do so: We learn to think critically and increase our capacity to learn. We deepen our understanding of the world and the views held by those around us. We gain greater knowledge of God’s creation and see the flow of history. All of this prepares us for leadership in the church in the midst of the world. For example, it prepares us to witness to our non-Christian neighbour, about whom we would know next to nothing if we never read and study these



secular subjects, but about whom we may know something if we read broadly.

But this is not the emphasis of the apostle in these texts.

Rather, the apostle means this: Read Scripture! Rightly divide the word of truth! First of all, read Scripture itself. Read the Bible! That seems obvious. Yet we need to hear this exhortation. Read Holy Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation. Read regularly and systematically, from beginning to end, or in some other orderly way. Give special attention to areas of the Bible which you do not yet understand, or which are currently under attack, or which apply to you in a special way at this point in your life. Read in preparation for Bible studies. Read with the minister in church on Sunday. Read the Bible! Secondly, read the creeds and confessions of the Church which are faithful to Scripture, such as the Three Forms of Unity (the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dordt) and other faithful Reformed creeds. Read about the historical context of these creeds. Seek to understand the meaning and significance of the doctrines taught in them. Read commentaries on the creeds. I highly recommend all of the works of Rev. Herman Hoeksema, but especially his commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism called *The Triple Knowledge*. I have found these three volumes to be incredibly deep, rich, and edifying. Thirdly, read theological books, journals, and magazines. Read the old and the new. Read the works of Augustine, such as *The City of God*, *The Confessions*, and *On the Predestination of the Saints*. Read the writings of Luther, such

as *The Bondage of the Will*, and of Calvin, such as *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Read the many books published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFPA). But also read the works of heretics, old and new: Arminians, Arians, modernists, millenarians, and others. Do so to know the enemy: to know his arguments and how to refute them properly.

Give attendance to reading! I hope you will not be overwhelmed by this! You need not read it all at once! View this rather as a compass to help point you in the right direction.

I have discussed what we should read. Let me also briefly comment on how we should read. We often read too quickly and carelessly, especially in theological reading. We must slow down. We must read carefully and thoughtfully. We must not let the words on the page become mere signs. We must allow the ideas behind those words to sink deeply into our minds. Perhaps keep a pad of paper nearby and take notes on what you learn. Pray over the Scripture which you read. Pray for insight and understanding. Meditate on it (I Tim. 4:15). Think hard when you read books of theology. Read critically, subjecting every book and article to the standard of Scripture. Always take the standpoint of absolute allegiance to the authority of the Bible as the Word of God and the final arbiter of truth and morality. Do not read quickly and carelessly, but read to understand and to grow.

Moreover, in all your striving to get knowledge, be sure to get wisdom too (Prov. 4:5). Knowledge all by itself puffeth up, but charity edifieth (I Cor. 8:1). Knowledge

with wisdom does not puff up, but yields humility, godliness, and spirituality. It yields a man who applies principle to practice, doctrine to life. It results in a man who speaks the truth in love, who subjects his knowledge to the service of God, Christ, and the Church of Christ, and who uses it for the glory of God.

Young men, study to show yourselves approved unto God, workmen who need not to be ashamed. If you refuse to read or study; if you are lazy or proud; if you do not see the need to grow in knowledge and wisdom, then you have good reason to be ashamed. But if you read, study, and work hard, then you need not to be ashamed. May the Lord fill you with zeal and diligence to read and study, and to let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom (Col. 3:16).

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“ Knowledge all by itself puffeth up, but charity edifieth. Knowledge with wisdom does not puff up, but yields humility, godliness, and spirituality. ”





# Living the Rejection of Common Grace at School



>> Prof. David J. Engelsma



*Prof. David J. Engelsma* is an ordained minister of the gospel in the Protestant Reformed Churches in America for nearly 50 years, having been ordained into office in 1963. He served as pastor for 25 years of Protestant Reformed congregations in Loveland, Colorado and South Holland, Illinois. In 1988, he was appointed professor theology at the Protestant Reformed Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He worked as professor of dogmatics and Old Testament for 20 years before his retirement in 2008. Prof. Engelsma has been married for nearly 50 years to Ruth. They are the parents of 9 children and the grandparents of 27 grandchildren. Prof. and Mrs. Engelsma are members of the First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

What practical difference does the rejection of a common grace of God make for the Reformed young man or young woman in Singapore who attends the state (public) schools?

This is the question I answer in this article.

And the answer to this question applies as well to Reformed young people who may be attending state (public) schools in the United States and in other countries.

Rejection of common grace should make a great difference in the life at school of the young Reformed believer.

In order to answer and understand the question, we must have clearly in mind what the lie of common grace is, as also what the rejection of this error involves.

## **The Theory of Common Grace**

The theory of common grace teaches that God has an attitude of favour, or love, towards all humans without exception. In this favour, God bestows on all humans the power of His grace. This grace does not save them from sin and death, or unite them to Jesus Christ and take them to heaven when they die. But it makes all humans somewhat good, so that they are able to think and teach rightly and truly, and perform good works in the sphere of earthly society, even though these humans hate the true God, reject Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, and worship and serve idols.

It is also an important aspect of the theory of common grace that, because of this grace of God in the ungodly and unbelieving, believers may and should have fellowship with the ungodly, especially by cooperating with them to influence society for good, making earthly society good, even godly. Indeed, common grace is supposed to enable the ungodly to create the kingdom of God on earth, with the help of Christians.

Rejection of this theory of common grace is based on the biblical and Reformed doctrine that God is gracious to His elect, believing people in Jesus Christ, and to them only. “The LORD loveth the righteous” (Psalm 146:8), that is, those who are justified by faith alone in Jesus Christ and who, therefore, also live in obedience to God’s law. But He “hates all workers of iniquity” (Psalm 5:5). All unbelievers and idolaters, who are outside of Jesus Christ, are “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1), incapable of doing any good or of pleasing God (Rom. 8:5-8).

It is the Reformed confession that, “except we are regenerated by the Spirit of God,” we, and all humans, are “so corrupt that we are wholly incapable of doing any good and inclined to all wickedness” (Heid. Cat., Q.&A. 8).

“Even in things natural and civil,” that is, regarding everyday life in earthly society, fallen, sinful, unsaved humans “render wholly polluted, and hold...in unrighteousness” even the glimmerings of natural light (which are not grace) that remain in men and women after the fall (Canons of Dordt, 3&4/4).

Worse still is the depravity of fallen mankind. All who are unregenerated and unbelieving are “prone by nature to hate God and [the] neighbour” (Heid. Cat., Q. 5).

Such people do not enjoy God’s favour and blessing, as is the false teaching of common grace. But, on the contrary, the terrible “curse of the LORD is in the house of the wicked” (Prov. 3:33a).

The ungodly do not build a kingdom of God. But, knowingly or unknowingly, they are used by Satan to build his kingdom in the world, opposing the true church and her labour on behalf of the kingdom of God in Christ.

In light of these truths regarding the theory of common grace, those young, Reformed people who attend the state (public) schools must be on their guard in these schools. In the schools are grave dangers, for which they must be vigilant and which they must resist.

### **The Danger of the Instruction**

The first danger is the instruction itself. All of the instruction is divorced from the knowledge of the triune, one, true God, who made everything as revealing His power and Godhead (Rom. 1:20) and for the purpose of glorifying Him (Rom. 1:21-28; Rev. 4:11).

This necessarily implies that all of the instruction in a state school is a lie. Whatever is taught as truth,

apart from God the creator and upholder of all things, is a lie, even the fact that 2 plus 2 equal 4. God is the truth, and whatever is true is true only in relation to Him. He is the light of truth, as well as of life, so that apart from Him all is the darkness of falsehood and lie. In the light of God we see light, so that thinking and teaching that turn their back on God’s light are spiritual, intellectual, and moral darkness (Psalm 36:9).

In the state schools the Christian student will be confronted and challenged by many teachings that openly and directly oppose his faith and that would subvert his life: evolution as the explanation of origins; the fundamental oneness of all religions; Jesus as merely one Saviour among many others; the brotherhood of all humans; the goodness of sodomy and lesbianism. These gross falsehoods, the student must reject. Against them, in his or her own mind, if not vocally in class, he or she must affirm creation; Christianity as the one, true religion—all others being false and wicked idolatries; Jesus as the one and only Saviour from sin and death; the division of the human race into two, divided, warring camps by divine fiat—the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15); and the restriction of the good gift of sex to the relation of marriage between one man and one woman.

But in addition to rejecting the open, often brutal attack on his Christian faith, the Reformed young person must work hard to relate everything he learns at school to God, His kingdom, His appointed servant in the world, Jesus the Messiah, His kingdom, and His glory. For example, the magnificent, intricate design and functioning of the human body are not the haphazard

effect of blind, aimless evolutionary development, but the handiwork of the wise creator. Biology is dependent on, and reveals, the God of Christianity.

Similarly, history, with its bloody wars and other calamities, teaches the judgments of a holy God upon a rebellious, sinful human race. The present developments in history leading to the uniting of the nations are the course set for it by God. He directs the nations towards the world-kingdom of the beast (Rev. 13), so that He may be glorified in the second coming of His Christ (Rev. 19, 20).

Good, thorough knowledge of the Bible and of the Reformed creeds is necessary for this hard work of the Reformed student, not only without the aid of the teachers, but also in opposition to the instruction by the teachers. Parents, minister, and elders must help the young people and children of the church.

The danger is that the Reformed young person will be swept away by the godless, antichristian learning of the schools. What is a young person profited, if he or she shall obtain a Ph. D and world-renown for academic brilliance, and lose his or her own soul? (see Matt. 16:26)

The theory of common grace is responsible for the sweeping away into unbelief of many nominally Christian young people. For the theory of common grace attributes the brilliant, but godless, instruction of learned teachers to a grace of God, failing to warn the young people that learning and instruction, no matter how brilliant, that are contrary to Scripture are darkness.

This is not to say that it is impossible for a Christian child to get an education in the state schools. Fallen

humans do have “glimmerings of natural light” whereby they retain some knowledge of natural things and have some regard for good order in society. Ignorant of the truth, they nevertheless know many facts of God’s creation and providence. They have deep and accurate insight into the workings of God (not into God, but into His workings) in nature and history. They have remarkable natural abilities for exploring, using, and developing the various spheres of God’s world. They possess the gift of imparting knowledge about these facts and workings. The Christian may avail himself of their knowledge, abilities, and gifts, setting them in their right relation to God, using them to God’s glory, and purging them of all their naturalistic and humanistic accretions.

Augustine and Calvin compared this use and enjoyment of the learning of the wicked to the use that Israel made of the wealth of the Egyptians (see Ex. 12:35, 36).

In his rejection of the ungodly aspect of the instruction in the state school, the Reformed student need not, indeed may not, make himself obnoxious to the teachers. There will come the time when open confession of God and His Christ is

required. Then, the student may not be a coward.

But, in the main, he must perform his assigned task quietly and submissively. On tests, where the required answer conflicts with his own beliefs, he should give the answer that the teacher expects, prefacing it, perhaps, with the words, “We were taught the following,” etc. In some instances, he may well add the statement of his own, contrary conviction.

### **The Danger of Friendships**

A second danger is the forming of close friendships with unbelieving students. Common grace approves, indeed encourages, such friendships. Rejection of common grace entails rejecting these friendships. The believer, who has been set apart unto God by grace, may have no fellowship, that is, friendship, with the unbeliever, or idolater, who, lacking grace, is part of the world of darkness that is alienated from God, and hostile to Him. “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?...or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath

the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God... Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord” (II Cor. 6:14-18).

By ascribing the grace of God to unbelievers and idolaters, the theory of common grace teaches that believers and unbelievers have something in common that warrants, indeed demands, fellowship with unbelievers. This is fatal to the Christian life, particularly of Reformed young people.

For friendship with the ungodly can be a powerful temptation to a Christian young man and young woman. Especially is the temptation strong, and dangerous, when a young man is attracted to a lovely young lady, or when the Christian young woman is attracted to a handsome young man.

The command to Christians to marry only in the Lord (I Cor. 7:39) implies the calling, as well, to carry on courtship, and entertain marital thoughts and desires, only in the Lord.

But even friendship with an unbeliever of one’s own sex opens up the believing young person to the ungodly thoughts and behaviour of the unbeliever.

“



For friendship with the ungodly can be a powerful temptation to a Christian young man and young woman. Especially is the temptation strong, and dangerous, when a young man is attracted to a lovely young lady, or when the Christian young woman is attracted to a handsome young man.



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“ In the circles where the theory of common grace obtains, including the supposedly Christian schools, the young people are dancing away their chastity, to the world’s music, with the approval of the parents and school authorities. ”



At school, the Reformed student may associate with the unbelieving and idolatrous fellow students. But he or she may not allow this association to become friendship. The word of the apostle in I Corinthians 5:9-13 is the rule here. We are allowed to “company with” the ungodly in earthly society, including the state schools. Otherwise, we would have to go out of the world, which is neither possible nor the will of God for His people. But keeping company with someone, for example, working together on a school project, is different from forming a friendship.

### **The Danger of Fellowship with Wicked Activities**

A third danger is engaging in activities that are inherently evil. The Bible forbids fellowship, not only with evil-doers, but also with evil deeds. “Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Eph. 5:11). Forbidden here are not evil workers, but evil works. These unfruitful works of darkness are not only gross iniquity, for example, the fornication of unmarried teenagers. They are also the parties of young people featuring drinking, drugs (in the United States), suggestive music, and dancing, which is itself sexual uncleanness and a prelude to fornication.

Common grace smiles on such activities as valid cultural activities, the products of common grace. In the circles where the theory of common grace obtains, including the supposedly Christian schools, the young people are dancing away their chastity, to the world’s music, with the approval of the parents and school authorities.

But the Reformed young person who lives by the power of the sanctifying grace of God in Jesus Christ will decline invitations to parties and other extra-curricular activities that would compromise his or her Christian walk in holiness, and would, in fact, bring him or her into fellowship with the darkness of the devil.

### **The Danger of Embracing the World’s Thinking**

I also warn against the danger of adopting the world’s thinking about various ethical issues that are prominent in society today across the world. Among them are the idea that the good and worthwhile life consists of wealth, high position, and earthly pleasures; the notion of sexual license, including sex outside of marriage and the perversion of sex in sodomy and lesbianism; and the approval of abortion, the murder of the unborn and half-born.

Gifted educators are persuasive. The

example of the majority is powerful. Criticism of the biblical way of life as harsh, outdated, and bigoted, and the ridicule that accompanies this criticism, can be effective, especially upon the young.

### **Spiritual Separation (the Antithesis)**

Avoiding and resisting all these dangers requires of the Reformed student that he or she live in spiritual separation from the world of the ungodly. Reformed theology calls this spiritual separation the “antithesis.” Whereas common grace encourages the Christian to hobnob with the world as a friend and ally, the Bible admonishes him to separate from the world as an enemy. “Israel shall dwell in safety alone” (Deut. 33:28).

The Reformed student in a state school is a lonely Daniel, not necessarily in a lions’ den, but certainly in the impressive Babylon of a culturally rich, glittering, and seductive world of the ungodly. The culturally impressive, and morally decadent, Babylon is even more dangerous than a pride of lions.

But lonely Daniel stood fast in the wisdom of the people of God, without disdaining the knowledge and skill in all the learning of Babylonia (see Dan. 1:4, 17-21).

The reason was the (particular, sanctifying) grace of God upon him, grace that kept him faithful to the one, true God, the God of Israel/ church.

This grace will also keep the godly children and young people of Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore. The better way, by far, where this is a possibility, is a good, Christian school (see my book, *Reformed Education: The Christian School as Demand of the Covenant*).



# Fearfully and Wonderfully Made: Completely Dependent



>> Lynette Kleyn



*Lynette* is a member of Grace PRC in Grand Rapids, MI, USA. She is 22 years old, the oldest of 8 children. She works in a doctor's office as a Medical Assistant.

"I will praise thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made..." Psalm 139 is full of references to the handiwork of God in creating man, and especially in forming his own children in the womb. In the past few years I have had the privilege of experiencing this miracle of God first hand, working at a doctor's office where we see mostly pregnant patients. The miracle of the conception and growth of a child in its mother's womb can only be explained as an act of God. No random chance could ever make happen what God makes happen in the growth of a little baby.

God's perfect order and intricate detail are beautifully shown in the conception and development of a baby. Put yourself in this picture: you once were just one cell that held all of the information needed to form each part of your body. That one, tiny cell split into two, and then four, and on and on,

cells dividing and multiplying and eventually forming into a little tube. Five weeks after conception, the two pieces of your heart fused together and began to beat very rapidly. At eight weeks, you already had tiny hands and feet and little beads for eyes. All your internal organs (lungs, stomach, intestines, etc.) were all formed by 3 months, even though you were about the size of a chicken's egg. Your kidneys even worked, producing urine, which amazingly enough became the amniotic fluid, the cushion that protected you so well in your mother's womb. Then your lips formed, and you could open and close your mouth. All this time, your skin is transparent, showing tiny bones and organs developing underneath. By the end of three months, your mom could listen to your strengthening heartbeat using a special tool called a Doppler.

By the fourth month of your life, you are finally starting to look more like a baby and less like an alien with a big head. Your eyelids are now formed and closed over delicate eyes, and you begin to hear things like the fluid you swim in and mom's stomach growling. Hair begins to cover your still transparent skin, and you love to roll and tumble inside your sack of fluid. Mom finally feels a fluttering for the first time at about 5 months, because your bones and muscles are strengthening. Your brain develops a lot during this month, and some

say that nice music and talking, or the reading your mom does to you helps the nerves connect faster. At this point, you have finally reached the great length of about 7 inches (18cm).

During the last few months in the womb, you continue to grow long as well as heavy, as fat is stored and bones harden. Your lungs prepare to breathe on their own, and your eyes can open and close. Mom starts to become uncomfortable as you stretch her belly and sit on her bladder. And finally, after nine months of waiting, preparing, and watching you grow inside her, mom is ready to meet you. The miracle of your birth awes both of your parents as they snuggle you close with love.

The growth of a baby inside its mother is beautiful, so intricate, and so miraculous! That God planned from before the beginning of the world, the exact moment of conception, the exact way that the chromosomes and genes are going to fit together, the way those cells are going to split and which part of the body they will become, is wonderful! As that baby grows, and as you grew inside your mother, He, as with His own finger, shaped your fingers and toes, chose your eye color, skin color, the texture of your hair. Each part of you is perfect in His eyes, even if in our own eyes we see a deformity or a part that is less beautiful than that of someone else. There was no mistake in His plan or in the carrying out of

that plan. David, in Psalm 139:14ff continues, "...marvelous are thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written...when as yet there was none of them."

You may think that all of this could be said about any animal or plant in God's creation, and it is true that everything God made is intricate and beautifully formed. However, when God made man, He made us in His own image, and gave us a soul which separates us from the animals. When Adam sinned, the result of the fall brought about all the disease, deformities, and imperfections that we see in humans today, but that does not change how special God's own people are to Him. So special

are we to God that He sent His only begotten Son to become a man, perfect and sinless, to die for our sins. Through this God shows us our need for Him and our complete dependence on Him.

God calls us His children, adopted unto Him through Christ. Just as human babies depend on their mother for life, protection, nourishment, and warmth, so we depend on our Father for all those things physically and spiritually as well. In Matthew 6 - Jesus' sermon on the mount, He warns us not to worry about tomorrow, what we will eat or drink, or what we will wear, "for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things" (vs. 32). The children of Israel are a great example of how we are as spiritual children of God. Just like them, we turn our backs on God, doubt His goodness, try to argue against what He does in our

lives. Yet our loving heavenly Father forgives us in mercy and shows us, sometimes gently, sometimes more firmly, that His ways are higher than our ways. We need Him to survive physically, and spiritually.

Next time you see a baby, remember the handiwork of God in forming that little child, but even more importantly remember that our heavenly Father is forming and shaping us each day, through each circumstance we face, to be more and more like His only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, our Elder Brother (Romans 8:28, 29). We may find ourselves asking God, "Why?" but we must never think that we are better or wiser than Him. Just as we used to depend on our mothers and fathers for every single need, so we are to depend on Him who can and "shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).



## The Responsibility of Older Siblings in the Covenant Family



>> Julia Ong



Julia is a youth who is a confessing member in CERC.

To be an older sibling, you will need: At least one younger sibling.

From a BBC news article on How To Be An Older Sibling:

"1. Copycat behaviour starts at a very early age, prior to the younger child being able to crawl. As they reach toddler age and start exploring their world, their behaviour is, in part, based on the observations of their older brother or sister.

When the younger child begins developing its identity and image, this image will draw from their older sibling, such as what colour clothes they wear, the style of clothes and hair and mannerisms.

The younger siblings rely on this information at all the critical points in their lives, school, love and money.

❧

“ Once, when I was young, I asked my mother if I could cut my hair in the exact same way as Tabitha cut her hair; and years later, Tabitha reminded me of that incident! ”

❧

2. You have the responsibility to protect your younger brothers and sister from bullies.

3. Your parents will expect you to lend your brothers and sister money, buy them food, and in particular buy them ice-creams on holiday. This money is never recovered, nor will the young siblings ever pay it back to you.

4. You will be expected to share everything you own with your siblings. Some of this you may not mind, like hand-me-down clothes that no longer fit, but one of the hardest things of being the eldest child is learning not to throttle your brothers and sisters when you find jam covered toast in your portable CD player.

5. Your parents at some point will use you as cheap labour for babysitting while they go out to a restaurant, film or just to get five minutes peace from a household of screaming kids.”

Ah, I wish it were that easy. To be a good, God-glorifying older sibling entails so much more!

It is true that older children have a greater responsibility here than the younger children. Younger brothers and sisters ARE watching and learning by example. We need to set that example and we should be pleased that God works through us. But, the comfort is that there

is a powerful example in our older brother, Jesus Christ. He obeyed the commands of God, honoured His Father, submitted to His Father’s will, all for the sake of His younger brothers and sisters (us). The will of God for Him was so much more difficult than our parent’s will is for us. In obedience, he died. He died for the sins of God’s people!

The evidence that Christ is our older brother is clear in the Bible too. Colossians 2:12-17 reads that God has “delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature”. He was the second Adam, who by his obedience gave the free gift of righteousness to His people as we read in Romans 5:18, 19. (Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous). He, like Adam, was the firstborn and figurehead of mankind so that what He did had a great impact on His siblings, God’s children. We are the adopted children (Ephesians 1:5) but He was begotten of the Father

and we follow the example of our older brother.

The bible has negative examples of older siblings. Reuben was told by Jacob in Genesis 49:3 “Reuben, thou at my firstborn, my might and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power” but he was immoral and “lay with Bilhah his father’s concubine” (Genesis 35:22) so that Jacob said that he “shalt not excel” because of his sin. Cain was an evil older sibling who killed his younger brother and Esau, who stole his brother’s birthright, was the older of two twins.

We must also see that not only are we older siblings in our biological families, but we are also older siblings towards one another in the church! After all, we are all children of God and we are brothers and sisters-in-Christ on that same note. Once, when I was young, I asked my mother if I could cut my hair in the exact same way as Tabitha cut her hair; and years later, Tabitha reminded me of that incident!

It is not easy to live out the responsibilities of an older sibling, even as many temptations and our sinful nature can find it resentful and too much of a burden to bear. But Jesus has set the example, and He is touched by the feeling of our infirmities. Let us be heartily willing and ready, henceforth to live unto Him.





# The History of Verbal Revelation

## (Belgic Confession 3a)



>> Rev. Angus Stewart



Rev Angus Stewart is a minister of the Word at Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland ([www.cprc.co.uk](http://www.cprc.co.uk)).

### *Belgic Confession 3: The Written Word of God*

*We confess that this Word of God was not sent, nor delivered by the will of man, but that holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, as the apostle Peter saith. And that afterwards God, from a special care which He has for us and our salvation, commanded His servants, the prophets and apostles, to commit His revealed Word to writing; and He Himself wrote with His own finger the two tables of the law. Therefore we call such writings holy and divine Scriptures.*

Belgic Confession 3 can be used to give us a three-part history of verbal revelation in terms of God's making Himself known in (human) language by words uttered and/or written.

#### 1. Spoken Word, No Written Word

There was a time when there was the spoken Word of God but not the written Word of God. When was that? The period from creation to Moses' writing the Pentateuch or the writing of Job (whichever work was penned earlier).

Almighty God revealed Himself to the ancient prophets. He spoke to Adam in the Garden of Eden. He revealed His will to prediluvian Enoch:

And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him (Jude 14-15).

The covenant revelation given to Adam (Gen. 3:15) was further unfolded to Noah, with whom the cosmic dimension of God's covenant of grace is especially prominent. One thinks also here of the three patriarchs to whom God spoke directly: Abraham (who is called a prophet in Genesis 20:7), Isaac and Jacob. Of these men, we read that Jehovah "suffered no man to do them wrong: yea, he reprov'd kings for their sakes; Saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm" (Ps. 105:14-15).

God communicated to people in those days in various ways. He spoke to Adam and Eve (Gen. 1-3), Cain (Gen. 4), Noah (Gen. 6-9), Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, etc. We read of theophanies (appearances of God), Christophanies (appearances of Christ) or angelophanies (appearances of angels) to unfallen

and fallen Adam (Gen. 1-3), Abraham (Gen. 15; 18), backslidden Lot in Sodom (Gen. 19), wrestling Jacob at Peniel (Gen. 32), Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3-4), the Israelites at fiery Mount Sinai (Ex. 19-20) and Job to whom God spake "out of the whirlwind" (Job 38:1; 42:3). He gave dreams to Eliphaz (Job 4:12ff.), Abimelech (Gen. 20), Jacob (Gen. 28) and Joseph (Gen 37). God's will was communicated to others through the interpretation of dreams (Gen. 40-41) and the proclamation of godly prophets, such as Noah, who was "a preacher of righteousness" (II Pet. 2:5), as well as a covetous, reprobate prophet, Balaam (Num. 22-24; II Pet. 2:15), and even his donkey (Num. 22:28-30; II Pet. 2:16)! The handing down or passing on of God's Word (cf. Ps. 78:3-7) was facilitated by the longevity of the prediluvians. For instance, since Adam died aged 930 (Gen. 5:5), Lamech, Noah's father, could have talked with him.

#### 2. Written Word and Spoken Word

After this came a period in which there were both the spoken Word and the written Word. When was that? The period from the writing of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible) or Job (whichever work was penned earlier) to the writing of the book of Revelation. This is about 1½ millennia, from about 1,400 BC to AD 100. There was especially one significant gap during this period: the 400 silent years after Malachi,

God's last Old Testament prophet.

So, from Moses on, we have both the spoken Word and the written Word in Old Testament days for about 1,000 years. The first parts of canonical Scripture were the Pentateuch, Psalm 90 (see its heading) and Job, to which were added Joshua, Judges, Ruth and I and II Samuel. Around this time came the poetical or wisdom books (other than Job) written (at least mostly) by David and Solomon, namely, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon. Then were added the remaining historical books (I Kings - Esther) and the 16 writing prophets: the 4 major prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah with Lamentations, Ezekiel and Daniel) and the 12 minor prophets (Hosea - Malachi). Many Old Testament prophets uttered inspired oracles but left no inspired writings, such as Nathan, Gad and Jehu, the son of Hanani.

The New Testament period (the first century AD) had the most concentrated revelation in terms of both the speaking and the writing of God's Word. Inspired utterances were made by Christ, the apostles, the New Testament prophets and others, such as Elisabeth (Luke 1:41-45), Zacharias (Luke 1:67-79) and various angels. The New Testament written Word consists of the 4 gospel accounts, the Acts of the Apostles, the 21 epistles and the book of Revelation.

The New Testament Scriptures contain only a tiny portion of the inspired spoken Word of those days. Think of how many spoken words the Lord Jesus must have uttered during His public ministry! Likewise, had He willed, God could have given us a written record of many more of Christ's miracles and deeds:

"And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name" (John 20:30-31).

And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen (John 21:25).

How many of the 12 apostles (and Paul) wrote New Testament books? Only 4: Matthew (who wrote 1 canonical book), John (5), Paul (13 or 14) and Peter (2). The other 9 apostles, such as Bartholomew and Andrew, wrote no New Testament Scripture.

What about the New Testament prophets? Only 4 of them wrote books in the New Testament canon: Mark (who wrote 1 canonical book), Luke (2), James (1) and Jude (1). (I take the last two men to have been the Lord Jesus' half-brothers and not apostles.) Prophets such as Agabus, Silas, Barnabas, etc., did not write any part of the New Testament (though a few have claimed that Barnabas wrote Hebrews).

### 3. Written Word, No Spoken Word

Since the apostolic age, we have the gloriously complete inspired written Word and not the inspired spoken Word. The inspired written Word consists of the 39 Old Testament books and the 27 New Testament books. We will consider this more fully, DV, when we come to the canon of Scripture in Belgic Confession 4.

The church no longer has the inspired spoken Word, for there

are no extraordinary church office-bearers (e.g., apostles or prophets) in the post-apostolic age. We have no need of extraordinary church office-bearers or inspired spoken words for we are have been lavishly endowed with the complete canon of Holy Scripture. God has blessed the church ever more richly through the progression from the days in which there was the spoken Word but no written Word, to the days when there was the written Word and the spoken Word, to our day when we have the whole canon, revealing the mind of God in Jesus Christ for the whole catholic or universal church until Christ's bodily return. We will say more about the sufficiency of Scripture when we come to Belgic Confession 7, DV.

This distinction between the spoken Word and the written Word is, perhaps, a bit unusual for, or unfamiliar to, Protestants, though it is biblical and confessionally Reformed, as per Belgic Confession 3. Which of the two main groups (Romanists or Anabaptists) that the Belgic Confession chiefly opposes would seek to instil a wrong view of this distinction? The answer is the former. Rome believes that extra-canonical words of the apostles and prophets are preserved and developed in Roman Catholic tradition. These alleged apostolic words are then used to buttress Rome's heretical doctrines, e.g., its Mariolatry. Rome's false view of tradition is also used to undermine the sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures.

Belgic Confession 3 acknowledges that, in general, the spoken Word precedes the written Word: "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost ... afterwards God ... commanded His servants, the prophets and apostles,



to commit His revealed Word to writing.” Now all we have, by God’s purpose and providence, is the written Word, which is far better, from various perspectives, than the spoken Word. Indeed, this is “from a special care which He has for us and our salvation,” as we will see more fully next time, DV.

#### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. From the beginning of the written Word of God to the completion of the last canonical book, in which period was the spoken Word of God least present? Which period received the most concentrated revelation in terms of both the speaking and the writing of God’s Word?
2. Explain the difference between the Reformed and Roman Catholic conceptions of the spoken Word.
3. Does this article help you better understand Hebrews 1:1-2? How?



## What is Reformed?



>> Prof. Hanko



*Prof Hanko* is a retired professor of the Theological School. His present work consists of preaching at Hope Protestant Reformed Church, writing for the Salt Shakers magazine, writing in a forum for the young people in Singapore, and writing new books. He has visited Singapore on many occasions and is like a grandfather to all the youths here.

### Refutation

After the last issue of Salt Shakers was mailed, I received two letters neither from a member of the PRC nor from a member of CERC. The first letter was critical of what I had written, and accused me of leaving the impression with people that only “PRs” go to heaven. The second letter, addressing the same article and the same problem, was thoughtful and helpful in an effort to analyze what could possibly have given rise to such a charge.

Before I continue a discussion of the subject I am writing about in this short series, I want to say a few things

about the charge that was made and the misunderstanding out of which it arose. As one of the correspondents suggested, the difficulty lay in the word “Reformed.” I admit I was using the word in a sense in which it is not used much today. In today’s ecclesiastical world, the word “Reformed” is a label given to anyone who holds to the five points of Calvinism or at least comes close to holding these five points.

I have a dislike for quibbling about words and their meaning, but this broad use of the term “Reformed” is not historically correct, and is, on the contrary, confusing. There are

certain groups, such as Reformed Baptists, who not only include the word “Reformed” in their church name, but are not reformed in doctrine or in their historical ancestry as a denomination. One who denies the covenant cannot even claim to be reformed in doctrine.

Further confusion arises out of the fact that the term “reformed” is made equivalent to Biblical orthodoxy. One faithful to the Scriptures is “reformed;” one unfaithful to the Scriptures is not “reformed.” And here is the rub.

In my efforts in the last article to point out that Reformed and

Presbyterian were two separate branches of the Calvin reformation, I said (correctly) that churches on the mainland of Europe who followed Calvin were properly designated by the term "Reformed" Churches in the British Isles who followed Calvin were the Presbyterian branch of the Reformation. And that division has continued to the present with Reformed and Presbyterian Churches throughout the world.

But then I pointed out that there were differences between the Presbyterian and Reformed traditions, many belonging to the area of Christian liberty, but two especially that were of a doctrinal kind. These two were differences over whether the so-called covenant of works was biblical and whether the approval of divorce and remarriage under certain circumstances was biblical. I said that I thought the Reformed tradition was different in that it approved neither the covenant of works nor divorce and remarriage under certain conditions.

To understand this, one must remember that the Presbyterian tradition is defined by its confessional basis, which is the Westminster Confession of Faith (WC); the same is true of the Reformed tradition, which is defined by the Three Forms of Unity (TFoU). While the WC teaches the covenant of works and divorce and remarriage, the TFoU do not. This fact has made a difference in the development of these two traditions.

I added something that everyone who has read what I have written knows: I am convinced that in these two respects, a denial of the covenant of works and a denial of the right of a divorced person to remarry is Biblical. That is, that the view held in the Protestant Reformed Churches is Biblical.

Wei Lyn has prepared a chart for this article in which what I meant is set down in a clear and visible way.

### **What Is Reformed**

We return now to our discussion.

It is true that from the beginning of the development of the doctrine of the covenant in Switzerland, the covenant was defined in terms of an agreement, or pact, or treaty. Zwingli himself and his co-reformer Bullinger both defined the covenant in that way in their battle against Anabaptists. Although they were right in seeing that the Anabaptist error was basically a denial of the Biblical doctrine of the covenant, they were wrong in their definition of the covenant. Nowhere in Scripture is the covenant defined as a treaty or agreement – between God and man.

It seems as if this definition of the covenant arose from the meaning of the Latin term for covenant, *foedus*, which term means, treaty or agreement. That idea was the prevailing idea on the continent of Europe as well as in the development of the Reformation in the British Isles. Nevertheless, although such outstanding theologians as Zacharias Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus, the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism, both used the same language, Olevianus especially also considered the covenant to be a bond of friendship and wrote a pamphlet under that title.

By the time the Heidelberg Catechism was written (1563) these two men, although they included the doctrine of the covenant in the Catechism, made no mention of the covenant as an agreement, but insisted that infants of believers had to be baptized as well as adults because infants too were incorporated into the church of

Christ and the covenant of grace.

Earlier than the Heidelberg Catechism, when Guido de Bres wrote the Belgic Confession (1561), he too made no mention of the covenant as a treaty or agreement. Fifty years later, when the great Synod of Dordt met, it too refused to speak of the covenant as an agreement, although it spoke in different places about this truth.

It seems the reason why the Reformed Creeds were silent on the idea of the covenant as an agreement is their awareness that a covenant defined in terms of an agreement resulted in a conditional covenant, for infants cannot enter into an agreement. A covenant that is an agreement is, in the nature of the case, a conditional covenant.

In Presbyterian theology however, the covenant as an agreement took hold and pervaded the thinking of covenantal theologians. The result was an adoption of and commitment to the covenant of works, a conditional covenant God made with Adam prior to the fall of Adam into sin. After the fall, the covenant of works was replaced by a covenant of grace.

Although there have been exceptions to the doctrine of a covenant as an agreement in Presbyterian thought, the doctrine was taught and maintained by most outstanding theologians until the present. But along with it went, in most instances the idea of a conditional covenant.

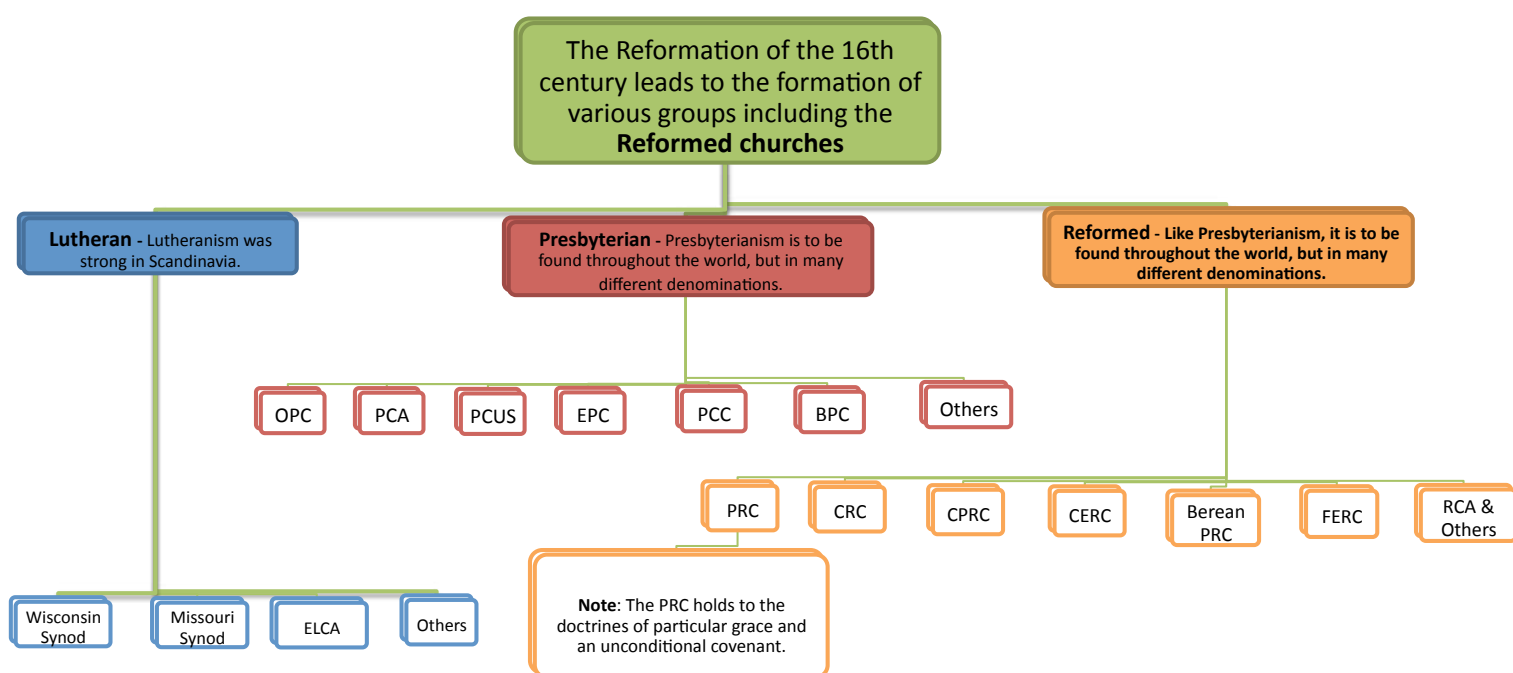
Likewise, in the Reformed development of the doctrine of the covenant, many theologians clung with might and main to the covenant of works and the accompanying idea of a conditional covenant. As such, many thoughtful theologians who saw the error of

a conditional covenant became critical of a covenant of works. And if, as the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort emphatically insist, infants as well as adults are included in the covenant and church of Christ, the covenant is, necessarily, unconditional.

And so, an important difference between Presbyterianism and Reformed is the difference in the doctrine of the covenant: the conditionality of the covenant versus its unconditionality.

The difference is important. It is a difference that can be traced back to the confessions that form the basis for both traditions: the WC and the TFofU. It is a difference between the fundamental question whether man participates in the establishment of the covenant as well as its maintenance; or whether both the establishment of the covenant and its maintenance are the work of God through Christ.

But it is also the difference between an idea of the covenant which is mechanical and a necessarily cold agreement, or a warm, vibrant, living relationship of fellowship and friendship between God and his people in Christ. That difference in ideas concerning the covenant underlies the difference between whether or not divorce and remarriage is permitted by the church.



Note: The number of the sub-groups under each group does not meant to be an indication of each group's importance. Neither does the order in which the sub-groups and groups are placed intend to indicate an order of importance or any other order. Also, the list of sub-groups does not lay claim to include every single Lutheran, Reformed, or Presbyterian church in the world. Rather, this chart serves to illustrate how Prof. Hanko used the word "reformed" in his articles, "What is Reformed?"; Reformed as in those churches who stand in the line of the Reformed branch of the Reformation, and Reformed as in Churches springing from the 16th century Reformation. The illustrator sincerely hopes that the reader will gain a clearer understanding of Prof. Hanko's articles through this chart.

ELCA stands for Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

OPC refers to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church located primarily in the United States.

PCA refers to the Presbyterian Church in America

PCUS stands for Presbyterian Church in United States.

EPC stands for Evangelical Presbyterian Church (Australia).

PCC refers to Pilgrim Covenant Church (Singapore).

BPC stands for Bible Presbyterian Church.

PRCA refers to Protestant Reformed Churches in America.

RCA stands for Reformed Church in America.

CRCNA refers to Christian Reformed Church in North America.

CPRC stands for Covenant Protestant Reformed Church (North Ireland).

CERC stands for Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church (Singapore).

FERC stands for First Evangelical Reformed Church (Singapore).

Berean PRC refers to the Berean Protestant Reformed Church (Philippines).

# Prayer & Thanksgiving

Php 4:6-7 Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

## We thank God for...

1. Paul and Anthea's wedding, during which we could be pointed to THE marriage between Christ and His Church.
2. The gift of education and the exam results He has blessed the students with. The release of 'O' and 'A' level results and school posting for those who took 'O' levels.
3. The visit of the Kapteins, Jeff Kotman, Pastor Kenneth Koole & Elder Tom Bodbyl.
4. The anniversary of our senior youth group (Covenant Keepers Seniors), a commemoration of the Lord's goodness unto us.
5. The new CKS committee that has taken up the onus of serving the youths in church, as well as the various committees that are diligently doing Kingdom's work.
6. The Biblical Reformed Truth which He has graciously revealed to us and caused us to believe.
7. The start of Catechism classes and the good covenant instruction that our children receive through it.
8. The fellowship that we could have with Matthias Poi and Matthias Wee during their recent break, and for their labour amongst us.
9. Mdm Lo who can continue to join us in worship and for the opportunity we are given to fellowship with her. Thank God for preserving Aunty Daisy, giving her strength to continue serving in distributing solid Reformed books to the saints. Thank God that Pastor Lau is now on fewer antibiotics and that he could celebrate with his son Paul and his new daughter in law Anthea their joyous wedding.
10. God provides His sheep with a God fearing and loving under-shepherd. Thank God for diligent Elders that study God's word carefully and lovingly care for the flock.

## We pray that God will...

1. Bless their marriage, give them strength and grace to assume their callings, and grant them covenant children according to His will.
2. Grant the youths contentment and uphold them spiritually even as they begin a new phase of their lives. Grant the youths contentment and uphold them spiritually even as they begin a new phase of their lives. May God also show His will to the graduating university students and 'A' level result recipients that they may walk the path that He has ordained.
3. Use these visits to strengthen the ties between our churches and cause us more and more to appreciate the catholicity of the church. Grant more opportunities for such visits to take place, that we may experience the communion of the saints in a richer measure.
4. Bless and establish the work of their hands, and equip them with the grace, strength and wisdom to serve in their capacity.
5. Bless their service and direct it for His glory and the gathering of His Church.
6. Preserve our church in the Reformed Faith and enable us to earnestly contend for it.
7. Help parents to take upon themselves the responsibility of teaching their children, and following up with their lessons.
8. Keep our youths who are studying overseas, that they may receive good spiritual nourishment and continue steadfastly in the truth.
9. Sustain and comfort the sick, afflicted and aged – Pastor Lau, Aunty Daisy, Mdm Lo, etc. – that they may continue to find peace in God's unfailing promises.
10. Grant Pastor Lanning and the Session love and strength to continue leading and serving CERC in meekness. Grant the congregation humble hearts to continue to esteem those that God has placed to watch over us.



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3. Remember, pass the Salt! Share our magazine and bless a friend with God's Word.



(Clockwise)

Meaningful rendition of "The Lord Bless You and Keep You" by youth at Paul and Anthea's wedding

Youth who took Confession of Faith and Adult Baptism with Pastor Lanning

Paul and Anthea walking down the aisle as husband and wife

Celebration of CKS 5th anniversary

Adult Baptism of Paul Ong and Melina

Thank God for preserving Pastor Lau and his family thus far

### Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church

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

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

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

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