

EDITOR'S

NOTE:

Welcome to Salt Shakers 22!
NEW this Issue: "News from
the Churches"! Find out more
about how our sister
churches are doing!

Do try to attend CERC's
upcoming Reformation Day
Conference if possible! =)



salt shakers
joel 3:16 matthew 5:16

Issue 22 | Sep 2013

The Kingdom's Inheritance Rediscovered!

Dates: 25 & 26 October 2013

Time: 8pm (25/10) & 10am (26/10)

Venue: Salvation Army (William Booth Corps)

Speaker: Pastor Andy Lanning of Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church

Details at [facebook.com/ReformationDayConference](https://www.facebook.com/ReformationDayConference)



**REFORMATION DAY
CONFERENCE 2013**

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PSALM 23: VERSE 3

>> Paul Liu

Paul Liu is a confessing adult in CERC and is married to Anthea Liu. He is the editor of Salt Shakers.

1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

Introduction

In the last instalment, we saw WHAT Shepherd does for us as His little lambs. He provides for us, both physically and spiritually, such that we never lack in any way. Knowing that we are silly sheep, He mercifully helps us to lie down and rest; because we

aren't able to do so ourselves, even if we know that we are desperately in need of some respite! If all that isn't good enough, Shepherd is also so loving and giving towards us. He doesn't forget our weakness and frailty, and will give us grace and comfort sufficient for each step of the way. Aren't we a privileged flock of sheep? =)

The verse for this article explains WHY Shepherd does all the above for us. This is very, very, important because the question "Why?" often tends to be very puzzling for little ones like us! When we are walking on a cheery path, skipping around and chasing butterflies, "Why are you here?" seems too obvious a question for anyone to ask us. "Well, obviously because following Shepherd is an enjoyable thing, isn't it?" – we answer without faltering. But, when we find ourselves on a narrow path at the edge of a cliff (and if you dared to take your eyes of the cliff's edge and looked inwards, you would notice the sick and painful thorns that forbid you to lean inwards), "Why are you here?" is a question that we can barely answer on our own... And we look forward, but don't see Shepherd, and we mistakenly think He, too, doesn't see us. (Psalm 121)

But don't think that way... this Psalm that our God has committed to us ought to bear a sure testimony in our hearts. Well, true, we may sometimes be so frightened that this Word is so small and soft within our hearts. But even then, this Word is sure and unwavering, and it gives comfort to our little hearts whenever we quieten ourselves to hear it. "Why are you here?", they ask. "Because Shepherd wants to restore my soul, and His path of salvation for me brings glory to His name."

To Restore a Soul

If only we could see more of what is happening, then we wouldn't be stuck in the mess that we are so often in. Perhaps that's why Psalm 23 speaks of us as sheep – to snap us out of our obsession with bodily, earthly and temporal things, and to focus on things that are eternal! (2 Cor 4:18) And how wonderful it is, that when we realise that we are sheep, we also realise that everything Shepherd does is for the restoration of our souls. It is such a comfort, for the littlest of lambs and heroes of faith alike, that there is only one simple truth to absolutely everything that happens in our physical lives: it is for the perfecting

of our souls. All we need are hearts that trust God's Work in our lives, and spiritual eyes to see His handiwork in progress.

What is a soul, and how can we little sheep understand such a thing? Well, the Bible gives us much information on the soul, and that should guide our understanding on this matter. God gives us a peek into what we consist of in Genesis 2:7, where the creation of the first man, Adam, is described. A form made of dust (our body), and a God-given breath (our soul) makes us the living beings that we are. We also know that when someone dies, his body still remains, but there is obviously something that isn't there anymore. That part of the living person that isn't there anymore is the soul. Another important thing about the soul is that it is the most essential part of a person. In Luke 23:43, Jesus told the thief on the cross beside him "Today, you shall be with Me in paradise." Did the thief's body make it to heaven on that day? No, but his soul did, and by the example of Jesus' words, we see that Jesus was addressing the man's soul when He said "you". A person is most importantly his soul, not his body.

In the same way, the Bible consistently tells us of the frailty and shortness of the physical life, and often reminds us to take good care of our souls rather than our bodies. Remember the rich fool whom God asked, "Whose shall those things be?" (Luke 12:20) The rich fool cared much for his worldly possessions but totally forgot about his soul! What does the Bible say about bodily exercise? – look up 1 Tim 4:8. Matthew 10:28 also tells us that we ought to be much more concerned for our souls than our bodies. From what Jesus told the thief beside Him, we also know that the soul does not cease to exist when a person dies. We must be thinking, "You mean the most important part of me while I'm alive carries on even after death?" Yes!

And that is why Shepherd does EVERYTHING for the sake of our

souls. His main purpose is to sanctify our souls in order that we may be perfect to enter our eternal dwelling. Romans 8:28 tells us that we KNOW all things work together for our good. Put these two together, and we understand that everything that happens to us in this life is ultimately for the good of our souls! No wonder then that we don't really care for multi-coloured coats of wool or bulging legs of lamb... we sheep of our Shepherd are happy and comforted to know that in sickness or in health, in adversity or prosperity, our soul is being restored. What does our soul consist of, and how does Shepherd restore it? We can see some obvious "parts" of our soul, though it is difficult to ever truly define our soul; the parts are the mind, will, and heart.

Our mind can be explained a little further as our intellect and memories. As little ones, we know many things about many things around us because we go to school. However, very often, our knowledge about things comes from a wrong perspective, or does not give rightful glory to God as the Creator of all things... isn't that a huge problem? And dear Shepherd will lead us accordingly to restore and sanctify the knowledge in our minds. He does that when our parents take the time to show us God's hand in all that we learn, or maybe through Christian teachers in a Christian school, or maybe even through discussions with Christian friends about things we have learnt in school.

As we are led by Shepherd along the path, we have memories of where He has led us. Sometimes these memories are terribly frightening or sorrowful – places that little lambs would rather not recall going to. But one important way in which Shepherd restores us in our minds is by showing us, bit by bit, how each place He has led us to actually turned out for our good! He makes sad memories happy, and frightening ones sources of strength. We see more and more of His goodness as we look back and understand the

wisdom of His leading! Indeed, our sanctified memories are the towers, bulwarks, and palaces of Zion, and they are become undeniable testimonies of God's faithfulness and wondrous might in our lives. (Psalm 48)

Our will is the part of our soul where our desires and decisions come from. Oh, we as sheep would know much about that... we love to chase butterflies, run all over the place, and decide and devise to get lost ever so often! The Bible in Isaiah 53:6 tells us that all we like sheep have gone astray, and we have turned everyone to his own way. How sad that our fallen will makes it impossible for us to walk on the right paths before God. If left to ourselves, we would always much rather be on our merry way to destruction than follow the narrow road to blessedness. But Shepherd loves us, His dear sheep, and He has gone through unimaginable pain and suffering to find us and bring us back to the paths of righteousness.

Along the way, He corrects and changes us in our will, so that we desire more and more to follow where He leads; and we desire less and less the things that would distract us. We are able to say of the law that we once dreaded, "I love it!" (Psalm 119:97) And we desire it so much that we chew on it all the day long... Our restored will also causes us to resolve to follow Shepherd, wherever He may take us. We know that our wills are weak as usual, and our resolutions fail all the time, but yet by God's grace, we keep deciding to carry on, knowing that Shepherd see us, and will never let us go. We persevere in following Shepherd ONLY because He preserves us. =)

Our heart is the centre of activity from which our thoughts, feelings, and emotions flow. From the Bible, we know that people say things within their hearts, very much like thoughts and feelings. Isaiah 65:14 speaks of the joy of heart and also the sorrow of heart. This is such a rich and wonderful part of our souls that it is almost as if

that were our very person itself! Psalm 4:4 and 77:6 speak of being able to commune with one's own heart... have you ever communed with your own heart? Let's not forget what we used to commune about with ourselves before Shepherd found us: we foolishly said to ourselves that there is no God and we probably made foolish plans with ourselves about building huge barns and storing our wealth for enjoyment and security. We had emotions that ran wild with hatred, envy and all kinds of nasty thoughts... Oh no, we need great restoration work in this part of our soul!

As God carries out His important work of Salvation in us, our thoughts, feelings, and emotions must also be sanctified! No more do we think like the world (Philippians 4:8), and feelings of contentment, thankfulness, and gladness take over and fill our sheep hearts till they are bursting with joy at all times. No wonder Shepherd's flock is a happy one! No, we are not filled with temporary emotions that ebb and flow with the music, the amount of money we have in the bank, or the strength of our bodies. Our joy in the Lord is firm and unshakeable, such that we are able to sing even in the midst of trouble. (Acts 16:25)

Paths of Righteousness

What a massive job it is to restore a soul! And it is simply mind boggling to think that Shepherd restores the soul of each and every sheep of His. He promised to save us, and He will do it. Every step of the way in our lives, as we walk along the paths of righteousness that Shepherd leads us in, He is working on us in our souls. Whether we realise it or not, we are being restored and perfected; and so the Bible points this out to us when it tells us in 2 Corinthians 4:16ff. to be aware of the renewing of the inward man and to look at the eternal things which are not seen.

This is important because we are so prone to look at the things seen and fall into despair and hopelessness! The moment the scenery doesn't look as

good as before, we start to wonder if Shepherd has forgotten about us! Look beyond what is physical, and you will see how Shepherd is ever so close, even, no rather, ESPECIALLY when the pathway looks impossible to tread. God can take away your health, because He knows you need His grace more; He can take away your possessions, so that your hands would be ready to receive His providence. How blessed are we, if we can see and appreciate God's working in our lives!

If we are one of those sheep who have our eyes opened (not sleepy sheep), then we must also see and appreciate that God is also restoring the souls of our fellow-sheep and leading them in the paths of righteousness. And our job would be to "BAAA!" as loud as possible to awaken our sheep-friends who might be unaware of what is happening around them! When they fail to see how something that happens in their life is God's goodness toward them, then we must quickly remind them that Shepherd is working on their soul and whatever happened was exactly in accordance to God's plan for them as His sheep.

Though at a point of time we may not be able to explain everything to ourselves or to a friend, yet if we trust in our Shepherd's promise to us, we can live in hope and peace, knowing that it is a matter of time before we see His mercy and wisdom in leading us in the paths of righteousness.

Glorify to God Alone!

Everything sounds really fine and dandy right now... but there is a big problem, especially to sheep who are so prone to wander and get lost. What is that problem? Imagine when a little sheep gets lost – because he was naughty and went chasing after butterflies even though Shepherd was going the other way. And all those shepherd-less sheep with their multi-coloured coats surround him and ask, "So... you sure your soul is being restored now? And you sure you are walking in paths of

righteousness?" Oh, the answer to both questions surely seem like "No...". And the little sheep would break down and cry because he wasn't good enough and had lost his Shepherd. No-no-no! The little sheep would break down and cry if the verse stopped there! But no, the verse doesn't stop there... he remembers... "for His name's sake"! And realisation flows into the little sheep as he thinks about why Shepherd was leading him. Shepherd wasn't restoring him because he was winner of the "Best Behaved Sheep" award... Shepherd wasn't leading him in paths of righteousness because he was the best follower in town... "Shepherd did it because He said I am His sheep; He did it because He keeps His word; He did it because it brings glory to His name!" And though unable to argue with his accusers, the little sheep says in his heart, "Shepherd, I know you will come for me."

Oh, wherever you are, He will bring you back; however lost, He will find you. The assurance does not lie in us, but it lies in the fact that our salvation is a matter of God's glory. Our anchor, finally, is that Shepherd loves us for His own name's sake. That is better... for us sheep, that is much better.

Following Shepherd

And so, we come to the end of the third verse. If there's only one thing you can remember, remember this: Every step of our lives is perfectly planned for the good of our souls, and all for the glory of God. Thank God that He cares for us perfectly, and gives us what is truly good for us. Thank God that we can depend on Him; we dare not even trust ourselves.

Following behind Shepherd is a happy place to be. We are well protected as He gently restores and perfects us along the way Home. As His sheep, this is our ultimate comfort: even if we lose Shepherd, He will find us – because we belong to Him. Do you believe these? If you do, then move along now... Shepherd is leading us on. =)

Daughters of the Father; Sisters in Christ

>> Sister Stephanie Lanning



Stephanie Lanning is the wife of Pastor Andrew Lanning. She is a mother of five.

“
 God has given to
 women in the church
 a high calling. ”

Matthew 12:50: “For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.” As members of Christ’s glorious body and bride, the Church, being brothers and sisters of Christ makes us brothers and sisters of each other also. We are all part of the Covenant family of God, who, as our Father, has adopted us to be His children. We are to show that we are Christ’s brothers and sisters by doing the will of our heavenly Father. How do we as sisters-in-Christ encourage each other in that calling?

God has given to women in the church a high calling. Some are called to be wives and mothers, serving God in the home. Some are called to be single and use their life of singleness in the service of God. And all of us are called to be

“Proverbs 31 women” – women of virtue, who fear the Lord.

The virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 is a woman who is trustworthy (v.11), generous (v.15), giving to the poor (v.20), strong and honourable (v.25), wise (v.26), kind (v.26), and hard-working (v.27). She is beautiful with an inward beauty that comes from fearing the Lord (v.30). Some of those virtuous women are called by God to be “fruitful vines by the sides of (the) house” (Psalm 128:3), and “keepers at home” (Titus 2:5). Others are called to be virtuous in single life, caring “for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit” (I Cor. 7:34). As we fulfil the callings that God has given us, we need His Word, heard in the preaching and studied in the home, and we need His Spirit to strengthen us. But God also gives us sisters-in-Christ to encourage each other, be examples to each other, and pray for each other as we do the will of God as His daughters.

Establishing godly friendships is vital for a young woman. Our friends influence the way we think and the way we act. In II Corinthians 6, we are called not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers, for light and darkness, Christ and Belial, have no communion with each other. On the other hand, we read in Proverbs 27:17, “Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.” That is, with godly friends we can “sharpen” each other spiritually. Discussions with sisters who are one in the faith with us make us grow spiritually.

Many of us in our day-to-day life, at school or work, are not around those who believe the same truths that we do. So it is important to seek our friendships with people who are one with us in the faith. “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3). How thankful we may be for the CK/CKS groups God has provided at CERC, where we can develop godly friendships with believers of like faith. May He give us wisdom for living in the world with ungodly schoolmates or colleagues at work, while resisting being of the world.

I have seen in my own life the benefit and blessing of godly friendships with sisters-in-Christ. After high school I was able to attend a Young Adults’ retreat in Colorado, as well as a few overnight retreats in Michigan. At those retreats I met many other young adults who loved to discuss God’s Word, or to discuss other topics in the light of God’s Word. How I enjoyed those conversations! Are you able to have those types of conversations with your friends, because they are your spiritual sisters?

Godly friends can also encourage you in the praise of God. At the retreat I went to in Colorado, a group of us went for a walk one night to have a bonfire further up in the mountains. It was so dark that we could barely see the outlines of the mountains around us. I will never forget one godly sister saying, “You guys, this is amazing! We HAVE to sing ‘How Great Thou Art.’” So in the quiet darkness of the mountains, with the stars shining down, we as brothers and

sisters-in-Christ all raised our voices together in praise of the great Creator.

Sisters-in-Christ also include those who are older than you. From the youngest little girl to the oldest woman, we are all, as part of Christ's family, sisters in Him. It is good to develop relationships with older sisters also. Titus 2:3-5 calls older women to teach the younger women "to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands." And the reason? "That the Word of God be not blasphemed." We want the world around us to see Christ in us – not to be led by our walk to blaspheme Him! The older sisters, who have more experience in different areas of life, are used by God to give the younger women good advice and wisdom as they grow in their faith and walk of holiness. And even those who are young themselves yet – you in your late teens or early 20s – are "older women" to the younger teens. Does your life give a godly example to them,

so that you are teaching these younger sisters?

When I was a young mom with two children, I attended a women's Bible study at First Church in Grand Rapids, where my husband did his seminary internship. What a blessing that was! Being one of the youngest ones there, there was so much opportunity for me to learn from the older women, from their biblical knowledge and life experience. Now some of my good friends are women in the same stage of life as I am, including women with whom I have raised my children from infancy into the stage of having children in school. We encourage each other in godliness in the raising of our children, and in the day-to-day life of being mothers in the home. Yet some of my very good friends are also women who are older than I am, who have been through many of the trials of life and can, by their experience, help those who are currently going through trials; or who have raised their children

already and can give godly wisdom in different areas of child rearing. Do not underestimate the important role that older sisters in Christ may have in your life!

One way to help us evaluate our friendships is to test them with questions like these: Do your friends praise God with you? Do they show you a life of godliness? Is the "peer pressure" you face from your friends pressure to do the right, or the wrong? To follow the ways of God, or the paths of evildoers? To dress in a way that glorifies God, or to wear the immodest dress that is so popular today? To watch the world's movies and listen to the world's music, or to glorify God with your time and sing His praises?

The ultimate purpose of our being sisters-in-Christ is for the glory of our Father. He has united us as members of His body that we may glorify Him. May we as sisters in Christ encourage each other in a life of godliness, doing the will of our Father which is in heaven!

Jephthah: The Faithful Judge

Who Kept His Promise

>> Bernice Lim



Bernice Lim is a confessing youth in CERC.

Read Judges 11.

Who was this man, Jephthah? He was a mighty judge who was faithful to his calling and to God's Word. He was willing to help Israel and his family even though they were not faithful to him. Jephthah's half-brothers hated him as he was the son of a harlot (v7). They expelled him from the family because as the son of a harlot, they thought that he should have no portion with them in their father's inheritance. After Jephthah's brothers thrust him out, they kept silent about it; by doing so, they showed their guilt in mistreating Jephthah.

Jephthah lived in the land of Tob after being thrust out. One day, however, the elders of Gilead went to fetch him out of that land because Ammon had made war against Israel and the elders needed his help. What was Jephthah's response

towards them? He charged them for expelling him out. The elders knew that it was his wicked half-brothers who had actually expelled Jephthah, but admitted their guilt in the actions of his half-brothers. They had either approved or failed to stop the actions of Jephthah's half-brothers. "Thrusting out" was the Old Testament equivalent of excommunication from the Church, and there was no reason why Jephthah had to be thrust out. We would imagine that it was very painful for Jephthah to leave the land of Canaan as it was the land of promise. Jephthah was still vitally interested in the history of God's Covenant dealings with Israel in this land, and we can see that in the detailed and extensive knowledge he displayed when communicating with the king of the children of Ammon (Judges 11: 12-28).

Nevertheless, Jephthah was cast out from this land and the elders came and begged him to return. That he agreed to return to help a family and a nation that rejected him is evidence of Jephthah's faith, for which Hebrews 11 puts him in remembrance. For faith bears evil patiently, does not seek to "get back", and puts the glory of God's name and the needs of God's people first. Still, Jephthah charges the elders with injustice, and rebukes them. "Did ye not hate me, and expel me out of my father's house? And why are ye come unto me now when ye are in distress?" (Judges 11:7). Jephthah also had a stipulation. In verse 9, he asked the elders if they would acknowledge him as their leader if he fought for them. What he was really saying was: "When I return, and when the Lord delivers Ammon into my hand (as He surely will!), are you going to accept me as God's chosen leader?" He did this because he recognised that the people needed a judge. Throughout this incident, Jephthah was relying on Jehovah and not on himself. He was faithful to God's Covenant people even though they were unfaithful to him.

What would we do if we were in

Jephthah's position? Would we remain faithful to God? If we were in the same position as Jephthah, the proper response would be to remain faithful to God's Covenant people and God's family. Even after two hundred years of repeated apostasy and repentance, and return and backsliding, God remained faithful to His people. We can see this faithfulness in our own lives. God always brings us back to Himself when we have sinned and gives us confession and repentance of our sins before the cross of Christ. Always look to God's faithfulness as exemplified by His judge, Jephthah.

After Jephthah returned back to the land of Canaan, he sent messengers to the king of the children of Ammon (v12). The king of Ammon asked Jephthah to return the land peacefully or expect war but Jephthah's response to them was that the land never belonged to them before, and that in fact it had originally belonged to the Amorites. Jehovah was the one who gave Jephthah and the children of Israel the land and they were living in the land as God's Covenant people. Jephthah could give that answer with confidence because he was faithful to God's Word and he knew the history of God's Word. He was able to spot the lie in the king's speech and was able to put the Word of God to use, to turn the enemies away. In this, Jephthah showed himself to be a type of Christ. Christ turned back Satan's temptations in the wilderness with the words: "It is written..." The more we know God's Word, the more we are able to fight the enemies and the stronger we are in the battle. This is why we have youth camps and church camps – they help us to learn more about God and how to effectively use the Word of God in our own battles against sin and false doctrines in ourselves and others.

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She had to prepare herself for the fact that she would never be a covenant mother in Israel, happily married, bearing and rearing children.

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Jephthah's vow gives further evidence that he was a godly man. Jephthah's vow was a godly vow, not a rash one because God was directing him. Jephthah was saying what the Spirit gave him to say. We read that "the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, and he passed over Gilead and Manasse... and Jephthah vowed a vow unto the LORD" (vv.29-30). He was ready to fight. But he knew that the outcome of the battle depended on God alone. He did not vow in doubt but he vowed in faith that God would give his people the victory. That vow was referring to a person, a human that he was giving to the Lord, not some animal or thing (v21). Jephthah knew that it was a human that would come out of the door. He even knew that it would be his daughter because he only had one child. Nevertheless, Jephthah made that vow thankfully, lovingly, and willingly because he understood the great deliverance that Jehovah was about to send. And indeed, by a great work of the Lord, Ammon was defeated. God gave Jephthah the victory in that battle.

After the war, Jephthah went back home and the first person to come out of the door was his daughter. He cried when he saw her because of the vow he had made to God (v30-31). He explained to his daughter and told her that he had made a vow to God that he would give her to Him. And what was her response? Did she complain or hate her father for doing so? No! His daughter told him that he should obey that vow and fulfil it. She said in verse 36, "My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the LORD, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth." Jephthah's daughter did not rebuke her father and ask him why he had made that vow, but she obeyed and submitted to him even though it was of

great cost to herself.

There are especially three examples of how we can apply this faithfulness of Jephthah to his vow in our own lives. The first is confession of faith. Confession of faith is a vow that we make in the presence of God. Just like Jephthah, we have to be faithful to our vow even though it may be a costly vow. We have to make many sacrifices to keep this vow. Some of these sacrifices might be a lucrative income or career. We might have to give up our worldly friends as well. Another example of a vow is marriage. Marriage is established by a vow on the part of the man and the woman that they will not forsake or leave each other unless death parts them. A marriage vow may not be broken by any kind of divorce or remarriage. The last example is baptism. When a couple brings their child for baptism, they make a vow together that they will bring up their child in the fear and admonishment of the Lord. May God help us to remain faithful to Him too.

Jephthah's daughter asked her father if she might go away for two months to "beware her virginity", and to prepare herself. She had to prepare herself for the fact that she would never be a covenant mother in Israel, happily married, bearing and rearing children. Her father would consecrate her to the Lord as a virgin until the day of her death. She would consecrate her life in a special way unto the Lord; what this special way was we are not told. But notice that her request is that she might beware her "virginity," not beware her "life." She did not consider her life ruined by her father's and her own faithfulness to his vow. After the two months, she returned and "knew no man," in fulfilment of her father's vow. And long after her death, we read that "it was a custom in Israel, that the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year" (Judges 11:39, 40). The Bible gives the alternate reading of "commemorate" for the word "lament," and "commemorate" gives a better sense; the daughters of Israel

commemorated Jephthah's daughter for her faithfulness to her father's vow.

Jephthah was faithful to his godly vow. Jephthah's vow was costly and of an enormous price to himself and his daughter. Jephthah's family line would not continue anymore in Israel. God too has made a vow to save His people from their sins. That vow was costly for God to keep because it meant giving His own only begotten and beloved Son to the bitter and shameful death of the cross to satisfy His justice against the sins of His people. "Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us" (Hebrews 6:17, 18). God saved His people from their suffering and misery in a marvellous way: through Jephthah. Jephthah pointed to Jesus Christ, who alone can save His people from their sins.

Conveying the Gospel to a Non-Believer

>> Rev. Ronald van Overloop



Rev. Ronald van Overloop is a minister of the Word at Grace Protestant Reformed Church in West Michigan, USA. In March 2011 and October 2012, he came to Singapore to assist our church in her pulpit needs.

The request for an article under this title was expressed as follows: "What would you say if you had twenty minutes or less to share the Gospel to a non-believer? Often in school and at work we have many people asking us all sorts of questions on sin, religion, and the purpose of life. Sometimes, the person seems ready to talk about it and expects us to give 'our case', but we find it hard to phrase the Gospel in a coherent manner. In the Singaporean context, these people have probably heard very little of Christ. They know that Christians believe in Christ and maybe that Christians do not approve of homosexuals; and that is about it.

Before we give a specific answer to this question, it is important that we understand clearly that there are some basic principles which the Bible gives for all witnessing. It is essential that we understand and remember these Biblical truths and hold them

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 a non-believer?”
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as pre-suppositions for communicating to others concerning the faith God has graciously given to us.

1. Scriptures must be unashamedly presented as the source of truth.
2. The supreme objective is never to save souls, but always to glorify God.
3. The communication of a genuine concern for the individual.
4. The only power that can enable a non-believer to understand and believe is the Holy Spirit – not our own brilliant presentation, convincing method, or charming personality.

First, we have an objective standard: the Bible. It is to be used to determine truth. Only the Bible provides answers. When we speak to an unbeliever, it must be communicated that what we believe is not a matter of personal opinion. It is not a matter of each of us having an opinion, and each having the right to our own opinion. Nor is it a matter of feelings or of one's past experiences. We are to let the non-believer know that the Bible is our objective standard.

In this connection, we can tell the non-believer that they do not have to believe us unless we can give proof of what we say from the Scriptures. This implies that the manner in which we communicate is with humility. We do not convey that we are right and they are wrong (as if we are better). Rather, we are believing and bowing to God's Word, and they are called to do so also. We all must bow to the God of the Bible.

When Paul addressed people with the Gospel, then he made it clear that he unashamedly used the objective standard of the Scripture. He reasoned “out of the Scriptures” (Acts 17:2,3). When Paul was before non-believers in Athens, he immediately and unashamedly confessed his faith in God as the Creator of heaven and earth who must be worshiped (Acts 17:22ff). In any communication with a non-believer, we want to set clearly before them that we are presenting them with the truth of Scripture, the standard for faith and life. Be clear about what you believe and why you believe it. We are to know the Scriptures (and confessions, which so well summarise the Scriptures) so we can communicate clearly what the Scriptures say. Speak about Christianity as factually true by citing Scripture as much as possible.

Let us be clear that our calling is not to win an argument, but to proclaim of God and His demands. A discussion may become intense, but the purpose is not to show why you are right and they are wrong. Communicate the truth of Scripture. The message is to be the offence, not us. In this connection, it is important to remember that we do not need eloquence (1 Cor. 2:1). But God does require a genuine desire and effort to communicate the truth of God's Word concerning Him and His Christ. Our calling is only to present the truth. In our minds, we ought to have the truth of Scripture prioritised – some truths are more important and pressing than other truths when first bringing the Gospel. It is good to follow the priorities set forth in our confessions. Always be aware of the warning to avoid foolish questions and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law, for they are unprofitable” (Titus 3:9; cf. I Tim. 1:4-7; II Tim. 2:16).

Second, the supreme objective of proper conveyance of the Gospel to a non-believer is the glory of God. The object is not to save a soul. It is not to add members to our congregation.

And, it is definitely not to demonstrate that I am right or better. When His Word is set forth as the only standard for what must be believed by all men, then God is glorified. When His Word is set forth as the only standard for how all men must conduct their lives and conform themselves to Him and His standard, then God is glorified.

The clear message to be brought to non-believers is that God is to be feared, given glory and worshipped. “Fear God, and give glory to Him; for the hour of His judgment is come: and worship Him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters” (Rev. 14:7). God is worthy of glory, honour, and power, for He created and sustains all things according to His good pleasure (Rev. 4:11). The focus must be on God and His worthiness; and on Jesus as the evidence of God's love for His people. We must always be careful that we do not emphasize ourselves and how Christianity impacts our lives. Non-believers must be told of their call to glorify their Creator!

Third, there must be a genuine concern for the spiritual well-being of the non-believer. We may not want to answer the questions of a non-believer for many different reasons. However, our Saviour and Lord does not give us a choice. He gives us a command not only concerning the duty to give an answer, but He also commands us concerning the attitude we are to have in answering: “love”. The love required is a genuine concern for the individual's spiritual well-being, which love is to be a reflection of and an extension of our love for the Lord our God. This brings glory to God.

Our Saviour gives us the duty to love the Lord our God with our all, and to love our neighbour as ourselves. My neighbour is anyone God puts in my path. Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan instructs every believer in God's Word to see that a non-believer is in a spiritual condition more critical than the physical condition of the

man found by the Samaritan (Luke 10:29ff). Never are we excused from the commandment to love our God and our neighbour. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Matt. 22:37ff). Consider the fact that by exhibiting a genuine concern for them, we will be evidencing to them what we believe they must do: lovingly obey the God of the Scriptures.

A part of this love for the neighbour is that we see each person who questions us as one who must be dealt with as an individual object of concern – not as a case, not as a statistic, and not as someone to be defeated. This genuine concern for the spiritual well-being of the individual person to whom we are speaking must take them into consideration. Remember that Jesus proclaimed the same Gospel in different ways to different people. He knew His audience and spoke accordingly: using parables with some people and expounding all things to His disciples (Mark 4:33,34). Paul communicated the same Gospel differently to the Gentiles (Acts 17:22-31) than to the Jews (Acts 13:16-41). “Walk in wisdom toward them that without.” “Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man” (Col. 4:5,6). “We are in no wise to conduct ourselves towards them with haughtiness, as if we had made ourselves to differ” (Canons III,IV – 15).

Fourth, we must realize that the only power that can do the work of

converting a soul is the Holy Spirit. We cannot! Along with our proclaiming and talking, there must be constant praying. God alone is able to give us the ability to communicate, to open a heart (Acts 16:14), and to add to the church (Acts 2:47), by His Spirit (Zech. 4:6) and Word (Isa. 55:10ff). We are to be praying to Him, Who alone is able to bring about changes of heart, before we talk to the non-believer, while we are talking with them, and after we talk with them. With regard to those “who have not yet been called, it is our duty to pray for them to God, who calls the things that are not, as if they were” (Canons of Dort, III,IV – 15).

When we confess complete dependence on the Spirit, then we will patiently trust the Lord to supply the increase (1 Cor. 3:6). This knowledge keeps us from pushing the truth down one’s throat and from thinking that a response must be immediate. Our responsibility is not “success” but faithfulness (1 Cor. 4:2). We can only sow, we cannot make the seeds to sprout or grow (Mark 4:26-29). And sowing, we must with patience wait on Him Who alone is able.

Specifically, the message which must be brought to those who are apparently non-believers is that there is a God Who must be worshiped, thanked and obeyed. The focus must be on God and His worthiness. And Jesus is to be shown as the evidence of God’s love for His people.

In this connection, consider carefully how Paul addressed the unbelieving

crowd in Athens (Acts 17:22ff). He began by speaking of God as the Creator and Sustainer of all (v24,26,28). He is a Spirit, to be worshipped (v25), Who is unlike all other gods. Thus superstitions (v22) and physical worship (v29) is to be rejected. All men are called to repent (v30). Because an historical Adam (our first father and representative head) plunged the human race into sin and death through his wilful rebellion against his Creator, no one is innocent before God. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). Everyone is born to die, for a corrupt stock produces a corrupt offspring (Heb. 9:27). Total depravity with the loss of all original righteousness means the total inability to come to God if left to ourselves (John 6:65). The many difficult problems faced by the human race come because of human sinfulness. There will be a day of judgment, conducted by the resurrected Jesus (2 Cor. 5:12), in which judgment all men will give an account of all the things they did in their lifetime (Rom. 14:12).

Faith in Jesus Christ as God’s only begotten Son is necessary. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved and thy house” (Acts 16:31). Those who believe shall not be condemned but have everlasting life. He that believes not is condemned already, because he does not believe in the name of the only begotten Son of God (John 3:16-18,36).

May God bless the witness and testimony we give!



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...We see each person who questions us as one who must be dealt with as an individual object of concern – not as a case, not as a statistic, and not as someone to be defeated.

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Lessons from the History of the Beloved Church of Jesus Christ Now Among Us

>> Rev. Arie den Hartog



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I was asked to write a short article about the early history of CERC. In the course of working on this article, I decided that it might be beneficial to write more than one article. This article is only the first chapter, so to speak, of this history. I hope additional chapters will be written, either by myself or others who were directly part of this history.

We had the great privilege of being part of the early years of this history during our years as missionary in Singapore. These years were some of the most exciting and blessed years of our almost forty years in the Gospel ministry. This does not mean that there were not also sorrows and trials for us personally. We ourselves were kept by the Lord and rewarded by His continued blessing and joy in our lives and ministry and also in the life of our home and family.

It is important that the members of the church remember their own history. In the case of the true church of Jesus Christ, this history is the blessed account of the leading hand and the

preserving grace of God of His chosen and beloved people. This history involved numerous struggles and battles. As much as we might want to change parts of this history, it is simply impossible to maintain the truth of God without being willing to be engaged in a spiritual warfare and many struggles. Even the history of the church recounted in the Bible is full of such great battles. None of us would choose these battles ourselves just because we have some sort of unholy delight in them. There are often painful aspects of these struggles. Sometimes brethren who have been with the church for a long time leave. Friendships are greatly strained. In some cases, years of walking together and enjoying fellowship come to a sad end. Some even return to the darkness of errors from which they were, by God's grace, once delivered. God is the judge.

Often it is the case that only after we have gone through the struggles that we can see more clearly the leading and guiding hand of the Lord in the history of the church. Also then we can more deeply appreciate how the truth of the Word of God was preserved among us even in the way of these struggles. The faith of those who endure these struggles is tested and proven to be truly of God. The glory of the truth of God often shines in the midst of the battles for this truth; these battles are fought by those who love this truth and are devoted to it and are courageous in defending it.

The true church can be distinguished by the truth of God and of Jesus Christ which finally she holds to, continues

faithfully to preach, and to confess, and to live by. This they must do in this ungodly world. God uses persons, men and women in history, and gives them the knowledge and courage to stand, and the zeal and devotion to bring honour and glory to His name. These men and women properly have a place of honour and glory in the sight of God. However, the truth of God and the blessed preservation of the church is greater than any particular honour and glory of a man or woman. The history of the true church is all about God's faithfulness and the triumph and revelation of His glorious truth in His church. In this truth, God's people find their joy, comfort, and purpose for every part of their life. Those who are blessed with being part and parcel to this history are blessed above all peoples of the world. Great is the salvation of the members of the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. Great is the final, glorious, and heavenly hope of His true church and her exceedingly blessed members.

We came to Singapore before the Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore was even instituted as a church. There was already however, the existence of a living plant or, using the Biblical figure, the living body of Christ among God's redeemed saints chosen by God's grace for a very high calling in life. The truth of Jesus Christ was planted in the hearts of those who would in time become members of the instituted church that would be established.

ERCS had its beginning as a Bible study group in a secondary school called Monk's Hill. One would perhaps not

imagine that the church would have such a beginning. One would imagine that it would have its beginning with mature and long time Christians, perhaps with some learned theologians who had for a long time studied the doctrine of God as theologians do.

However, often, the church, in God's amazing providence, begins with simple and ordinary Christians and in the case of ERCS, with those who were recent converts and still very young in their faith. God raises up leaders for the benefit of giving guidance and establishing and strengthening these new Christians in faith to be long time members of His church. This is a very important aspect of the history of the church and will serve to strengthen the church for her ongoing spiritual battle and defense of the glorious truth in this ungodly world in spite of the departure and faithlessness of short term temporary members of the church.

God delivered these young Christians from the darkness and hopelessness of heathen religion to give to them the blessed and glorious light and hope and salvation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Through His Spirit He filled them with holy zeal, joy, and excitement. They delighted in the fellowship of the truth of the Gospel continually, just like the early church in the days of the apostles.

God raised up several young leaders of the original bible study group, among whom was the late Pastor Lau Chin Kwee whom God recently took home to glory and the blessed eternal reward of His grace and salvation. Lau Chin Kwee, who was himself a student at that time, was given the gifts to be a teacher and a leader in the Bible study group. The brilliance and vibrancy of the first love for the Lord of this group attracted many others to join in just a few years.

In the course of the early history of this group, it adopted the name Gospel Literature and Tracts Society (GLTS). The purpose of this group in the beginning was not to begin a new

“ .. often, the church, in God's amazing providence, begins with simple and ordinary Christians... ”

church. Its purpose was simply to reach out to other young people and to serve by spreading the truth of the Gospel which God had given to them. One of the means used to spread the truth was the distribution of tracts and literature. A room was offered at the Gilstead Life Bible Presbyterian Church for the holding of fellowship meetings.

Some very significant events took place. Looking back, we can now with amazement realise God's wonderful providence. No one knew at that time where these events would lead the youthful saints of GLTS.

A delegation of ministers and brethren from the Protestant Reformed Churches in America stopped by Singapore. The Bible study group invited members of this delegation to give a series of speeches about the doctrines of the Reformed faith. It would take far too much time and space to tell all the details of the persons and meetings that were held at Life Church. However these events brought about a very distinctive work in the hearts of the leaders of the Bible society then known as GLTS. There was a more conscious movement of the leaders to study what we love to call the Reformed Faith. By the terminology “Reformed Faith” we mean the faith God restored and established in His church through the mighty events of the Protestant Reformation of the 16th Century. Soon after the Reformation, this faith was embodied in clear and distinct statements of faith called creeds. The major creeds where these doctrines have, in the history of the Reformed Churches, been outlined are

the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms, and the Three Forms of Unity – the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort. The Three Forms of Unity are the confessions of ERCS. But these confessions are also the confessions of a multitude of Reformed Churches throughout the world. The significance of these confessions is that they express in summary form what these churches believe to be the central and foundational truths of the Gospel. These truths are new and exciting to those who hear and believe them for the first time. But they are also the old and tried truths of the Gospel which have from the time of the apostles been the foundation on which the church has stood. They are in summary the unchanging truths of God found all through the Word of God and infallibly recorded in the Bible.

Another truth which God led the members of the GLTS to understand already in its early history was the truth that the church is not based on the opinions of one or a few men as gifted as they may be in themselves. The church is usually founded on the truth that she learns by a group of leaders. God uses these to guide and establish others in the faith. Thank God for the men He used for the original beginning of His church which today is called CERC.

In conclusion, the true church today is founded on the truth first given to the apostles of our Lord and passed down to succeeding generations and given to groups of saints in all different places of the world. The amazing thing is that this truth is the same from age to age. It never changes. It can be proven from church history that the true church through the ages of time and in every place is founded upon the one unchanging truth of Jesus Christ. This truth can never be overthrown. This truth makes the church from the beginning of the world, and in every nation, one church – the church that glorifies God and will finally be exalted to be with Him in glory forever.

THE BENEFITS OF THE COVENANT

>> Prof. Hanko



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

Introduction

In the last issue of Salt Shakers I made the point that the Reformed faith includes the doctrine of God's everlasting Covenant of grace. The doctrine of the Covenant is an important part of the Three Forms of Unity: the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort, although the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort especially mention and develop the doctrine of the Covenant. Our confessions define for us what is Reformed.

But our Liturgical Forms also teach this doctrine of the Covenant, especially the Form for the Administration of Holy Baptism. So, our liturgical forms are also part of our confessional heritage. It is especially the Baptism Form, perhaps our oldest Form, that is also, at least in my judgment, the most beautiful. All Reformed ministers cherish that Form and, I have no doubt, many can nearly recite it from memory. It teaches

the doctrine of the Covenant in all its beauty.

Its Importance for a Godly Life

But the doctrine of the Covenant is not mere cold doctrine that does not touch on our life. In fact, it really enlightens and underscores with emphasis what we are called by God to do as his Covenant people. I want to take a brief look at this.

The most basic idea of the Covenant is fellowship. God has fellowship with his people. Now, if you think about it, what is the most important ingredient of fellowship? I think that you will see immediately that this most important part of fellowship is speech: the ability to talk together. A man cannot have fellowship with a mouse or a tree, for neither a mouse nor a tree can talk. If husband and wife have fellowship within the bonds of marriage, they talk together. Try to imagine a husband and wife living together and never talking to each other! It is impossible.

Well, you see, Covenant fellowship with God is a holy conversation between God and His people. They talk together! The eternal and infinite God who is Creator of heaven and earth engages in conversation with us. Enoch walked with God and they talked together. Noah walked with God and God and Noah talked together. One would almost say, "But that's impossible! Can a grown man speak with a spider? And, if that is not bad enough, can a holy God who hates sin have intimate and friendly conversation with a terrible sinner?" Yet, it is true. God comes down to us

in all His majesty and power and makes us able to talk with Him – and He talks with us. He does not get angry at us – not too often anyway, for His anger lasts but a moment, the prophet says; but His favour lasts all our days. He does not come down to us sternly and with the purposes of reprimanding us fiercely – "chiding us" Psalm 103 says. James says to us that God gives wisdom to all who ask Him for wisdom, and He does so "upbraiding us not", that is, without telling us that we have sinned so much we do not deserve to receive that for which we ask.

He comes to us with love, mercy, and grace, for He comes to us when He sends His only beloved Son into the world to save us. (It is interesting and important to remember here that Christ is also called in Scripture, "the logos", that is, "the Word". Christ is God's speech to us concerning what He is willing to do for us in order to save us. How amazing!)

In His speech to us, God tells us all about himself: how glorious He is and how blessed, but He also tells us what He has planned to do for our salvation, what He is doing now to save us, and what He will do for us in the future. Let us not forget, He also tells us how we must act in the world as His Covenant friends. The speech of God comes to us through the Bible. That is why meditation on the Scriptures is a necessary part of our devotions – which are really fellowship time with God.

And we speak to Him! We speak to Him in church on Sunday, when we pray and sing, and even at the very

beginning of our worship when we say, “Our help is in the name of Jehovah who hath made heaven and earth.” We speak to Him every time we pray, even when in our prayers we pour out all our sorrows and troubles to our Covenant God. We speak to Him when we confess our sins and tell Him how sorry we are for what we have done to Him. In fact, the more we walk in conscious dependence on Him and the more we see His hand in everything He does, the more we really talk with Him in the life we live: study, housework, working at our place of employment, talking to our fellow-saints or to the wicked whom we come to know, or, whatever we are doing. (Did you ever notice that the word “conversation” in Scripture means “entire walk of life?”)

And, what seems to be the most important of all is that our holy conversation in the world is our way of saying thanks to Him who does such wonderful things for us.

All this is lost when we talk about a conditional covenant. Then everything we do is a “condition” to entering into and staying in God’s covenant. What we do and say about God is before we enter into God’s covenant. I cannot help it: If I have to do all these things before being in God’s covenant, I will never enter. If I have to speak to God before He will speak to me of His love... If I have to be obedient before the salvation He has for me can be mine, then... Thank God that is not true!

But when our speech and life are the fruits of God’s work of establishing His Covenant with us and our way of saying “Thanks” to God for such a great miracle, then Covenant life with God is the most precious treasure we possess!

Implications for Marriage

When the Bible wants us to have some idea of how rich and wonderful fellowship with God is, then it points us to marriage. Marriage here in the world tells us something about marriage to God and to Christ. All the intimacies and blessedness of a loving husband and wife living together are pictured in the Covenant we have with God and Christ – only our marriages are rather dim, like a picture taken by a poor photographer and with a very cheap camera. God’s Covenant with us is more intimate, more thrilling, more blessed, more joyful than our marriages, even when we are newly married.



If our marriages are pictures of God’s Covenant to a young man and a young woman, they would surely like to make their marriages as much like God’s Covenant as they can. And then the word “love” becomes important. Even the word “love” means fellowship. Paul calls love “a bond of perfection”. A bond is fellowship.

Then divorce does not break the marriage bond, for God’s relation to His people cannot be broken. God establishes an “everlasting” Covenant with His people. And if divorce cannot break the marriage bond, then remarriage is adultery.

But if God’s covenant is conditional, so is marriage based on conditions. And if our marriages were based on conditions, they would not last long.

Because God’s Covenant with us is unconditional, and He always receives us back into Covenant fellowship when we confess our sins, then when a marriage partner commits adultery, there is the possibility and hope of reconciliation. The marriage bond is not broken.

A godly and happy marriage makes for a godly and happy family. And a godly and happy family makes for a happy home. And a happy home is the foundation of all society. As a man once said, “The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.” We may add: Happy covenant families make for a sound and loving congregation.

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 The hand that
 rocks the
 cradle rules
 the world.
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Public Confession of Faith (Part 1)

>> Aaron Lim



Aaron Lim is a confessing young adult in CERC.

“Confession of faith is a privilege of the highest order, a privilege of grace.” – Prof. Ronald Cammenga

Introduction

Reformed churches have, in their history, maintained the good practice of public confession of faith. This practice is specially extended to covenant seed, the children of believers. Ordinarily, they are the ones who have been born, baptised, and raised in a covenant home and church. When they arrive at their years of discretion, they decide to make confession of faith. The elders of the congregation carefully interview these young people, and then approve them to be recognised as mature members of the local church. Accordingly, public confession of faith marks the transition of immature members of the church to mature members.

Grateful praise fills the hearts of covenant parents who witness this confession of their covenant seed. God has used their faithful instruction, along with the church's, to develop them spiritually in the ways of truth. This public confession marks the fruit of their tireless labour. For many years

they have trained up their children in the way that they should go (Prov 22:6). Witnessing their young people's mature acknowledgement that they will not depart from this path brings tears of joy to their hearts. Few blessings can compare to this great blessing of God's covenant faithfulness to believers and their seed. These young people confess with conviction before God and his church, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2 Tim 1:12). The God of my parents is MY God. The God of this church is MY God.

Three questions are posed to the young person when he makes public confession of faith:

1. Do you acknowledge the doctrine contained in the Old and New Testaments and in the Articles of the Christian faith and taught here in this Christian church to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation?
2. Have you resolved by the grace of God to adhere to this doctrine; to reject all heresies repugnant thereto; and to lead a new, godly life?
3. Will you submit to church government, and in case you should become delinquent (which may God graciously forbid), to church discipline?

The first question concerns doctrine, the second life, and the third church government. There is an inseparable connection among these three concepts. Doctrine, life, and church government relate to one another intimately. In a sense, the second and

third questions flow from the first. The young person confesses that the doctrine found in the Scriptures, the Confessions, and the church is the true and complete doctrine of salvation. He patterns his walk in life according to that doctrine. And the church government that is exercised over him is based upon that doctrine. Without the true and complete doctrine of salvation, the other two aspects collapse. In the next few articles, the three questions listed in the form will be treated more thoroughly.

Our Reformed fathers at the Synod of Dordt in 1618-19 drew up these questions. They were deeply concerned about guarding the Lord's table. They were mindful of the Lord's command to discern his body when believers came to the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:27-28). Only mature members can be admitted to the Lord's Supper. Therefore, public confession of faith was and is a means by which the elders safeguard the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. This Reformed tradition has been passed on to us. We will be faithful to keep it.

Misconceptions

There are some misconceptions of this practice today. Many suppose that public confession of faith is similar to a graduation ceremony. The young person is viewed to have graduated from catechism or pre-confession classes. Family and friends flock to attend this ceremony to celebrate with the young person. This is a wrong view. Public confession of faith is not a graduation ceremony. It is not a one-time event to be celebrated and forgotten.

“ On the contrary, public confession of faith marks the beginning of a mature confession that will by God’s grace endure till the end of his life. The young person is making a vow before God and his church. It is a solemn ceremony. ”

Another misconception involves reducing this confession to a mere declaration that one is a Christian. This view is wrong too. Public confession of faith is more than that. It carries a sacred responsibility. By this confession the young person vows to commit his life to Christ and to walk as His disciple. He promises to uphold the truth of God in all its purity and to reject everything contrary thereto. Young people making this confession are mindful of the persecutions that their Reformed fathers suffered. They would “offer their backs to stripes, their tongues to knives, their mouths to gags, and their whole bodies to fire, rather than deny the truth of God’s Word”. This is the faith that their spiritual fathers confessed and walked in, and by their confession they commit themselves to walk in their footsteps.

Confess What?

In public confession of faith, the young person confesses his faith in Jesus Christ. He confesses, in the stirring words of the Heidelberg Catechism, that he is not his own, but belongs to his faithful Savior Jesus Christ (LD 1,Q1). He belongs to Him, and will

henceforth live unto Him for the rest of his life. He confesses that that he holds for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word (LD 7, Q21). He confesses that it is necessary for him to believe all things promised us in the gospel (LD 7, Q22). He confesses that he is resolved to live according to the doctrine of Holy Scripture, and to reject with all his heart whatsoever does not agree with this infallible rule (Belgic Confession, Art 7).

The public character of this confession is underscored in this ceremony. The young person makes his confession before the entire congregation. By his public declaration he makes himself known as a disciple of Jesus Christ. This declaration puts him in a vulnerable position. Jesus himself warned that the world will hate his disciples because it hated him (Jn 15:18). Since he is our covenant Head, the body of believers which is joined to him by faith will suffer the persecution that he did. They will be persecuted for righteousness’ sake (Matt 5:10). Men shall revile them, persecute them, and say all manner of evil against them for his sake (Matt 5:11). Nevertheless, they bear patiently in their affliction, knowing that nothing shall separate them from the love of their faithful God and Father (LD 10, Q28).

This confession involves warfare. This confession identifies the young person as a soldier in Christ’s army. The Reformed theologian Abraham Kuyper writes, “To confess is to ‘show one’s colours’ for one’s King, to be loyal to Jesus, to allow oneself to be incorporated into Christ’s battalion, and in that way to be active for His majesty and Kingdom”. As a soldier, he fights for the cause of God’s covenant. He fights against all that oppose that covenant of friendship between Jehovah and his people.

God demands our confession of him. Just as a wife demands her husband’s confession of his love for her, so does God demand the believer’s confession

of his love for him. Jesus Christ is the faithful bridegroom who demands his wife’s faithful confession of her love for Him. Together in the bond of marriage, they express mutual love for each other. By our confession God is glorified and praised. Jesus promised that “whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven” (Matt 10:32).

Sacred Vow

Public confession of faith is a sacred vow. The young person vows before God and his church that he will be faithful to him throughout the rest of his life. This vow is no less serious than the vow a husband makes to his wife in marriage. He vows to be faithful to her for life – “till death do us part”. God takes our vows seriously.

“ When thou shalt vow a vow unto the LORD thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it: for the LORD thy God will surely require it of thee (Deut 23:21). ”

The young person making confession of faith considers it to be a great privilege and a sacred responsibility to confess his faith. He bows in humility before the great God of salvation who has chosen him, wretched sinner, to be his child. Gratefully, he takes up the cross, and confesses him who is his God.

Boldly, courageously, and with conviction, he confesses his God.

Up next, an examination of the doctrine which the young person confesses.

The Assurance That Scripture Is God's Word

(Belgic Confession 5)

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Belgic Confession 5: From Whence the Holy Scriptures Derive Their Dignity and Authority

We receive all these books, and these only, as holy and canonical, for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith; believing, without any doubt, all things contained in them, not so much because the church receives and approves them as such, but more especially because the Holy Ghost witnesseth in our hearts that they are from God, whereof they carry the evidence in themselves. For the very blind are able to perceive that the things foretold in them are fulfilling.

Belgic Confession 5 addresses this issue: How do we know that the 66 books of the Bible are the Word of God? How do you know personally? What biblical and theological arguments would you use? This was one of the key issues at the time of the sixteenth-century Reformation. The Roman church claimed that people know the Scriptures to be the Word of God simply because Rome says so! Thus the Roman church puts itself above Holy Scripture!

If you read *Belgic Confession 5* carefully, you will see that our creed mentions three things in connection with our knowing the Bible as the Word of God: the church, the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures themselves. This does not mean that there are three separate grounds for knowing that the Bible is God's Word. Rather, there is essentially one ground with three aspects.

Scripture

Scripture itself is the objective ground for our knowledge that it is God's Word. The 66 books of the Bible claim to be God's Word; many times we read, "Thus saith the Lord." This is no false or idle assertion, for they "carry the evidence [that they are divinely inspired] in themselves."

Westminster Confession I:5 mentions some of the ways in which Scripture "doth abundantly evidence itself to be the word of God:" "the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof."

We could develop these things further by speaking at length of the Bible's fulfilled prophecies, the unity of Scripture (despite its having over forty penmen in three continents over 1,600 years!), its profound doctrines (such as the Holy Trinity, double predestination, the incarnation and cross of Christ, and justification by faith alone), etc. The Word of God far excels all of man's religions and

literature.

The last sentence of *Belgic Confession 5*, "For the very blind are able to perceive that the things foretold in them are fulfilling," refers specifically to biblical predictive prophecy. Of course, there are various subjects of prophecy. For example, as regards the history of Israel, its apostasy, captivity in Babylon and return were predicted. Christ's virgin birth (Isa. 7:14), crucifixion (Ps. 22; Isa. 53), resurrection (Ps. 16:10-11), session at God's right hand (Ps. 110:1) and pouring out the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28-32) were prophesied. The New Testament age was predicted as that of the salvation of a largely Gentile church, with the gospel going out to the four corners of the world (Matt. 24:14). The signs of the times are presented in Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21, II Thessalonians 2, the book of Revelation, etc., as including earthquakes, famines, wars and rumours of wars, Christ's gathering of His church by the Word, apostasy, persecution and the development of a one-world Antichristian government. Of these three main subjects of prophecy (the history of Israel, Jesus Christ and the New Testament age), it is the New Testament age that is referred to at the end of *Belgic Confession 5*. This striking reference to the signs of the times adds something to *Belgic Confession 37*, the only article in our *Belgic Confession* on eschatology.

The "very blind" are unbelievers who, perceiving "that the things foretold in them [i.e., the Scriptures] are fulfilling," are left "without excuse" (Rom. 1:20; *Belgic Confession 2*). However, because

we are fallen, if Scripture's testimony to itself were the only witness that the Bible is the Word of God, even the elect would not believe (to speak as a fool for a moment).

Holy Spirit

Belgic Confession 5 states, "the Holy Ghost witnesseth in our hearts, that they [i.e., the Scriptures] are from God." If the Bible itself is the objective testimony (outside of us), the Holy Spirit is the subjective testimony (in our hearts). The external testimony of the Spirit is the Bible, which He inspired; the internal testimony of the Spirit is illumination, the Spirit's giving us to understand and believe the external testimony of Scripture.

Remember that the Holy Ghost is the great agent of assurance. He gives the believer certainty and confidence, for example, that he or she is a child of God (the assurance of salvation), that Jesus is the Christ and that the Bible is God's Word.

I John is the great epistle on assurance. In I John 5, we read of the assurance of salvation (v. 13) and the assurance of answered prayer (vv. 14-15). I John 2 refers to the believer's unction or anointing by the Holy Ghost (vv. 20, 27), which gives us assurance that the Bible is God's Word (vv. 20-21, 27), that Jesus is the Christ (vv. 21-23) and that we are saved (vv. 24-29). How true it is that "it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth" (5:6)!

How does the Spirit assure us that the Bible is God's Word? The Spirit does not do this without or apart from Scripture, as if God simply whispered in our ears (the error of mysticism). The Spirit testifies that the Bible is God's Word through Scripture, that is, by means of the preaching and reading of the Word, and by our discussing and meditating upon it.

Church

Moreover, the Spirit assures us that the Bible is God's Word not without

or apart from the church (the error of individualism), but in living connection with the church. The Spirit witnesses to the inspiration of Scripture through the church, that is, the true church (not the false church), in fellowship with the universal church of all ages. If Scripture is the objective ground and the Spirit the subjective ground, the church is the instrumental means by which we are graciously convinced that the Bible is God's Word.

Belgic Confession 5 states that we believe the inspiration of the 66 canonical books "not so much because the church receives and approves them as such." The testimony of the church is not the main thing, though sadly there are many who make too much of it (e.g., the Romanists). There are others who make too little of it, by well nigh discounting the church's witness (e.g., the Anabaptists).

The church introduces us to the Bible and proclaims that Scripture is the very Word of God. I Timothy 3:15 calls the church "the pillar and ground of the truth," for it upholds, preaches and defends the truth of Holy Writ in the world. Paul argues in Romans 10:14-15 that people cannot hear Christ without a preacher and that they will not come into contact with a preacher unless Christ sends such through His church. This is what Augustine was getting at in his oft-quoted remark that he would not have believed the gospel if it had not been for the church, for the church with its preaching is the necessary instrument or means by which God brings His elect from the kingdom of darkness to the light of salvation.

We could, perhaps, illustrate this by referring to two biblical scenes. First, the church is like John the Baptist pointing to the Christ revealed in the Holy Scriptures. Second, the individual believer is like the Samaritans to whom the woman at the well witnessed and who then heard Jesus directly. Their

response was: "Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world" (John 4:42). The church proclaims Jesus as the incarnate Word according to the written Word, but the believer's faith in the truth is not based on the church's say-so but on the certainty of the Word of God's own witness blessed to his or her heart by the Spirit.

Conclusion

Do you now see the relationship between the three factors? The objective ground for believing that the Bible is God's Word is Scripture itself. The subjective ground which enables us to receive this truth is the Holy Spirit and His powerful work in our hearts. The instrumental means is the church, for the Spirit empowers the church's preaching and teaching of the Word for the salvation and assurance of the elect.

Westminster Confession I:5 teaches the same truth as *Belgic Confession* 5:

We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverend esteem of the holy scripture, and the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the word of God; yet notwithstanding our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts.

In this way, we know and are utterly convinced, first, of the *canon* of Scripture. After listing the 66 biblical books in *Belgic Confession* 4, article 5

begins, “We receive all these books, and these only, as ... canonical.”

Second, by the external and internal witness of the Spirit through the church, we are likewise assured of the *holiness* of Scripture. “We receive all these books, and these only, as holy,” for the God who inspired them is holy. These books are set apart from all other books, even Christian books which explain and apply the Bible.

Similarly, it is in this way that we are certain, third, of the *inerrancy* of

Scripture, “believing without any doubt, all things contained in them.”

Fourth, we are likewise convinced of the *authority* of Scripture “for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith.” As the basis and ground of our faith, the authoritative Word guides and directs us, and sustains and strengthens us.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Express in your own words how you know that the Bible is the Word of God. (Be sure to include all the three factors.)

2. Read Calvin’s *Institutes* 1.7. How has this helped you further grasp this important truth?

3. How does the truth of *Belgic Confession* 5 add to your understanding of the blessed ministry of the Holy Spirit?

4. How would sinfully absenting oneself from church adversely affect one’s assurance that the Bible is God’s Word?

Reflections on RDC 2012

>> Milton Ho



Milton Ho is a confessing young adult in CERC.

We, as members of Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church, confess to be “Reformed”, and thus it is not a surprise that the Reformation Day Conference is of great importance to us. In 2012, we were thankful to God to have Professor David Engelsma, from the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, with us to deliver four messages about the victorious truth of God expressed in the conference theme: *His Church Shall Stand!*

Prof. Engelsma began the series of messages by explaining what the Reformed Church is and where it can be found. Quoting Ephesians 5:22-23, he reminded us that a “reformed” church does not refer to a particular denomination, but rather, the churches which are the spiritual heirs of the 16th century Reformation – spiritual descendants who confess the doctrines of salvation by grace, and grace alone. This church consists

of, in the words of the great reformer Martin Luther, “holy believers and sheep who hear the voice of their Shepherd” – those who are called out of this wicked world by God Himself.

However, the sheep of God encounter many wolves that seek to destroy them. These wolves come in the form of teachers of false doctrines and wicked elders who do not defend the truth but instead seek to propagate lies in the church. Threats can also come from members of the physical church who belittle the preaching of God’s Word each Lord’s Day, and those who introduce worldliness into covenant homes and the organic life of the church. Such are part of the inescapable struggle of the true church to stand in this world – a topic which Prof. Engelsma dealt with in his second speech.

Struggle comes to all true churches

“ To dedicate one’s life to uphold, defend and live out the truth is to be dedicated to Christ and His glory. Do you and I love the Truth? ”

and all its members. Because Satan, his host, and the wicked world have been defeated by Christ at the cross, they now focus their attack and hatred at God's church. Satan and his ranks of demons know that their time is short before their final destruction in the day of Jesus Christ. A final push culminating in the rise of the antichrist has been launched. Temptations and the lies of the devil are the fiery darts which are fired at the church. In this never ending barrage, the bride of Christ bleeds from her heel, leaving a trail of blood as she limps through the ages. No true church of Jesus Christ can escape from this struggle. Every man, woman, and child of God is called to be armed and fight. But even though the church bleeds, this wound is not fatal. The fatal wound that was inflicted was not on us but on the head of the great deceiver. Satan's head is crushed. All the soldiers of Jehovah know the outcome of this war – complete and absolute victory in Jesus Christ! Till that day when we exchange our battle-beaten helmet for the crown of life, every true church and every member will struggle and fight with the life of Christ flowing in us through faith. Are we comfortable in our earthly comforts? Or are we fighting and struggling spiritually? *Phil 3:14 – "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus"*.

Perhaps the most harrowing thought that comes to mind when one comes face to face with heresies in the church would be for the church to teach that salvation is conditional. That means that salvation is not solely dependent on the sovereign grace of God. They deny that God elected His people in love in Jesus Christ before the foundations of the world out of only sovereign grace. Such dangerous heresies that teach a salvation that is dependent or partly dependent on man's decision for Christ or on his good works directly oppose the Word of God (Rom 9:16). These doctrines

are dangerous and they take away God's glory and His sovereignty. They reduce God to be at the mercy of man's decision in order to effectively save him. These doctrines also breed pride and rob the child of God of the assurance of his salvation. For one day he may be doing well and deciding to accept Christ, and the next day he may not. Lacking the full assurance of his salvation, he soon sinks deep into doubt and despair.

Many churches no longer proclaim God's truths of His sovereignty and election. Though believing in this truth, its members choose to keep as quiet as possible about this God-glorifying doctrine. This attitude of abandoning the love for God's truth is prophesied in 2 Thessalonians 2:10 – "they received not the **love of the truth**, that they might be saved" (Emphasis mine). As true churches, Prof. Engelsma exhorted us in his third speech to love the truth. We ought to love it enough to study it diligently, preach it, and proclaim it distinctively. Do our church and her members proclaim God's sovereign grace boldly? Do we diligently study the doctrines of Christ? Heresies spring out and take root in a church when professing Christians do not love the truth. When the love for God's truth grows cold and is then replaced by the love for compromise, false peace, and alliance with the world, the ground quickly becomes fertile for deadly heresies and strivings to spring up and choke the life of the church. 2 Thessalonians 2:10 is a warning that the love of the truth is of life-and-death importance – those who do not love the truth will perish! To dedicate one's life to uphold, defend and live out the truth is to be dedicated to Christ and His glory. Do you and do I love the Truth? God gives this love of the Truth only to His elect. He makes them love His truth deeply and hate all false doctrines and lies. There is no natural love of the Truth to be found in ourselves. We must fly to God for

grace in this matter.

So what is "the Truth" which the Bible speaks of? 2 Thessalonians 2 points out that the truth can be known and is known by the true people of God. This is unlike what sceptics like Pilate would say – "What is truth?" (John 18:38) That question revealed his unbelief and the false idea that absolute truth is unknowable to man. Knowing the Truth is not just a natural emotion, or a religious feeling or conviction; and neither is it merely a "personal relationship" with God. But it is a Biblical doctrine – knowing the Truth is knowing Jesus Christ. The Reformation agreed with the apostle Paul that the truth is the teaching of what one believes with the mind and the heart. It is the Biblical teaching of the good news of salvation from sin and death through Jesus Christ alone, the Lord of the church which is saved by Him (2 Thess 2:14). The truth is the good news of the gospel! It makes known to us the triune living God. The truth comes from God, is about God, and is founded upon God.

In his fourth speech, titled "*The Standing of the PRC, CERC (and Other Reformed Churches) in the Faith and Practice*", Prof. Engelsma explained that the distinctives of the Reformed Church are the creeds we hold on to. These creeds, which we call the Three Forms of Unity (the Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, and Canons of Dordt), bind the Reformed church to the Bible, and maintain and preserve the truths of the Bible. As such, this standing of the PRC, CERC, and other Reformed churches compels us to formulate the doctrines we confess according to the creeds, to use the creeds to check the content of our teaching and preaching, shape our public worship by the creeds, and use the creeds to teach our children and young people.

Prof. Engelsma went on to explain that the creeds are not sectarian. This means that not only certain doctrines

are harped on and preached, but because the creeds are entirely biblical, one has to expound on the entire vast and comprehensive body of truth in a simplified and organised form.

A reason why the creeds are important to Reformed churches is that they aid us in the defense against false doctrine. One key example is how the creeds, when loved, help defend the church against the teaching of the false church that man possesses a free will. It is the heresy that each sinner can make a choice for himself to accept the offer of Christ and salvation from a god who loves every human being, desiring to save every human being without exception. Thus, the sinner makes a “decision for Christ” independent of the sovereign grace of God. In this case, the sinner’s salvation depends on his own acceptance of the offered Christ. This, Luther said, was the essential issue of the Reformation. The question of the free will of man was “the hinge upon which everything turns”.

As the church develops sound theology through controversies, it pens her statements of beliefs in her creeds. By learning from the rich heritage of our spiritual forefathers, we can properly defend the sovereign grace of God and condemn the heresy of free-willism. Covenant ERC must not let down her guard on fiercely guarding the truth that man does not have a free will and that an unconditional Covenant (friendship) flows out of God’s unconditional election. From the doctrines that are according to God’s Word flow a life of godliness, thankfulness and true humility before our sovereign God.

The true church must confess that it is God who chose us so that we would be holy and not because He saw that we were holy or would be holy so choose us. Rom 9:16 makes this clear when it says, “So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.”

Because salvation is not dependent on the sinner himself, not even partly but all of God, the child of God has true peace. Knowing that God has chosen to shower upon him the blessings of salvation and the gift of holiness, the child of God need not be constantly questioning and doubting his identity based on his works or the consistency and intensity of his choosing Christ. A salvation that depends on God alone glorifies God alone. To know that God will surely preserve His people through working in them to persevere in repentance, faith and holiness brings the assurance of salvation to every believer (Rom 8:35). Clearly the Three Forms of Unity is a gift of God, because they all are faithful expositions of the Bible.

By implication this dramatically underscores the importance of Heidelberg Catechism preaching. Our elders take heed from our Reformed spiritual fathers to have two services. As the time of the antichrist draws close, and the spiritual attacks of the devil on the hearts and minds of every confessing believer intensifies. It is then no surprise that reformed Christians treasure dearly the practise of frequenting the Lord’s house every Sunday to rest spiritually as Christ speaks and to have the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith systematically taught to them.

Last, may we remember: he that glorieth, or boasteth, let him glory in the Lord (1 Cor 1:31)! The fact that the church stands today, despite the presence of her ferocious enemies, is testament to the mighty works of Jesus Christ Himself. We rejoiced at RDC 2012 not only for God’s preservation of CERC in the Truth, but also for God’s preservation of the churches through the ages.

As I have the personal experience of coming out from a Pentecostal church and knowing the errors spread by the false church (eg. pre-millennialism vs amillennialism, free-willism vs God’s

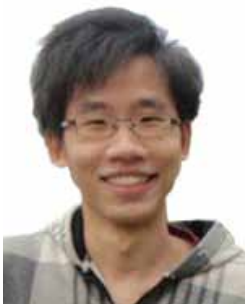
sovereignty), I have learnt to treasure these truths, although this is but a small beginning. These are truths which the martyrs have shed blood and gave their lives for; truths which are essential for our salvation; truths which are given by God (2 Peter 1:20-21) and which build the church, placing her on solid ground, safe from the strong winds and heavy rain which pelt against her walls. Because of these God-given truths, His church shall stand.

Truth is also a name of God (John 1). This Truth does not just free us from sin and evil (John 8:32), this Truth gives us the freedom to love and serve God! Every child of God, makes this their heartfelt prayer: that his heart be set on exerting himself to be stablished in the truth and greater holiness. He does this by attending catechism classes, being ready for and attentive during worship services, growing close to God, and actively avoiding sin!

Indeed, God will defend His truth and maintain it in His church to ensure the completion of the gathering of His elect (Heb 12:2). He does this by giving to the church godly elders and calling pastors to tend to the sheep of His fold. Prof. Engelsma did this for the few weeks before and during the RDC 2012. It is by God’s providence that the message of RDC 2012 coincided with the arrival of our minister-on-loan, Pastor Lanning. The acceptance of the call to feed the lambs in CERC is definitely evidence of God’s goodness and providential care to His needy people here in CERC! It is almost as if God is reminding the weary pilgrims here that He is with us and will never forsake us. Bless the Lord, oh my soul, for He is good! By the grace of God, may we heed the calling to struggle for the Truth and to love the truth that God will always protect His precious bride and cause His church to stand!

B A C K S L I D I N G

>> Matthias Wee



Matthias Wee is a confessing young adult in CERC.

Introduction

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, I write this article with the youth and young adults in mind, though its application is to all ages. Backsliding is a very familiar subject to us – many of us would have experiences to relate. It is certainly a very difficult experience of mine. Indeed the sinful corruption of the flesh results in times where the believer, in his sin, turns from God and seeks after the desires of his own heart.

What Is Backsliding?

(http://www.biblewitness.com/resources/magazines/articles/Vol08_Iss05_Art1.pdf)

In the King James Bible, the word “backsliding” in its various forms is found multiple times in the Old Testament, and is often used to describe Israel’s unfaithfulness to God. Though the word is not found in the New Testament, the concept is widespread. This English word is derived mainly from three Hebrew words. The first word *meshûbâh* and other forms of its root word (*shôbêb*) refer to apostasy, waywardness, faithlessness etc (e.g. Jer 3:6, 8, 11, 12, 14, 22, 8:5, 49:4).

The second word *sârar* (e.g. Hos 4:16) means to be stubborn or rebellious. The third word *sûg* (e.g. Pro 14:14) is also translated as “turning away” and literally means “to flinch”, or in other words, to go back or retreat.

Put together, the meaning of backsliding is not a pleasant one: it refers to the state of a believer that is stubbornly turning away from God, or deliberately walking aside from the correct path. You may ask, “Don’t we sin against God daily?” That is true; we harbour pride, lust, envy, hatred in our hearts, and require daily prayers of repentance. But backsliding is more than just that; it is a *state of continual sin and refusal to repent*. It is a stubbornness of the heart that, despite the promptings of the Holy Spirit, refuses to admit sin and seek forgiveness. Perhaps Proverbs 14:14a describes it the most succinctly: “*The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways.*”

Who Backslides?

Through the weakness of the flesh, every child of God will experience backsliding at some point in their life. The Old Testament has many examples of God’s people who filled their hearts with their own ways. Lot left Abraham to dwell in wicked Sodom; he valued the rich pastures more than the Covenantal promise with Abraham (Gen 13-14). Twice, Abraham gave in to fear for his life by claiming Sarah was his sister and not his wife, demonstrating a lack of trust in God (Gen 12, 20). This was echoed by his grandson Jacob, who stole the birthright by deceit from his father Isaac (Gen 25, 27), who in turn

disobeyed God by favouring his son Esau (Gen 25). King David committed adultery with Bathsheba the wife of Uriah, and after failing to cover up his adulterous deed, orchestrated the death of Uriah (2 Sam 11). Indeed, if the patriarchs of the faith and one such as King David, a man “after God’s own heart”, were led wayward by their hearts, how much more do weaker saints like us have to be wary of the deceitfulness and depravity of ours!

It is important to note though, that backsliding can only occur in a child of God. Backsliding is a turning away from the correct path, which implies that the believer is first set upon that path. This means that the Christian, while entering from the strait gate and walking along the narrow way, encounters some difficulty which stumbles him for a while; perhaps he shrinks from fear of Apollyon whom he must pass by; perhaps he is led astray by Formality and Hypocrisy after they jump over the wall, or tempted by the worldliness in the town of Vanity-Fair. But what sets him aside from a non-believer is that this lapse is but temporary – God in His mercy, according to the election in His eternal counsel, chastens the Christian to bring repentance of sin and restores him to the narrow way. For the non-elect, God imputes his iniquity and brings sorrows upon his head (Psa 32:2, 10). We will explore more of this later. Before that, let us consider the cause of our backsliding.

What Can Cause Me to Backslide? Proverbs 14:14a teaches us that backsliding is to fill our heart with

our own ways. This means that our heart departs from God and follows its natural tendency of corruption and depravity. Though we may be freed from the chains of the old man of sin, he still resides within our corrupt earthly bodies; our hearts are prone to yearning after our own pleasures. Thus it is fundamentally a heart-issue like the apostle Paul describes in Romans 7:23: the law in his members (his sinful body) fights against the law of his mind (a renewed heart). Our heart is prone to being divided (Hos 10:2); it is in this division that sin festers, and if not repented of, we begin to backslide.

The sins we commit and do not repent of may not be as obvious as the deed of physically committing adultery and murder. More often than not, it begins subtly. It may begin with busy commitments at school or at work taking priority over time for personal devotion and prayer. It may begin with watching a TV show that depicts sexual immorality and stirs our lust. It may begin with spending time with friends who are 'decent' people but who draw your time away from fellowship with the saints. Oh, there are many ways indeed that our deceitful hearts can lead us along. It could be one, or it could be multiple; slowly eating away at our unwary defences like a gnawing cancer, gradually leading us away with our lusts (1Joh 2:16). Beware, brethren! Beware of our sinful hearts and sinful pride.

How Do I Know If I Am Backsliding?

The Holy Spirit within us gives us no peace if we are in a state of backsliding. King David writes in Psalm 32 about his guilt after committing adultery and murder. He had no peace in his soul; *"when I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer (vs 3-4)."* The weight of his sin upon his conscience was so great that even his bones, the

very substance of his being, were wearing away. He had no peace in the house of God because the law of God reminded him time and time again of his sin. Likewise, the weight of our sin will press against our conscience, and when we read the Word of God and hear the preaching from the pulpit, God rebukes us through it.

Does God Allow Me to Stay Backslidden?

First of all, God sees our sins. Nothing is hid from His eye; He knows the secrets of our hearts (Psa 44:21, Jer 17:10). And yes, our sins displease Him. 2 Sam 11:27 records ominously at the end of the chapter: *"But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord."* God could have justly chosen to impute the sin on David's account and let him spiral down the pathway of sin and death. But because David was a child of God, his sins were imputed upon Christ, who was the propitiation for his sins (1 Joh 4:10). And because David was a child of God, God in His love and mercy would not let him perish, but turned him to repentance. If left alone, David would continue and perish in his backsliding (Canons of Dort, Head 5, Article 8). What a sobering thought indeed!

God employs chastening to bring His children to repentance. Chastening is the loving rod of correction that God uses to bring wayward sons back to Him. And though it may be grievous to us, yet it is *"for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness"*, and ultimately yields the *"peaceable fruit of righteousness"* (Heb 12:6-11). The Lord calls to us *"Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings"* (Jer 3:22). How is it done? Well, two ways as seen above: the unease of our conscience and the rebuke from His Word presses the weight of sin upon us. That is but the first step – if we like David continue to keep silence, the chastisement becomes harder and harder, until we finally see our sin and are brought to

our knees in repentance.

It was a long time before God sent the prophet Nathan to rebuke David; the child David fathered in his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba had been born. That means David had almost a year (or more) of guilt on his conscience! How his guilt as recorded in Psalm 32 must have grown and devoured him! Does it remind us of ourselves, beloved brethren, of times when we have strayed from God? Our days are plagued with unease, our fellowship with the saints grows dim, and our joy of hearing the Word of God preached is lost. Far worse though, is when we become complacent in our sins, and learn to silence the voice of the Holy Spirit. But if we do not heed the warnings of our conscience or that of godly counsel, God employs the rod of correction. Oh, how grievous it is! David lost his firstborn son and brought the curse of violence upon his house (2 Sam 12:10, 14). Naomi, who left the promised land "full" was brought back "empty" (Rut 1:21). Jonah was swallowed by the whale (Joh 1:17). The prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32 was reduced to eating the food of the swine and returned to his father's house humbled. The severity was such that David warns in Psa 32:9 *"Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee."* Take heed, beloved brethren, of the warnings from saints gone before us – if we are God's children, He can and he will bring us back to Him – and the longer we persist in impenitence, and the further we run, the harder and more painful will be the chastening.

How Am I Restored From My Backsliding?

Just as the people of Nineveh did when Jonah declared the woes upon them, the first step in being restored from backsliding is the knowledge and sorrow of our sin (2 Cor 7:9). Next, repentance involves a full

confession of personal sin. David in Psalm 32:5 states “my sin”, “mine iniquity”, “my transgressions” and “the iniquity of my sin”. He takes full responsibility for his sin; he does not attempt to hide anything. More about David’s confession is found in Psalm 51. Thirdly, this repentance works “repentance to salvation” (2 Cor 7:10), and asks God to “create in me a clean heart” (Psa 51:10).

When we come before God in true repentance, our loving Heavenly Father is willing and ready to forgive. What a simple word, but such great joy it contains! For it signifies the lifting of the heavy hand of God from us – we are restored to sweet communion with God! No longer do we languish under the guilt of sin! Indeed the joy is to all parties: for ourselves, for the people of God, and to the heavenly host – all glory be given to God (Luk 15:7,10,32). David’s joy is palpable: *“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered (Psa 32:1).”*

What confidence do we have that our sins are forgiven? Full confidence! For by the grace and mercy of God, He sent His only begotten Son Jesus Christ, who has borne the weight of our sins upon the cross, and fully satisfied the justice of God for our

sins (Psa 22, Isa 53, Joh 3:16, 1 Joh 4:10). What a glorious hope we have in Christ!

How Do I Guard Against Backsliding?

Dear brethren, I hope I have made it clear that backsliding is not something to be taken lightly. The child of God does not enjoy backsliding; he dreads it and longs to be restored to fellowship with God. How then can we guard against backsliding? We know its root cause – our deceitful heart, and hence the key to prevent backsliding is to guard our hearts. To be brief, we need to pray earnestly for God’s sustaining grace, and to daily check ourselves against the Word of God. One verse I have found particularly helpful is Psa 4:4 *“Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still.”* Just as we pray for God’s grace at the dawn of a new day, likewise at the close of the day it is wise to reflect upon our conduct and our thoughts, and seek where we need to ask forgiveness.

What If I Am Not Grieved By My Backsliding?

I thought I should not end without addressing this final question. This is a difficult subject to write about. We have seen the ways that God chastens his backsliding children to bring

them to repentance. The Holy Spirit rebukes us through our conscience and the Word of God. We *should* be grieved if we backslide. But can a child of God not be grieved? Perhaps he does not have a good understanding of God’s Word, or perhaps the sin is subtle and he is not sensitive enough to it. It may be true that for a length of time, the believer is unaware that he is backsliding; however, as we have seen earlier, God will *always* bring him back through chastening. Thus, the person that finds himself walking in sin seemingly without guilt has to beware lest he be *“slidden back by a perpetual backsliding”* (Jer 8:5), and have his conscience *“seared with a hot iron”* (1Tim 4:2), ultimately proving himself not to be a child of God; for a good tree will not bring forth corrupt fruit (Luk 6:43-44).

Therefore, it is a warning for us when we backslide – if we do not feel grieved, examine ourselves for subtle sins of the heart. Pray for God to reveal our sins to us; and if we seek Him earnestly, we can be assured that He will hear us (Matt 7:7-8). Let us heed the call of repentance and turn back to God in humility of spirit. *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 Joh 1:9).”*

Our Father’s Handywork: Foetal Circulation

>> Lim Yang Zhi



Lim Yang Zhi is a youth in CERC.

The topic of this article is somewhat unfamiliar to many of us. It even sounds unfamiliar. Foetal circulation? What is that? Foetal circulation is basically the system of blood vessels and structures through which blood moves in a foetus.

We may think foetal circulation

is similar to how our blood now circulates throughout our bodies, but this is not so. The foetus is drastically different from an adult human. When we were foetuses, we lived in our mother’s fluid-filled womb and got all our basic necessities such as oxygen from her, primarily through

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Only when we truly consider how vital each and every part of our body is will we prostrate on our knees and confess,
 “I am truly fearfully and wonderfully made!”

”

the umbilical cord; but now, we live in a gaseous environment and get oxygen through independent breathing.

So how do we change from getting all our oxygen from our mothers through a cord to breathing by ourselves? That is what we are going to look at in this article. From this brief coverage of foetal circulation, we hope to see, as we have in all the articles under this series, the wisdom, power, and grace of God.

Side-note: There is a simplified flowchart at the end of the article. If you lack any Biology background about the anatomy of the heart, it will be good to use the flowchart as a guide to understand the following discussion.

From the time we came into existence, we have always needed oxygen to survive. However, as we were surrounded by fluid within our mother's womb, we were unable to breathe to meet our oxygen requirements. Instead, through the umbilical cord connecting our mother's circulation to ours, we obtained our required oxygen.

With this mechanism in place, there was no need for the blood to travel all the way to the lungs to be oxygenated. Thus, two features were formed by God within our hearts to divert blood away from the lungs. (Now would be a good time to refer to the flowchart!) Firstly, there was the foramen ovale, which is like a door connecting the right atrium (right 'half' of the heart) to the left atrium (left 'half' of the heart). This door allows oxygenated blood to bypass a section of the heart leading to the lungs, flowing directly to the left atrium of the heart and the rest of our body.

Second, there was the ductus arteriosus, which is like a bridge connecting the pulmonary artery (a blood vessel) that leads to the lungs, to the aorta (another blood vessel) which branches out to the rest of the body. With this bridge, the oxygenated blood once again bypasses the lungs and is circulated to the rest of the body. This 'door' and 'bridge' detracts 80-90% of the blood from the lungs, leaving them not in use.

We now fast forward to the time of childbirth, when we are ready to come out of the womb and into the world. Remember that we are still relying on our mother to supply oxygen through the umbilical cord. However, once we separate from our mother during childbirth, we cannot rely on her to supply oxygen; rather, we need our lungs (i.e., the respiratory system) to function in order for our bodies to receive the oxygen it needs. Knowing this, God, in His infinite wisdom, initiates a plan.

As our head exits from our mother's womb, a few significant events occur. First, as our mother undergoes a very physically demanding situation, the level of cortisol, a stress hormone, increases. Second, emerging from the womb implies that we are entering into a colder room-temperature environment that is extremely different from our mother's womb, where it was warm due to the surrounding body-temperature fluid. A combination of the increase in cortisol and the colder temperatures causes the umbilical cord to constrict, reducing the amount of oxygenated blood that reaches our heart.

This decrease of oxygenated blood then

causes us to take the first breath. This first breath leads to the subsequent breathing and expansion of our lungs. It is at this moment when two of the most spectacular and crucial changes occur in our heart. First, the foramen ovale in our heart closes. Second, something happens to the ductus arteriosus as well; it closes up and becomes a ligament in the heart! Recall what the foramen ovale and ductus arteriosus are; they are the 'door' and 'bridge' that divert blood away from the lungs. Now, with the 'door' shut and 'bridge' closed, our blood does not divert away from the lungs. This is extremely vital, because once we start breathing autonomously, the blood in our body will need to retrieve the necessary oxygen from the lungs. As we have noted, our mother is no longer able to supply the oxygenated blood; we have to oxygenate our own blood. As the blood reaches the lungs, oxygen will be supplied to the blood and transported to the rest of the body. If our lungs do not function as they need to – that is, if the lungs do not retrieve the required oxygen, we will die.

This whole process is amazing, isn't it?

Our discussion of foetal circulation has only mentioned a few of the 'more important' elements working together within ourselves as we are conceived. I say 'more important' with the inverted commas because *all* the parts involved in our coming into this world are equally essential for us to continue living autonomously. This is also true for our bodies right now. As our body functions, every component plays a certain key role to enable the organism to function the way it should. This is not a hyperbolic statement; if one vital component was missing during

our conception (or for that matter, even now), we will not be sitting here reading this article.

We ought to ponder on this fact in our daily lives. We ought to pause for a moment in our busy schedules and consider ourselves, that is, consider the creation of our bodies. We ought to ask ourselves, "How are my fingers important? How is my skin important?" These may sound like ridiculous questions, but they are *deep* questions, as they force us to remember the fact that all our body parts are vital. Only when we truly consider how vital each and every part of our body is will we prostrate on our knees and confess, "I am truly fearfully and wonderfully made!"

The fact that every organ, tissue, and cell is important points to the infinite wisdom of God's creation. It shows that He has formed us with consideration and thought beyond imagination! He carefully planned out how each of our organs ought to function. Job, in his physical turmoil, confessed, "Thou hast clothed me with skin and flesh, and hast fenced me with bones and sinews" (Job 10:11). The words 'clothed' and 'fenced' are by no means cold, arbitrary descriptions of God's work of creation. Rather, they reveal the work of Creation as one done with much meticulousness. Just as how God

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“ He is the One who sustains all life, even our lives! He gives us every breath to breathe, that we may praise Him while we yet live on this earth. His power is incredible! All glory goes to Him, not us! ”

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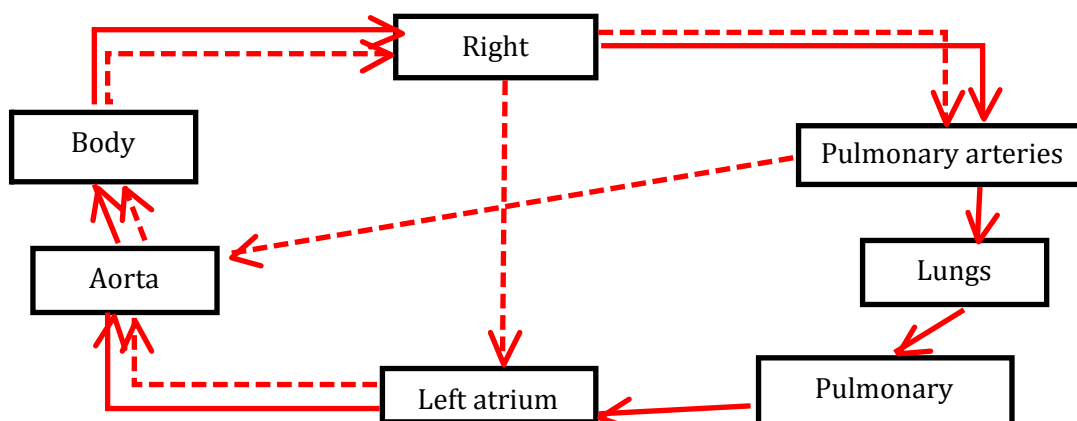
scooped the dust from the ground to form Adam, so does He scoop the dust from the ground to mould, form, and shape us individually in our mother's womb.

Striking us even further is the fact that God created us to be His children. God did not just form us for some whimsical, nonsensical reason. He formed us that we may be the object of His love, and that we may be His friend-servants. Thus, His meticulous and careful creation of us serves the purpose of showing His grace and

mercy to us. Our creation *has* to serve the purpose of saving us! That ought to humble us greatly. There is no room for pride here; we cannot help but shout, "Praise ye the LORD! Let all that have breath praise the LORD!"

There are many other implications and applications we can learn about from this study of foetal circulation, but the article must have an end. Yet, we must not stop here with our meditation on the creation of God. Such a meditation must go on for the rest of our lives! Such a meditation humbles us to heed the wise command of Solomon, "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth." Such a meditation reminds us that the Lord is our Creator and Maker. He is the One who shuts the 'door' and closes down the 'bridge' of our hearts when we are but tiny foetuses, in order for us to continue living and experience the depths of His wisdom. He is the One who sustains all life, even our lives! He gives us every breath to breathe, that we may praise Him while we yet live on this earth. His power is incredible! All glory goes to Him, not us! May this be our confession all the days of our lives. *Soli Deo gloria!*

I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. Psalm 139:14



Legend:

-Solid arrows depict blood flow after we are conceived.

Dashed arrows depict how blood ideally flows from the lungs to the rest of our body when we are still in our mother's womb. (Notice how it diverts from the lungs from the right atrium and pulmonary arteries, to the left atrium and aorta respectively.)

News from the Churches

Acts of Synod

- Mr. Erik Guichelaar successfully sustained his final examinations and by unanimous vote was declared a “candidate for the ministry of the Word and Sacraments in the PRCA, eligible for a call on or after July 13, 2013”
- The PRCA currently has 3 congregations that are without their own pastor: Faith (Michigan), Doon (Iowa), and Randolph (Wisconsin) PRC.
- Synod 2013 had its seminarian’s public examination broadcast live on the Internet. At its peak there were over 200 people from Singapore and USA listening live to the examination.
- Aaron Lim begins his studies in seminary this September together with 8 other students from 7 PR congregations in US, making it the largest class in PR theological seminary’s history.
- Prof Russell Dykstra reported good fruits from his partial sabbatical this past year which was spent studying on Christian education. He was granted partial sabbatical for the upcoming year for the study and writing especially in the area of church government.

Updates from Mission work in Northern Ireland

- On 30th June, Limerick Reformed Fellowship (Mission work in Northern Ireland) witnessed their third baptism (Penelope Kuhs).
- Manuel Kuhs from the LRF has created an android app (application) for the LRF website (enabling users of android phones to download sermons, lectures and updated materials more efficiently). The application is available on “Google Play”.
- Missionary Pastor Martyn McGeown has recently written three articles on Islam (“Jesus, the Trinity, and the Qur’an”, “The Qur’an and the Cross”, and “The Qur’an, the Atonement, and Salvation”) after studying Islam and having finished reading the Qur’an. The articles are available on his LRF website.

Updates from the Philippines

Annual Berean PRCP Conference in Manila

- The annual conference, which has been hosted by the Berean PRC for several years now in the metro Manila area, had “The Sovereignty of God Over All Things” as its theme this year.
- Pastor Kleyn and Pastor Smit gave two speeches each on the sovereignty of God in connection with creation, salvation, Scripture, and human responsibility (i.e. human accountability). The attendance was over 100 which for the Bereans was a first. Those in attendance included members of the area churches with whom they work, as well as new visitors.

Federation Developments

- On May 1, 2013, the two combined consistories, of Berean Protestant Reformed Church and of First Reformed Church in Bulacan, adopted the name for the future denomination: The Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines (PRCP).
- This was made possible because earlier in that meeting on May 1, the two consistories had finalised the resolution of some non-essential differences. With that completed, the way has been opened up now for full ecclesiastical union.
- The consistories are now in the stage of preparation for the completion of the formal union of the two churches as the PRCP. For the two combined consistories was on Wednesday, August 21, in which many items of preparation were considered. Lord willing, CERC would soon officially have new sister churches in the Philippines.

Sources: *prca.org* and *Standard Bearer July 2013*



Games during CK/CKS Outing at Pasir Ris Park



Orchestra practice for CERC 26th Anniversary



Cards and greetings from our brothers and sisters in the Philippines



Hiking and enjoying God's beautiful creation



Exhortation and Singing at Church Outing



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Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church

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

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Singapore 368813

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

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