

EDITOR'S NOTE

Welcome to the first Salt Shakers issue of 2014! May the new year remind us of the New Life that we have in our Lord Jesus Christ. How thankful are you for the love that God has shown you? What shall be your service to the Lord this year? May we hold nothing back from the One who deserves our all. 2 Cor 1:4 Blessed Reading!



salt shakers
joel 3:16 matthew 5:16

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FOREKNEW

PREDESTINED

CALLED

JUSTIFIED

GLORIFIED

“The vision is dazzling: a massive city, whose foundations are 12 precious stones, with walls like jasper, with gates of pearls, streets paved with gold, and a sea of glittering crystal.” – *Glorified in Heaven* by Jonathan Langerak, Jr

“Without this first work of God choosing a people, there would be no salvation at all.” – *God’s Foreknowing, Predestined to be Conformed* by Prof. Russell Dykstra

“Have you wondered why music notes sound so distinctly beautiful compared to noise or speech?” – *Our Father’s Handiwork: Music* by Lisa Ong

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PSALM 23 : VERSE 5

>> Paul Liu



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Psalm 23

- 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 previous verse, we saw the confident confession of sheep belonging to Shepherd. “Yes,” they say defiantly in the face of death, “I have no fear!” And though this courage seems impossible to all around, we little sheep have this secret of our assurance—Shepherd’s staff. When we hear its tapping, we are reminded of Shepherd nudging us gently along the way, ever since we were baby lambs; when we hear its striking, we know that Shepherd is driving away those scary wild animals, or hitting away dangerous objects, clearing the way for us to walk. How wonderful, to belong to Shepherd! =)

Verse 5 is where our LORD stops talking to us like sheep... Don't worry! You are still His sheep—you will never stop being that—but it is just about the right time that you realised that you are much much more than that! In a very important way, the first four verses help to prepare us to understand the last two verses correctly. If we do not understand that we ARE sheep, totally in love with, totally dependent upon, totally transformed through, and totally comforted by our dear Shepherd, then we will never properly understand the truth that is about to be told.

If Psalm 23 ended at verse 4, we would be happy enough... but it doesn't... And so as eager bouncing sheep, we are bursting with excitement as we wonder what other wondrous stuff could be in store for us...

Everything is Ours—No Less! Shepherd is LORD—No Less!

We are faced with a very interesting

scenario here in verse 5. Alright, it is really not just interesting, it is plain out-of-this-world! Seriously, I'm having a hearty meal while all my enemies stand and watch? And even if we forget that "minor" detail of all the enemies watching... What a spread in front of us! A prepared table with yummy food of all sorts, fragrant—and really expensive—anointing oil waiting to be used, and endless wine that has overflowed our cups as we were looking around in awe and amazement! Lavish extravagance—no less! What is all this good doing here? Good for the body, good for the countenance, and good for the heart. We sheepishly turn to Master and ask quietly, "Are... are you sure that this is all for us.....?"

Master explains Himself in Psalm 104; and especially in verse 15, we see that the providence of God for the good of man is exactly wine, oil for the head, and bread! But more importantly, look around that whole Psalm, and you will hear Master reminding you of who He is! He isn't just Shepherd, He is LORD! He is JEHOVAH GOD who made the heavens and the earth, and Who sustains and controls all things for our good! Psalm 104 makes it abundantly clear that nothing lies outside of our LORD's command.

Why should we be surprised then? This is the Owner of the cattle on a thousand hills; the world and its fullness are His! This is the God of miracles, who rained manna from heaven and sprung water from rock! This is our Lord Jesus who with only five loaves and two fish fed five thousand men with much to spare (John 6:1-14)! This is the father who held nothing back when his son returned (Luke 15:11-32)! This is the Father who gave His beloved Son for us and, obviously, also freely gives us

all things (Romans 8:32)! Oh yes, we are surprised at the goodness of our LORD; but yet at the same time, could we expect anything less from so great a God, and so loving a Father?

Untouchable

Because Shepherd has already gently told us in the earlier verses, we little sheep have been equipped with very perceptive spiritual eyes. We do not see this verse and proceed to slam the dinner table screaming, "WHERE IS THE FREE-FLOW WINE?!" Neither do we start pouring oil over our own heads to convince ourselves and those around us that we are blessed of God.

We know that Shepherd leads us for the good of our SOULS... Remember that? He feeds us spiritually in mercy and grace; He leads us so that we walk in paths of righteousness. And so we are sheep who can rightly, and always, see the table of food before us! We also rightly, and always, smell the anointing oil all over us; and rightly, and always, have cups overflowing with wine. How real and staggering it is when we have spiritual eyes to see the providence of our Master!

When we know that our Master controls all things for our good, we become people who are untouchable (Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 28). In adversity, we are patient; for God must be purifying us unto perfection and that we may be useful in His kingdom (Job 23:10, 1 Peter 1:6-7, 2 Corinthians 1:3-7). In prosperity, we are thankful; for God gives us the opportunity to be used for His kingdom. When facing the future, we are full of hope and confidence; for nothing can separate us from the love of Christ, and we are sure that God will reveal His goodness to us in greater measure and fullness!

Untouchable (Part 2)

If we think that we have understood the meaning of being untouchable, there is a sequel to drive home the point. And so we come back to the mindboggling part where our enemies are standing around watching us... eat and drink in comfort. This is an astounding detail that our LORD gives us; this shows us the infinite extent of our "untouchable-ness". If you may, imagine all those outraged and rabid enemies of ours going wild with exasperation at their inability to get to us and harm us. And there we are, shining our faces, munching on food and sipping wine. You are blessed, if Shepherd ever leads you to such an experience!

There are times, when we are faced all-round with vicious spiritual and physical enemies that would discourage us, hurt us, tear us up, and even try to cause us to leave Shepherd. Surrounded and exhausted, we may lose all hope and tearfully await our end. It is just about then, that if you just had those spiritual-eyes-of-little-sheep that Shepherd has given you, you would see the feast of blessing and deliverance before you! No more running, no more panting; you are right smack in the midst of love and goodness of the LORD.

The enemies (physical and spiritual) are all still around, that you may be a testimony to them of the faithfulness of our God. They hate to see it, but their desire to harm you keeps them looking on in desperation. They are those who used to continually hurt us and ask, "Where is thy God?" (Psalm 42:3,10) They are those, who tempt God and us by asking, "Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? (Psalm 78:19) Oh, YES He can! God will provide goodness in such abundance that His power will be undeniable and His glory displayed for

all to see.

Christ

God is pleased to set His goodness and love upon us because we are His sheep, and this is the final thing that we would like to look at in this verse. Sure, the bread and food is yummy, and the wine is more than we can drink... but what really takes our breath away is when our LORD comes over to us, and anoints our head with oil. And we know in our hearts that to be anointed is to be chosen; to be anointed is to have the blessing of God set upon us forever! (1 Chronicles 17:27)

What a personal and caring God we have! He doesn't simply set some conditions of salvation for a random bunch of humans and says, "Whoever would like can come, and whoever wouldn't—well, whatever." NO! With trembling lips that betray a heart barely able to fathom the possibility of this moment, we confess, "You, my LORD

and my God, have set your love upon me." (Deuteronomy 7:7-8) Wow. To be loved of God, must be the thing we treasure most of all; and it is also the thing that our enemies hate most of all. They can endure the fact that we are having a blessed time enjoying the goodness all around us... but they simply can't take the fact that God loves us.

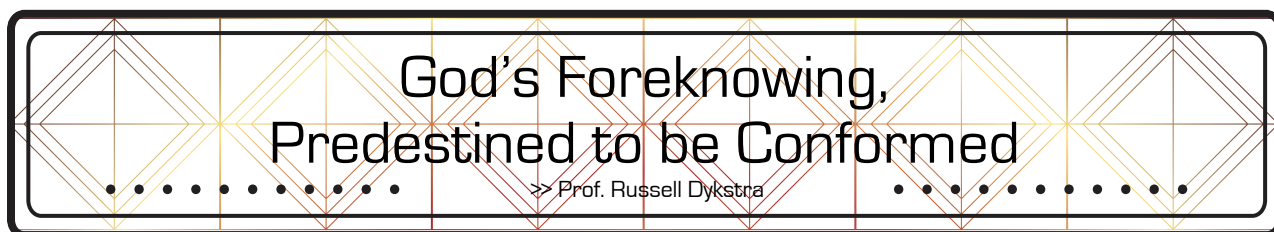
And so we need to know another important meaning of being anointed. When God anoints us, He chooses us to be found eternally in the Anointed One. His love is shown to us only through the Anointed One! And we don't have to look around too far wondering who that might be... because the meaning of "Christ" is exactly that—the Anointed One. And the Christ is none other than the Son of God, our loving Lord Jesus, who died the accursed death of the cross to pay for our infinite debt of sin and purchase our perfect righteousness

before God. (Acts 10:38, 1 John 2:22) God doesn't just say, "I choose you"; He anoints us so that we know exactly who we belong to, and where our salvation is found.

Christians

If Christ is the Anointed One, then we are the little anointed ones. Little Christs, as some may mock, but yes, little Christs—Christians! Through our journey as sheep, we will find this awesome fact to be more and more true (Galatians 2:20); and then the challenge will also become more and more real (John 15:18). But never fear, for our LORD will always provide for us in abundance, for He is greater than any king, and more loving than any father. And He will protect and bless us in the full view of our enemies, for the glory of His blessed name! The LORD is our God; blessed be His name!

Do you believe these? If you do, then move along now... Shepherd is leading us on. =)



Prof. Russell Dykstra currently serves as a professor in the Protestant Reformed Seminary. He has visited Singapore on a number of occasions to help with the preaching needs of CERC.

In the golden chain of salvation, election is the first and primary link. Without this first work of God choosing a people, there would be no salvation at all. All the other works of God (the links of the chain) flow out of this eternal purpose of God to select certain people, whom He foreknew (loved) eternally, and conform them to the glorious image of His Son, Jesus Christ.

The Canons of Dort give the clearest presentation of the Bible's teaching of election. The Canons were drawn up (in 1618-1619) by ministers and elders from churches all over Europe. They gathered in Dordrecht, the Netherlands, at the invitation of the Reformed churches of the Netherlands – churches convulsed in a bitter conflict over the doctrine of salvation. A large party in those churches followed the teaching of a certain Jacob Arminius that salvation was dependent on man.

These men taught a form of the Bible's doctrine of salvation, but with subtle modifications that denied the power of God's saving work. They even preached a form of election – how could they not, since the Bible so clearly maintains it (Romans 8 & 9, Ephesians 1, John 6 & 10, et al.). According to their view, God had an eternal purpose to save some people in Jesus. But this election was a matter of God eternally foreknowing (merely knowing in advance) who would believe in Jesus and would continue in faith and obedience to the end of their lives. This election is conditional, thus, dependent on the individual who must believe and obey in order to be chosen by God.

Such a doctrine of election appeals to men, for, first, it seems to be fair in that God gives all men an opportunity to be saved. Second, it appeals to a Christian's pride – we were chosen because God foresaw what we would do.

On closer examination, however, this conditional salvation robs the believer of all assurance of salvation and leads to terror. My salvation depends on me? If I fail to believe in Jesus to the end or to continue in obedience to the last breath – my election is lost? Then my whole salvation is lost. What a dreadful thing, if the first and primary link in the golden chain of salvation depends on the activity of people, and at that, sinful human beings! If Adam in the state of righteousness could not be secure in his maintaining obedience, how can sinful men and women hope to continue in faith and obedience for eternal salvation?

The Canons, drawing from many passages of Scripture, assure us that election is not conditional. The first section (Head) of doctrine sets forth the biblical doctrine of predestination. The

first Head leads up to predestination by demonstrating that in Adam all men sinned against God and therefore all deserve to perish under God's wrath. Yet, some are saved, having received the gift of faith in Jesus. But who are those that are saved, and why do only some receive this faith? The answer is sovereign, double predestination. God determines whom He will save, and whom He will not. Predestination is one decree with two sides – election and reprobation.

The main focus of the first Head is election, and article 7 is the central article, for it gives a definition of this truth. The essence of the definition is: Election is the purpose of God, before the foundation of the world, whereby He has chosen a certain number of persons in Christ unto salvation. Election is a decree of God, His purpose. It is an eternal decree, in God's plan before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4), that is to say, before time. In that decree, God chose certain persons, not a mere number, for according to Romans 8:30, God foreknew these people – and God's knowledge of His people is always the knowledge of love. Accordingly, each believer confesses with the apostle Paul that Jesus Christ "loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:22). God chose them in Christ, so that Christ is the Mediator and Head of His people. What Christ accomplished on the cross was for the benefit of all those who were chosen in Him, and given Him by the Father.

Most important of all – those persons are chosen unto salvation. This is crucial, for it makes election sure by ruling out any possible failure of God's purpose. God did not have several different kinds of elections. One, general, choosing all

men; and another, special, choosing to save those who would actually believe. There is not one election to faith (which might be lost) and another election to salvation. All these erroneous views of election assume a condition that must be filled in order for the election to be realised as planned. No, Canons Article 7 insists – God chooses His people in Christ unto redemption. And it adds, "to be saved by Him."

The beauty of election for the believer is the certainty that it gives. Salvation is guaranteed. The delegates to the great synod of Dort understood the importance of assurance and went out of their way to affirm and reaffirm it. Article 7 reminds us that election is God's "unchangeable purpose" so that we may be sure that God does not change His decree of election. The comfort of that is overwhelming – if you are chosen by God in Christ, you will be eternally with God – He will not change His mind. Besides, this choice of God is "out of mere grace" – no one earned or deserves to be chosen. The standard for choosing? Simply "the sovereign, good pleasure of [God's] will." Not something in you, nor something you have done or will do; rather God's good pleasure to give you salvation is the only cause of your election.

The certainty of salvation for the elect is made specific and concrete because it is in Jesus Christ, the very Son of God. As noted above, Article 7 teaches that God appointed Christ to be Mediator and Head of the elect, and then it goes on to say that God made Christ "the foundation of salvation." The Canons are concrete and pastoral in this, understanding the need for faith to cling to someone specifically – and that someone is our Saviour Jesus Christ.



If I fail to believe in Jesus to the end or to continue in obedience to the last breath – my election is lost?



No surer foundation for faith could ever be found.

Christ redeems His people in the cross, and then God bestows on them all the blessings of salvation earned in the cross. In time, God will surely and effectually “call and draw them into His communion by His Word and Spirit.” He bestows “on them true faith, justification and sanctification.” And not only that, but He will “powerfully preserve them,” and “glorify them.”

That, you recognise, is the rest of the golden chain – grounded in election in Christ.

Notice that God does all this not first of all for us, though we are the unworthy beneficiaries. No, God’s good purpose is God-centered, namely, “for the demonstration of His mercy,” serving the ultimate purpose of “the praise of His glorious grace.”

Election is not the first doctrine that one should discuss with an unconverted

man, or a new convert. Neither, however, should it be the last doctrine that one teaches a new Christian. Since the Biblical doctrine of election is the first link in salvation, it should be affirmed and treasured by each and every believer. Salvation is not of us, but of the sovereign Jehovah alone.

The Canons recognise, however, the two-edged sword in this doctrine. It sets forth the sovereignty of God in the boldest, most unambiguous manner leading to comfort for the believer, and the fiercest opposition by the ungodly. The Canons put it well in Article 6 of this first Head – “...that decree of election and reprobation, revealed in the Word of God, which though men of perverse, impure and unstable minds wrest to their own destruction, yet to holy and pious souls affords unspeakable consolation.”



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Perhaps you will recall that in the last article I wrote for Salt Shakers, I made the important point that if our worship is to be genuinely Reformed, our worship must be controlled by and in conformity with the sacred Scriptures. Reformed people believe that the Scriptures are infallibly inspired by the Holy Spirit, and that therefore, what is in them is the very Word of God.

In that Word, God tells us who He is, that He is the Creator of all things, that He gives life and existence to every creature, and that all that we are is due

to what He has made us—except, of course, our sin for which we alone are responsible. God tells us that we must worship Him alone—in the true sense of worship, which I explained in the last article.

Even the heathen who do not know what the Scriptures say and who have never heard any preaching, know the most important part of true worship. Paul makes that clear in Romans 1:18: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.”

The whole passage from this verse to the end of the chapter talks about that terrible wrath of God revealed to wicked men. These men are not men who belong to churches, or who have heard the Gospel; Paul is talking about savages and uncivilised people to whom the Gospel has never been brought. Specifically, he is talking about the Romans of his day, for the Romans were pagans to whom the Gospel was never preached until Paul went on his missionary journeys.

Paul says of them: "They hold the truth in unrighteousness." Here, the word "hold" means "suppress." They hold it down in their consciousness. To suppress something in our consciousness means that we know that which we suppress.

What is it that they suppress? The text speaks of "that which may be known of God." They know something about God. And Paul says in verse 20 what it is that they know: "His eternal power and Godhead." That is, they know two things. They know, one, that the eternal God is God alone; and two, they know that He alone is to be worshipped.

That they know that He alone is to be worshipped is clear from Paul's later statements, that when they serve idols, they "change" the glory of the invisible God into an image (v23, 25). Whoever "changes" something possesses what he changes. He cannot change anything about which he knows nothing. When he changes the glory of God into an image, he knows the glory of God, but does not want it.

When I was young I went to a Christian school, but not a Protestant Reformed Christian School, for there were none at that time. From time to time we had chapel in these schools. We frequently had missionaries who were home on furlough. They would come to speak

to us. Most of the time, the burden of their speeches was to persuade us to be missionaries when we became adults. That was not so bad; but the reason they used to persuade us to become missionaries was frequently this: There are millions living in jungles and the islands of the sea that have never heard the Gospel. They serve idols because they do not know any better. They want to serve God but they do not know about Him and want to learn about Him. And then these missionaries added, making us feel very guilty, "If we did not want to go and would not go, all these people would go to hell. And if they went to hell it will be our fault, because we did not go to teach them." The burden of the guilt of their destruction in hell was put on us.

That was extremely distressing for us, although somehow it did not seem right to me, even then.

Apart from the fact that God saves His elect and not us, the fact is that the heathen are not ignorant of God, but they know that they must worship Him who is God alone. That they worship idols is a terrible sin, for which they come under the wrath of God.

How do they know God? How do they know that God is the only true God, and that He alone must be worshipped? God shows them this through the creation. Paul tells us this very thing: "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them" (v19).

But how did God show it unto them? Paul goes on: "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen being understood by the things that are made:" (verse 20).

Thus they are without excuse in the judgment day. When Christ asks them,

"Why did you not worship God?" they cannot say, "We didn't know who He was." Christ will answer them: "God told you who He is and God told you that you had to worship Him." The sky and the oceans, the stars and the mountains, the rain and the sunshine, the fruitful ground and the deserts—all these speak of God's greatness and might; and all these things show clearly that God alone is to be worshipped. But you would not worship Him!"

It is true that the heathen do not know as much as you and I know. We have the Scriptures and know far more than the pagan Chinese and Indians. And, because we know more, our punishment will be much worse than the heathen if we do not properly worship God. Jesus says so: "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shall be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee" (Matt. 11:21-24).

I mention these things because they are so often misunderstood, not only that, but also because they have something to say about how seriously God takes the true worship that we ought to bring.

The key text is, of course, John 4:24: "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." This text is the foundation for all Reformed worship.

Our Father's Handiwork: MUSIC

>> Lisa Ong



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Music is an integral part of a Christian's life. It is the means by which we worship God not only in this life, but also in Heaven (Rev 14:1-3). This means that whether you think you like music or not, or whether you think you have musical gifts or otherwise, these differences are not so important, for our music on earth is a foretaste of music in Heaven. With the end in mind, let us now learn more about the godly uses of music.

What is Proper Music?

2 Chronicles 5 helps us understand what proper music is. In this fascinating account, King Solomon had finished building the temple and the men of Israel were assembled as the Ark of the Covenant was brought into the temple. In verse 13, trumpeters and singers made praises to God 'as one, to make one sound'. Such music was God-pleasing as it was at that moment that God entered the temple. Proper music is harmonious and God-glorifying.

With this understanding of music, let us examine ourselves with regards to the music we listen to. Are they euphonic

or discordant? Do the words magnify God or trample on God's name and truths? Am I compelled to love God and my neighbour more, or are my sinful emotions being stirred up? We may find ourselves falling short, as we only have a small beginning of the new obedience.

Perhaps, by knowing how music serves God's purpose, we will be able to appreciate that music ought to be for God. From the Bible, we see that God uses music to help us learn and understand more about Him.

God Is The Creator And Giver Of Music

When God created man, He gave man a voice. This voice was able to 'cry', 'speak', 'declare', 'preach', and also sing praises (Psalm 40). It is significant that God 'put a new song' into King David's mouth in verse 3 of Psalm 40. Not only does God give His children the physical vocal construct to produce a song, He also delivers them from their sins through the Rock, so that they can sing a new song in praise of their Redeemer. Gone are the old desires and ways of destruction.

God also provides man with the inspiration and means to make music. God created a world with sound effects, as though it were an orchestra under His conductor's baton. Psalm 98:7-8 vividly describe the powerful symphony of nature in response to God's signal of the baton when He comes in judgment. This orchestra in nature has inspired

and continues to inspire much music.

Apart from providing the sound effects, God, through nature, provides man with materials to make musical instruments. The first recorded instruments in the Bible are the harp and organ in Genesis 4:21. There are many theories on how these instruments originated, but some interesting stories are about how the harp evolved from a shooting bow. Later, more strings were added, using dried and twisted animal gut, with varying tension and thickness. The organ has its own set of stories about its origins. Although musical instruments have come a long way since then—designed with elaborate aesthetics, assembled with calculated Physics, fitted with processed and even synthetic materials—it is note-worthy that the first instruments were made without having to modify the natural materials God created. Music was simple to make!

Now, we know about the instruments that produce music: the voice and musical instruments. But how is sound actually produced? God governs sound production too. Ever since learning how sound travels when I was 14, I have always marvelled at how God uses vibrations in the air to create sounds. It is magical to observe how the vibrating string of a violin or reverberating lips of a trumpeter into his mouthpiece causes disturbances in the air via the instrument, and produces a beautiful sound.

God Loves Beauty

This is evident, as God wants us to worship Him with music. As evident in the 2 Chronicles passage cited above, God was moved by the harmonious music. Have you wondered why music notes sound so distinctly beautiful compared to noise or speech? To some extent, science helps us understand how those beautiful sounds are made. Specific frequencies of sound that are clear and stable produce a pitch (or a music note), while a mishmash of frequencies result in noise. By registering the frequency of sound, our brain differentiates music notes from other sounds.

Another form of beauty is the various timbre (character) of sound in voice or instrument. In the Bible, some instruments were more suitable for worship—harp, cymbal, psaltery (2 Chronicles 29:25)—while the trumpet was used for battle (2 Chronicles 14:8), and so on. One could imagine how the graceful harp and charming psaltery befitted reverent worship; and the ringing cymbals made the music more majestic at the appropriate times. Like how God had created different species of creatures to showcase the beauty of His creation, He created different musical instruments and qualities of sound to provide pleasure for those who could hear.

Not only does the sound constitute beauty, the words sung are equally important. The poetic lyrics of Psalm 96 are a good example. When we sing praises to God, we are communicating with Him in a beautiful way.

God Is A God Of Order, Not Confusion

Referring back to the proper understanding of music, 'as one' implies harmony. The better known

meaning of 'harmony' is unison; however, this word has musical significance. There are several elements required to make harmonious music. First, the intonation of the notes must be accurate, otherwise the resulting sound is off-tune. Second, since music is mostly made by playing several notes simultaneously, it is important to have harmony among these notes. This harmony technically refers to an appealing combination of several notes according to their frequencies—only certain combinations of music notes harmonise, while others are dissonant. Third, harmonious music requires regulated timing. Without these three components in place, the music will be messy and awful.

Interestingly, the Bible uses the analogy of pitching in 1 Corinthians 14:7-8 to illustrate how we should edify one another in church. This analogy points out the musical ineffectiveness of out-of-tune instruments to emphasise the ineffectiveness of irresponsible tongue speaking among the Christians at that time. Instead of speaking in tongues and creating confusion, Paul exhorts Christians to edify each other by speaking by revelation (v6). Another takeaway is that when we sing in church, we ought to sing with understanding; otherwise, we displease God (v15).

Other Purposes Of Music

Music, as God's creation, must always ultimately serve to glorify God. With this understanding, let us examine some activities in which music can be used properly to serve the ultimate purpose of glorifying God.

Relaxation

Music can have a calming effect and be helpful for relaxation. In 1 Samuel 16, the young David is described as a

cunning and skilled harp player, who, when he played, "refreshed" the king with his wonderful music.

Celebration

I am sure everyone can identify with this. At birthdays, weddings, church anniversaries, Christmases, there is music. The cry of a newborn baby is music to his or her mother's ears. Even at funerals, Christians rejoice that their fellow believer has gone to meet God.

Witnessing

When Paul and Silas were in jail, they sang praises to God (Acts 16: 25). God was pleased to save several other prisoners through their beautiful witness.

I believe singing about the Gospel is a good way to witness to the unbelievers for a couple of reasons. First, Bible verses and truths can be easily remembered through songs. The basis for this is my personal experience. I find that melodised verses leave a longer impression, thus my memory of the lyrics will be reinforced. I do not have scientific proof for this, but you could try this out!

Second, while witnessing, songs come across as a more joyful way of proclaiming God's Word than reciting verses. Of course, I do not mean that God's Word has to be supplemented with a melody to be effective, but music can be a possible medium. Again, I cannot find a better example than to quote my maternal great-grandfather on what he said about the testimony of Christians. He said, "They are always so happy, singing songs!" He was baptised at 95 years old.

Another form of witnessing is to our Christian neighbour. In Colossians 3:16, we are called to 'teach and admonish one another in psalms and

hymns and spiritual songs... with grace'. This effectively happens when we sing Psalters in church and meditate on the words sung.

All in all, I hope you have a deeper understanding of a Christian's Biblical perspective of music. May God help us to use music in a way that pleases Him.

“



God created a world with sound effects,
as though it were an orchestra under
His conductor's baton. ”



The Primacy of Preaching II

> Pastor Steven R. Key



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In the faithful preaching of the Gospel, it is not just a minister who speaks and tells us about Christ. Christ Himself speaks by what the world considers “the foolishness of preaching” (1 Corinthians 1:18). Exactly in that truth is the power of God seen in preaching; exactly in that way is the fulfilment of Jesus' words in John 10:27 found – “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”

The Power of Preaching

Preaching as a power is rarely understood today.

There are more than a few in our day who are much disillusioned with

preaching! There are various reasons for such dissatisfaction; some good reasons, many not-so-good reasons. There are some children of God who long for the warmth and vigour of lively preaching and who feel their faith languishing because they are not hearing such preaching. There is hardly any more preaching to be heard in their churches. The Gospel is not preached, or it is not clearly and purely preached. The reasons for this may differ, and we need not consider those reasons in this connection. But quite naturally, under such circumstances, the child of God is going to suffer. And if that child of God remains in such a land of famine for a lengthy period of time, say, while his children are growing up, he is going to lose his family to the death of spiritual starvation!

But not only is the power of preaching denied by those ministers who fail to proclaim the Word of the living God according to the calling of their office, that power of preaching is also denied in many ways by those whose calling is to bring themselves under the pure preaching of the Word as often as

possible. Sometimes, it is because of the failure of the pulpit that the people in the pew begin to reject the whole idea of preaching. Largely because of the failure of preachers to be faithful to their preaching obligations, there are many who have left Reformed churches to find their home in the outward warmth and vigour of tongue-speaking, and so-called, “Spirit-filled” churches.

Others cry for something new. And when the cries become loud enough, change is brought to the church. Preaching is minimised, in order to replace it with entertainment. Music and even drama are found to be more “meaningful” to the soul than preaching.

Do we understand and have we known personally the power of preaching?

God Himself has instituted the preaching of the Word as the power unto salvation to all who believe. That is a matter of emphasis in the words of Romans 10:14. In the middle part of that verse, the Apostle asks (according to our translation): “and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?” There is a little error in

translation there. That error, by the way, is carried on in most other translations too. We are thankful, of course, that there are not many errors in our King James translation. More importantly, the principle of translation upon which this version is based is absolutely correct — the principle which recognises the truth that the Scriptures are word for word inspired by the Holy Spirit. But here, there is an error, (an easy mistake for a translator to make) an error of only two letters; but an error which makes a world of difference to the meaning of the text. The word which does not belong in the translation is the little word “of”. In the original, the text reads very definitely this way: “and how shall they believe in him whom they have not heard?” Now, I want you to understand that makes a world of difference. You can hear of someone, without any personal contact with that person. But when you hear him, that is quite different. Then you say, as a hymn has it, “I heard the voice of Jesus say, Come unto me and rest.”

The power of preaching is not to be found in the man who brings the Word, in the one who speaks about Christ. Anyone who knows a little about the Bible can speak about Christ, but that does not make him a preacher. If that were preaching, there would be no power whatsoever. For the words of a man may have a certain influence upon the thinking of people, but it has no power in itself. But, a preacher is a man through whom Christ is pleased to speak!

That is why, when you hear preaching as a means of grace to you, it is not just a matter of enjoying the sermon. When you come under the faithful preaching of the Word, and you are conscious of the Spirit of Christ applying that Word

to your heart, you hear Christ calling you into the fellowship of His life and love. Christ speaks to you! Christ draws you to Himself by the preaching of the Word! He causes His voice to be heard through a weak and sinful man, such as me. That is preaching.

When you think of it, it is amazing that Christ would even talk to us! Should somebody treat you and me like we often treat our Lord, we would certainly turn away and avoid such a person. But Christ continues to come to us, to fellowship with us and to speak to us. He speaks to us powerfully, bringing salvation to us who have been caught in the bondage of sin and snared in the trap of death.

It is His work, committed to Him by the Father, to gather His own. That work never becomes ours. It is absolutely the work of the exalted Christ through the Spirit. That truth brings with it several implications, both to the content of the preaching and our attitude toward it.

The apostle says in 2 Corinthians 5:20, “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.” When your pastor stands as Christ’s ambassador and is used by Him in such a way that God beseeches you by him, it follows that his preaching must be strictly the Word of Christ. The preacher has no message of his own. The pulpit is no place for opinions. Nor is the pulpit a place for beggars. The preacher who stands in Christ’s stead does not merely speak about Jesus and conclude by saying, “Will you please accept what I say?” He does not beg for sinners to let Jesus into their hearts. The preacher, who is called by Christ to bring to you and to me the good tidings of salvation, is one who must bring his message with

the authority of Christ! He is to stand before you, saying, “Thus saith the Lord.”

That Word of Christ, the powerful Word proclaimed by the preaching of the Gospel, is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes. And being the power of God unto salvation, it is glad tidings – good news. The apostle, in Romans 10:8, speaks of those glad tidings being the “word of faith, which we preach,” the word addressed to you and which you take to yourself by faith.

What is that Word, which is powerful unto your salvation? It is this: You are justified by the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Whenever you receive the promise of the Gospel by a true faith, all your sins are really forgiven you by God, for the sake of Christ’s merits. And the result is that all the blessings of salvation are yours! (Heidelberg Catechism, Q & A 84).

Those glad tidings of good things apply to us in every aspect of our lives. They apply to us in times of joy, but also in times of sorrow. That God is good is as true in times of affliction as it is in times of health. Those glad tidings are applicable in the midst of social turmoil and war, as well as in times of earthly peace. They apply to us at all times and everywhere. They bear as well on the life that we live. Christ says to us, through the preaching, “Thus saith the Lord. Here is the way you shall live, to My glory, and in thankfulness to Me. Hear my Word.”

Our Attitude Toward the Preaching

That Christ speaks personally to us through faithful preaching ought also to have an influence upon our own attitude toward the preaching.

For one thing, fellowship with our

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When you think of it, it is amazing that Christ would even talk to us!

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Saviour, to hear His voice, is that which we cannot do without! When you love Christ, when you see Him as your Saviour, then you also long to be with Him and to hear His voice. That is true not only because we like the particular minister which He has given us. Different ministers will bear different gifts, and will bring the Gospel as Christ's ambassadors in different ways and with different emotions, applying it with different nuances. But we must have faithful preaching, faithful and diligent exposition of the Scriptures. For we need to hear Him in Whom alone is salvation and by Whose Word comes faith.

To neglect such fellowship with Christ is incomprehensible. Out of our misery, we need to be delivered. In our sorrow, we need to be comforted. From our sin, we need to be delivered. Christ alone is powerful enough to do that.

For another thing, as those blessed by God with faithful preaching, we will realise the importance of that preaching to our own spiritual life and will not forsake that preaching for any reason. Education or employment might provide a person with the opportunity to move from one location to another, perhaps even to another country. But in considering such a move, there is one consideration that must stand above all others when we understand the primacy of preaching.

We cannot move, except we know that we will hear in that location the same faithful preaching of the Gospel. We cannot settle for less than the pure and rich notes of the voice of our Saviour! Another location, therefore, is out of the question, if it will deprive us of faithful preaching. And in our day, let it be understood, faithful preaching cannot be taken for granted! We have to know, before we move, that in that location there is a faithful church that takes preaching with the utmost seriousness that it requires!

Then also will we demand faithful preaching from those who occupy our pulpits. We do not come for entertainment. We do not come to be moved superficially by song or great oratory. We come to hear the voice of Jesus. We do so as often as we possibly can. For that is our life. That is our need.

Finally, in our desire to hear the voice of our Saviour, we will also come with a humble attitude and a desire to be taught by Him. To stay out late on Saturday night, and to enter God's house exhausted on Sunday morning, is hardly expressive of one eager to give careful attention to the voice of his or her Saviour. Desiring to be taught by Him, we will come rested, ready to give careful attention. And recognising our dependence upon the Holy Spirit, we will come in fervent prayer for that Word of Christ to be applied to our hearts, our minds, and our lives.

The Fruit of that Preaching

Then that preaching of the Word which is powerful unto salvation bears precious fruit in the church and in our lives as God's people. The fruit of that preaching is faith.

We recognise that preaching which is faithful to the Scriptures, and through

which Christ speaks, does not bring faith to all who hear. There is also a negative effect wrought by the preaching of the Word. When we speak of preaching as a means of grace, we understand that grace is not for all. Some are brought under condemnation in that preaching. So Paul speaks of that preaching when he writes in 2 Corinthians 2:15-17: "For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things? For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ."

We have seen the preaching work that way. That preaching, which is to the salvation of us who believe, occasionally works hardness of heart in them that perish. To our sorrow, there have been those who have departed, not to go elsewhere, but who have left the Church of the living God because their conscience would not allow them to sit under the pure preaching of the Word. When Christ spoke, it was to their condemnation. And rather than turn from their sins, they turned from Christ. We still pray for their conversion.

But we are blessed indeed, who look to Christ longing to be satisfied by the preaching of His Word. Pastors rejoice to proclaim those glad tidings of good things. Pastors rejoice to see the Spirit apply the Gospel powerfully to the hearts of Christ's own. By means of preaching, the Holy Spirit works and strengthens faith. Because of that, we will not fail to sit at the meal table of the Lord's ministry, unless it is impossible to be present. The church observes the spiritual growth in many individuals

and families who have received the Lord's Word with gladness. To God alone belongs the glory.

Continue prayerfully to receive the Word. And having received it, do not immediately return to the things of the world. But meditate upon it as

a means of grace, and speak to one another about it, edifying one another unto salvation. Until Jesus returns, let us guard this means of grace. And even over and against all the attacks upon the preaching of the Word, let us continue to carry thankful attitudes for it – so that God will give us repentance

and faith, and the consciousness of His fellowship and love. By faithful preaching, you have been founded in the truth, established in the faith, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. By faithful preaching Christ will lead you to heaven.

The Apocrypha – Not Canonical (Belgic Confession 6b)

>> Pastor Angus Stewart



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Belgic Confession 6: The Difference Between the Canonical and Apocryphal Books

We distinguish those sacred books from the apocryphal, namely: the third book of Esdras, the books of Tobias, Judith, Wisdom, Jesus Syrach, Baruch, the appendix to the book of Esther, the Song of the Three Children in the Furnace, the History of Susannah, of Bell and the Dragon, the Prayer of Manasses, and the two books of the Maccabees. All of which the church may read and take instruction from so far as they agree with the canonical books; but they are far from having such power and efficacy, as that

we may from their testimony confirm any point of faith or of the Christian religion; much less detract from the authority of the other sacred books.

In the last article on the Belgic Confession, we introduced the Apocrypha and critiqued three of its books (or parts of them). Now we need to consider the Apocrypha in the light of the three-fold ground (one ground with three aspects) for recognising God's Word (Belgic Confession 5).

1. The Objective Ground

The Apocrypha itself does not claim to be the Word of God. It nowhere includes a ringing "thus saith the Lord" or any such statement. In fact, in several places it claims the opposite, such as II Maccabees 15:38 (as we saw last time) and the prologue of Jesus Syrach (Ecclesiasticus).

There is nothing in the Apocrypha akin to Biblical prophecy, such as predictions of the coming Saviour or the gathering of His catholic or universal church. To paraphrase Belgic Confession 5, the very blind are able to perceive that the things of the Apocrypha are not being fulfilled.

With regards to unity, no such thing is evident within the Apocrypha itself. Nor does it harmonise with the canonical Scriptures. For example, Judith 9:2 celebrates Simeon's sinful deed of slaying the Shechemites (Gen. 34) which Jacob cursed (Gen. 49:5-7).

Doctrinally, the Apocrypha never even approaches anything like the truth of the incarnation of the Son of God or His sufferings and glory (cf. Luke 24:25-27, 44-47). It contains no intimations of the Trinity or testimonies concerning justification by faith alone or salvation by grace alone. Indeed, it contains false doctrines regarding angels (Tobit 5:12; 6:7-8; 12:12, 15) and it teaches salvation by works (Tobit 12:9), as we saw in the previous article. It even praises prayers and sacrifices for the dead (2 Macc. 12:42-45).

To paraphrase Westminster Confession I:5, the Apocrypha does not contain heavenly matter, is not possessed of majestic style and does not ascribe all glory to God, unlike the Holy Scriptures.

2. The Church's Testimony

The old covenant church of the Jews received as its canon (as witnessed by Josephus and others) the same (Hebrew) books as our (Protestant) Old Testament and excluded the (Greek) Apocrypha. The key text here is Romans 3:2: "unto them [i.e., the Jews] were committed the oracles of God."

The Head of the church, in the days of His humiliation on earth, never disagreed with the Jews about their canon, though He was not hesitant to do so about many other things, such as their interpretations of the law, the Sabbath, divorce and remarriage, ceremonial washing, the Messiah, the kingdom of God, etc. The Lord Jesus never quoted from the Apocrypha, whereas He cited many verses in the inspired Old Testament books. He also approved the Jewish canon, even using their three-fold classification of "the law of Moses," "the prophets" and "the psalms" (Luke 24:44).

Likewise, the apostles and prophets who penned the New Testament Scriptures never quote the Apocrypha. The apostle Paul by divine inspiration declared that to the Jews "were committed the oracles of God" (Rom. 3:2), as cited earlier.

In the early post-apostolic church, there was some confusion regarding the Apocrypha: sometimes it was read in worship services and sometimes it was used to support church doctrine. But God led the early church to confess as canonical what we now refer to as the 66 books of the Bible, not the Apocrypha. This is especially evident in the writings of such church fathers as Jerome (the most learned in Hebrew), Athanasius, Tertullian, Hilary, Rufinus, Epiphanius and Melito of Sardis (c. 170 AD, quoted in Eusebius).

Even in the Middle Ages, many recognised that the Apocrypha was not divinely inspired. In fact, there were some at the Roman Catholic Council of Trent (1545-1563) who recognised that some or all of the apocryphal books were not canonical.

The views of the various churches at the sixteenth-century Reformation are interesting and instructive. By God's grace, the true church, represented in the Protestant Reformation, recognised only the 66 books of the Bible as inspired, unlike the false churches. Roman Catholicism adds to the Word of God and Eastern Orthodoxy adds more to the Word of God. Also, the sixteenth-century Anabaptists quoted the Apocrypha as if it were Scripture.

3. The Subjective Ground

Here we are talking about the inward witness of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the believer as a living member of the true church. The Holy Spirit witnesses to us in the light of the objective ground (the failure of the Apocrypha to measure up to the truth of the inspired Scripture) in connection with the testimony of the true church, now and through the ages.

The Relevance of Belgic Confession 6

First, Belgic Confession 6 enables us better to understand aspects of church history. As we have seen, the status of the Apocrypha was one aspect of the Reformation's battle with Rome, both in the sixteenth century and to this day. The Synod of Dordt (1618-1619) debated the meaning of the word "read" in Belgic Confession 6. Gomar and others rightly interpreted this not to refer to the reading of the Apocrypha in the church's worship services (cf. Westminster Confession I:3).

The Apocrypha was a key issue in the formation of the Trinitarian Bible Society (TBS). The British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) included the Apocrypha in Bibles they sent to Roman Catholic countries. Some correctly opposed this pragmatic compromise and the TBS was born in 1831. The United Bible Society (UBS), the Bible translation wing of the very liberal World Council of Churches (WCC), has unfaithful Protestants and Roman Catholics, etc., cooperating in producing common Bibles which include the Apocrypha. Another outworking of false ecumenism!

Second, the Apocrypha is of use in informing us of the history and theology of the Jews in the intertestamental period. I Maccabees' description of Antiochus Epiphanes IV's exploits is especially helpful because he is prophesied by Daniel as a type of the Antichrist (Dan. 7; 8; 11). Ecclesiasticus has a famous section in praise of godly Old Testament figures (chapters 44-49) and it has some interesting things to say about wisdom.

Third, learning about the Apocrypha and contrasting it with the God-breathed Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16) helps us to evaluate other pseudepigrapha, i.e., books claiming to have been written by Old or New Testament worthies, such as the Gospel of Thomas, a Gnostic forgery, much beloved of the extremely modernist Jesus Seminar. Likewise, this helps us understand the unhistorical criticisms of the Bible that arise, for example, in *The Da Vinci Code*, a best-selling but extremely fanciful novel by Dan Brown. In short, over against all contenders, the 66 books of the Bible stand out alone as God's hammer (Jer. 23:29), the inspired, infallible, supremely authoritative and canonical Scriptures.

Is Gambling Wrong?

Dealing with Chinese New Year Gambling

>> Elder Chan Chee Seng



Chan Chee Seng is an Elder in CERC. He is the husband of Angela and their family is blessed with 3 children.

Since this issue of Salt Shakers will be distributed around the festive season of Chinese New Year, the committee has asked me to explore this question of gambling during the Chinese New Year period. Is a friendly game of *mah-jong* or poker with friends and relatives an acceptable pastime? How about buying a lottery ticket just once for that yearly grand bonus draw?

With this article, I hope to present the Biblical view of gambling, then apply that view to those friendly games, and finally offer a few suggestions on what we can do when invited to join such games.

The world offers many reasons for us to think that some forms of gambling are not so bad. They reason that it is bad when it becomes an addiction, but not when it is for fun or when it is a way to socialise. They say that it is only a friendly game that happens only once a year, and very little money is involved. They point out that other Christians are doing it, and it is anti-social not to join such games. They may reason that since the government has legalised some of these gambling activities, they must be all right. They may reason that a small wager in TOTO or spending \$3 to buy just

one lucky draw ticket a month, or even a year, cannot be that bad. Many Christians may even agree that such seemingly harmless forms of gambling ought to be acceptable.

Governments legalise gambling for the billions of dollars of revenue it bring to their coffers and for the job opportunities such activities create. A government's approval of an activity cannot be an indicator of its moral rightness.

In fact, the world has much of its own arguments against gambling. When I was a kid, my father's friend commented that the best form of revenge is to continue to befriend an enemy and teach his children to gamble. Everything they own will be lost; money, house, career, and maybe even the next generation will suffer, he said. The cruelty of gambling and its possible use as a tool for revenge hit me hard. But still, many will argue that it does not apply to the friendly games or when only a few dollars are at stake.

Although there is much legitimacy in worldly wisdom against gambling, these are not the reasons why the Christian should abhor all forms of gambling. There are numerous confessional and Biblical objections to gambling. I refer to some of them here.

Our Form for the Administration of the Lord's Supper says, "Therefore, we also, according to the command of Christ and the Apostle Paul, admonish all those who are defiled with the following sins, to keep themselves from the table of the Lord, and declare to them that they have

no part in the kingdom of Christ; such as all idolaters, gamesters and all who lead offensive lives." Our confession keeps unrepentant gamblers from the Lord's Table.

Probably the most common Biblical objection to gambling is that it is the sin against the 10th commandment: Thou shall not covet. To covet is to crave after something that God has chose not to give us. In a gamble, something that God has given us is put at risk of being taken away in order to gain something else which God has not given to us. The root of gambling is to want something that does not belong to us. This is covetousness. God abhors the covetous (Psa 10:3). God hates the covetous and counts them together with fornicators, idolaters, the railer, the drunkard, and the extortioner. God, through the Apostle Paul, tells us not to keep company with them (1 Cor 5:9-11). The covetous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9-10).

Is it possible to gamble in a friendly game without being covetous? Some may attribute their win to God by saying that God wanted to give the winnings to them by letting them win. Can a Christian sincerely say that God gives to those He loves through the throw of a dice, the flip of a card, or by pulling the arm of the one-armed bandit at the casino? Whatever excuses we invent to cover the sin of covetousness in gambling, gambling is still sin – and God hates the covetous gambler.

Closely related to craving for what God has chosen not to give us (covetousness) is not properly using what God has given us (bad stewardship). Since God

is the Creator and all we are and have are first received from Him, then the most obvious Biblical objection to gambling is Christian stewardship. The Apostle Peter said in 1 Peter 4:10: “As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” God’s good stewards may only use God’s gifts for the service of His church. This is what Jesus meant when He said, “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness...” (Matt 6:33)

The Christian who gambles with his money or spends his time doing so, is like the servant that Jesus spoke of in the parable in Luke 12:42-48. The wicked servant misused the goods and authority that his master gave him, imagining that those things belonged to him to use in any way he liked. Jesus tells us what will be the unfaithful servant’s reward, “And that servant, which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.” (Luke 12:47)

To those who are not good stewards of their earthly possessions, the Lord says in Luke 16:11, “If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?” These are fearful words from our Lord for the casual gambler who does not exercise faithful use of the money that God has entrusted to him. How then shall he receive the true riches – the inheritance of the Kingdom in Jesus Christ?

We have probably read news reports about employees who embezzle to feed their gambling addiction and how they regret their foolishness to think that they would never be caught. Has the Christian embezzled from God by bringing what God has entrusted to him to be used for the Kingdom to the friendly gambling table? “For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.” (Ecc 12:14)

Not a cent that the Christian receives from His Master may be used to gamble. Not at the friendly gambling table, not at TOTO, not even \$3 for that ticket to win that 2.3 million dollars once a year.


Ultimately, for the Reformed Christian, gambling denies that God is sovereign. Gambling is about luck and chance. The gambler reasons this way, “If you are lucky, you win.” The Reformed Christian insists that God is absolutely sovereign; God’s sovereignty and chance, or luck, are mutually exclusive and cannot exist together. Either God is sovereign (so that even the falling of the hair on our head is at His bidding) or God is not sovereign (so that He left the result of your game to chance). The Reformed Christian who gambles, in whatever form, denies that God is sovereign. If God is not sovereign, then He must have left His creation to chance, as is popularly claimed by many Christians today. Then the fallen sparrows in the field must have had fallen by chance. That would make Jesus a liar when He said, “and one of them (sparrows) shall not fall on the ground without your Father.” (Mat 10:29). “Let God be true, but every man a liar” (Rom 3:4). Let the Reformed Christian guard the reformation truth of the sovereignty of God by abhorring gambling.

There are many reasons for our fear of declining an invitation to gamble, especially during the festive period. In our consideration for the one who invites, we may be afraid of putting them in a bad spot. There is probably the fear of being ridiculed as being ‘super holy’; other Christians are gambling, why not you? There may be the fear of persecution, falling from grace with the boss or maybe even losing out on that promotion. Also, there may be the fear of losing friends or being ostracised from a clique or from family ‘inner circles’.

For the Christian, the answer to all those fears is this: “Let us hear the

conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.” (Ecc 12:13) It is our duty to fear God and keep His commandments. Therefore, fear God “and fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” (Matt 10:28)

Gambling among friends and relatives is a real problem that many of us face during family gatherings or when we join the workforce. The best way to avoid an invitation to gamble is to have a consistent Christian walk that shows a fear of God. We must always be ready with the reason for our faith and the hope that is in us. Learn the reasons why Christians must not gamble. If a non-Christian taunts you to the table, tell him that God is sovereign and there is no such thing as chance. Maybe you will get an opportunity to tell him about the Christian’s comfort and salvation in this sovereign God. What about that inconsistent Christian who relentlessly pursues you to join him at the gambling table? I would tell him as tactfully as I can that there will be no unrepentant gamblers in heaven.



“ Gambling not only tarnishes the Christian’s witness for Jesus Christ, but more importantly, it is not consistent with the reformed Christian’s confession that God is absolutely sovereign. **”**



What to Look for in a Girlfriend? (II)

>> Elder Lee Kong Wee



Lee Kong Wee is an Elder in CERC. He is the husband of Dorcas and their family is blessed with 2 children.

Looking for Her

Before we turn our focus to our sisters, there is yet more to say to our brothers. And this has to do with how the brother behaves in going about initiating a relationship with a sister. The principle of headship and leadership applies here once again. That this truth is largely forgotten or ignored among young people today is evident from two things: 1) men no longer see the initiation of a relationship as their responsibility (while women think it's alright for them to initiate a relationship); and 2) the authority of the father over the daughter is hardly recognised.

That God gives the role of a leader and head to the man means that *he* takes the initiative; *he* bears the primary responsibility; *he* exhibits manliness in all respects with regards to the relationship.

In the **first** place, this means the brother ought to be the one to take the first step to approach the sister and initiate the relationship, and not wait for the sister to do so. If a brother notices a godly sister, whom he has come to know through a period of interaction, and develops a liking

for her, he ought to be the one to initiate any special relationship. He must pick up the courage to do so, and be prepared for the sister to reject him or to say she's not ready for any relationship, or whatever the answer may be. But to initiate a relationship must mean that the brother has the intention and is ready to pursue the relationship, with a view towards marriage, God willing. That means that at the point of approaching her, he already has such an intention. He is not just 'testing waters', and hoping to find out if the sister also likes him before he tells her his intention. If he has no such intention, or is not ready, then he ought not even to approach the sister, or pay excessive attention to her, which may cause her to misunderstand his behaviour towards her. In other words, he ought not to tell a sister he likes her or is 'interested' in her unless he means by that that he is looking at starting a serious relationship with her, and wants to date her with a view towards marriage. This does not mean he treats her as almost his wife right from the beginning, or that the relationship is most certainly going to work out and end in marriage. But it means he takes the biblical injunction of 'one man-one woman' very seriously, so that unless the Lord shows him clearly otherwise, he enters into a relationship with the intention to pursue it to its end. He has no intention whatsoever to try out as many relationships as possible so that he can 'pick the best girl'. Each relationship is entered into with a heavy sense of responsibility and accountability, for he knows he ought not to play with a sister's emotions. He knows he ought to reflect

something of Christ's love for His church, even in a dating relationship. There is commitment right from the beginning.

So brothers, be *'the man'*! Don't leave a sister guessing and wondering whether you like her and intend to pursue a relationship with her – tell her plainly! Your decisiveness and forthrightness in approaching her will also cause her to see your seriousness and sincerity in wanting to start a relationship with her. Pray for wisdom and courage to approach a sister and initiate a relationship with her. The Lord will give grace and peace as you seek His will.

In the **second** place, if a brother is interested in pursuing a relationship with a sister, he ought first to approach her father to seek his permission. Perhaps this may sound like some out-dated, old-fashioned practice. But this practice is grounded on a biblical principle, namely that a husband and father, as head of the family, exercises federal authority (authority as head) over his wife and children. As long as a child remains single, he or she remains 'legally' or formally under the authority and supervision of the parents. This is true for a young man or woman who is just growing out from their teenage years and entering young adulthood and considering marriage. But even for a single person who is well into adulthood, and has grown largely independent and self-sufficient in his daily life, the parents' formal authority over the unmarried child nevertheless remains according to God's creation ordinance. It is only in marriage that a child 'leaves father and mother'. This principle is

demonstrated by a ‘small’ segment in most of our wedding ceremonies, whose importance is often overlooked. That is the time when the father of the bride raises his hand in response to the minister’s question “Who gives this woman to this man to be his wife?” and answers ‘I’. I must admit I did not really thought much about this little ‘question-and-answer’ between the minister and the bride’s father until its significance was pointed out by Pastor Ronald van Overloop in his speech on the Marriage Form last year. By his answer, the father is actually transferring the headship over his daughter from himself to her newly-wed husband. Among many other implications of this truth, for the brother who desires to start a relationship with a sister, it implies that he ought to acknowledge and respect this authority of her father by approaching him and seeking his permission formally to date her.

Now we can turn our attention to the sisters briefly. What should a brother pay attention to in a sister as he prays and seeks the Lord’s guidance to lead him to someone? There is no doubt that the most important trait a brother must look for in a sister (and vice-versa) when contemplating starting a relationship is her godliness. The Scriptures make plain what ‘godliness’ means for a sister - read **Prov 31:10ff**, **Eph 5:22-24**, **Titus 2:3-5**, **1 Pet 3:1-6**. Some questions the brother ought to ask himself would include, *‘Does she love God, His church & His truth? Does she recognise her God-ordained role as a woman? Is she ‘womanly’, i.e. does she respond to and affirm worthy male leadership? Does she glory in being a woman, feeling honoured when a brother opens the car door for her or offers to carry things for her? Does she feel secure, and not insulted, that she needs the protection and care of a man? Does she have a covenant perspective of life, preparing herself to be a mother in Israel, seeing that her calling, ordinarily, is to be married and be a help meet*

to her husband and a keeper of the home? Does she adorn her life with the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, and good works?’ The brother must look for a girlfriend through the lens of Scripture, constantly applying its principles and maintaining a spiritual and long-term focus.

There are of course other factors a brother must consider when looking for a potential life partner. These would differ from person to person, according to our individual personalities, special needs or concerns, stage in life, etc. We are all attracted to different personalities. God’s providence brings different people at different times across our pathway in life. If you ask me for a comprehensive list of considerations which a brother can tick off, I do not have such a list. And neither would I want to come up with one. I trust the Lord will lead and guide our brothers as they seek His will prayerfully in finding a godly mate and apply their sanctified wisdom to their own individual circumstances in life. But let the brother guard his heart and be very careful when seeking out a potential girlfriend that he does not allow his carnal desires, physical attraction or any other temporal considerations to colour his judgment and become the main deciding factor. Godliness and spiritual maturity are of paramount importance and must be the over-riding consideration. It is therefore wise for the brother to seek the counsel of godly, mature Christian husbands or fathers before he starts a relationship.

But there is one thing yet I’m burdened to impress upon our brothers (and equally to our sisters). That is to look for a godly sister (brother) who shares the same, like, precious Reformed faith. This is by no means a secondary consideration. Much less an afterthought. Whether one finds a girlfriend or boyfriend - and eventually a spouse - who shares the same confession and conviction

of faith or not, has tremendous implications for family life, as well as the preservation of the truth of God’s Word in our generations. If a husband does not believe the biblical teaching of infant baptism, but the wife does, what are they to do when the Lord gives them a child? If a couple does not agree on a truth or teaching of the Bible, not only would it cause tension in the relationship between husband and wife, and hence threaten and weaken their spiritual unity and oneness, but it would almost certainly lead to a compromise of that truth in its bearing and application in their family life. To insist on that truth would cause strain in the family, so the easy way out is to cease talking about that truth, minimise it and ignore it as much as possible. Therefore, gradually, that truth is lost in the generations of that family. As it happens in the church, so it happens in a family.

So brothers, if you love the Reformed faith, if you love the doctrine of God’s absolute sovereignty, if you love the God-glorifying and man-abasing truths of sovereign, particular grace and an unconditional covenant, then look for a sister who shares the same love! To the extent and depth you share the same love for the same truths of the Word of God, to the same extent you would experience the spiritual oneness and richness of communion with each other in the relationship, and maintain those truths in your generations.

Looking Up

Finally, when looking for a girlfriend, the brother must ‘look up’. Though in a certain sense, when a young man desires marriage and to start a family, he must ‘look *for*’ a girlfriend, ultimately he must remember that it is God Who would bring *to* him his ‘perfect match’. This is not to say that he can therefore be careless in his dating, or ‘play fast and loose’ with many different sisters (God forbid!). Neither does it mean that he then

simply sits around passively and wait for the 'right' girl to cross his path. But it means that ultimately, he must rest content in the Lord's will for him even in such an important area of his life. While he actively seeks out someone, he also patiently waits upon the Lord to reveal His will clearly to him. It means he does not become anxious and desperate, or feel pressurised by his peers, friends or relatives to find a girlfriend. Remember brothers, God's timing is *perfect*. And He knows just

the person best suited for you – i.e. for your sanctification - and for His glory.

Conclusion

Brothers, if you have read this far, I hope by now you would have realised that 'looking for a girlfriend' is not so much about the sister as it is about yourselves – your own spiritual walk and your proper behaviour when approaching our sisters. I pray that reading this article would cause some of you, who are of 'marriageable' age,

to look out among the many godly sisters in our church and seriously consider starting a relationship.

May the Lord be pleased to establish godly dating relationships among our young people, and through them to raise up godly, covenant homes in our church as a living witness to the glorious truth of the everlasting covenant of grace He establishes with us His Bride in our Bridegroom Jesus Christ.

LESSONS FROM THE HISTORY OF THE BELOVED CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST NOW AMONG US (III)

>> Pastor Arie Den Hartog



Pastor Arie Den Hartog is a minister of the Word at Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Wyoming, Michigan.

We hope and pray that you will have the perseverance to read this series of articles, though a bit long, and that you will benefit from them.

In the years after the wonderful event of the Institution of the Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore (ERCS), God blessed her richly. ERCS grew wonderfully in her numbers. She gathered for worship on the Lord's Day in a humble meeting place. It was a kampong rented from the father of one of her members. This meeting place was filled to capacity with eager worshippers. Worship services were probably longer than most other churches in Singapore. Attention

to preaching was inspiring to the preacher. The singing was enthusiastic.

Besides the worship services on the Lord's Day, which were always well attended, there were prayer meetings every Wednesday evening. These were also well attended. The prayer meetings included a short meditation by one of the leaders of the church, usually the pastor, one of the elders or deacons, or some other gifted young man who could stand and give a simple inspiring exhortation based on a chosen passage of Scripture. After the exhortation, there was a period of sharing of prayer requests by those in attendance. There were many such requests. Those who came to the prayer meeting understood how important prayer is for the life of the Christian. Christians pray regularly in their own personal life. They also gather together corporately. In these prayer meetings, there was a rich experience of the communion of the saints and an encouraging of one another by praying together. Those who prayed knelt on the floor in front of chairs and benches.

The membership of ERCS grew

mainly through members of the church bringing friends and relatives to the morning worship services. They did this through the zealous personal testimony they gave, in their daily lives, of the joy and excitement of their God-given faith. They gave personal testimony of the blessed truth they had come to know and also of how this truth was a mighty source of comfort and joy in the trials and challenges they faced in life. Many of the early members of ERCS were school classmates. Later, many were students from pre-university and from universities and polytechnics. Some were beginning their life careers and facing the challenges in the workaday world. Some were going overseas for advanced studies.

From the very beginning of our coming to Singapore, there were pre-baptism and confession of faith classes. Meetings for instruction were held at our apartment on River Valley Close on Sundays after the morning worship services. After about a year of regular instruction, large groups of young people eagerly requested to be baptised. Some of the new Christians

were recent converts from heathen religions. Some came to ERCS because even though they had become Christians in other churches, they came for the first time in their lives to hear the blessed Gospel of the Reformed Faith. They realised by the grace and Spirit of God that the Reformed Faith summarised by the Reformed Creeds agrees with the truth of the Gospel in every part. Through the instruction given by the preaching, bible studies, and catechism classes, Christians from other churches were brought to a more perfect understanding of the Word of God. There were a whole series of groups of young people who went through the classes. The instruction given was based on the Heidelberg Catechism. When the period of instruction was over, those who attended the classes and desired to be baptised were examined by the elders. When the confessions of these vibrant young Christians were approved by the eldership they were received for baptism. Worship services regularly included large groups, some as many as twenty, that were baptised together. These were joyous occasions.

These years of the history of ERCS were exciting and blessed years. As we remember the history of God's beloved church we must remember also the years of the pouring out of God's blessing upon His people. In the history of the church from the beginning there are battles and struggles for the truth. There are sorrows as well as joys. There are trials of the members of the church. In these trials the members encourage and support one another. The truth must be defended. In the course of defending the truth there will be challenges and disagreements and differences. In the midst of all these experiences, God preserves His people and encourages and strengthens her members. We remember, with thankfulness to God, the glorious history of the church and God's blessings upon her members. If years

later the church begins to lose the zeal of her first love she must remember the former years of the great blessing of the Lord.

ERCS grew wonderfully in numbers in the first several years of her existence by the grace and Spirit of God among her. I can remember when walls had to be broken down to make more room at the kampong where the worship services were being held. Over the years adjacent rooms became available to rent and the worship centre was expanded several times for larger audiences at the worship services.

Another very exciting event was regularly happening during those years. Young people were being brought together, young men and young women in the great excitement and joy of Christian love for each other. There was one wedding ceremony after another. At times every other weekend there was a wedding taking place. In a few instances, there were even wedding ceremonies where more than one couple was married at a time. Almost the whole church joined the celebrations of the weddings.

After the many wedding ceremonies, young newlywed couples were having their first covenant children. For the first time in the history of ERCS there were regular infant baptisms taking place in the worship services. New parents, many who were raised in idol worshipping homes, were facing the challenges of raising their covenant children in the fear of the Lord.

Pastor Lau Chin Kwee completed his training in the Protestant Reformed Seminary in the United States of America. He returned, was ordained in the ERCS, and became her first native pastor. After some years God raised up two other young men from the midst of the church, brother Jai Mahtani and brother Cheah Fook Meng. Both of these spent several years in the USA at the Seminary to be trained as pastors.

As the numbers of the church grew there was a great need for a more permanent place of worship. In Singapore it is very difficult for a small church to be able to build or purchase a church building. For many years, committees in ERCS investigated various potential places of worship. There were many disappointments. Finally, in the providence of God, ERCS was able to purchase land and build a beautiful building at a site along Yio Chu Kang Road.

God continued to bless His church richly. Numbers continued to grow. Soon, the exciting prospect of starting a second congregation was being discussed. A difficult yet wonderful decision had to be made. What would better serve the cause of the church of Jesus Christ? Was it better to have one larger congregation or was it better to have two congregations and two places for the preaching of the Gospel and the gathering of God's people? Singapore is a country with a small area of land compared to other countries. Rapid mass transit was developing in Singapore with the building of the MRT lines. It was easier now to travel from one end of the country to the other. All these discussions resulted in the decision to start a second congregation. The new congregation was established we believe by God's guidance on October 9, 1986, and named Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore. Its first worship service was held on November 16, at the American School in Singapore. The second congregation was instituted also because God provided a second pastor after the training of Jai Mahtani. This was another exciting event of the history of our church.

Soon after CERC was instituted, the author of these articles returned to the USA. The ERCS had arrived at a stage when she no longer needed the presence of a missionary pastor from another country. Our returning to

USA with our family was an event that happened with a mixture of joy and sorrow. We rejoiced that the church in Singapore had arrived at a stage that we were no longer needed. Our sorrow was that we had to leave so many beloved saints behind to return to America all the way on the other side of the world.

In history the church develops. She grows in numbers. In Singapore, this growth included the adding of members who already had considerable history in other churches and some who had learned about the Reformed Faith even in other countries such as the UK and other places. Over time the church grows in depth of understanding the truth of God's Word. New challenges arise in defending this truth as members are added who already have their own established understanding of God's Word.


ERCS was from the beginning of her history blessed, we humbly believe, through the guidance of the Protestant Reformed Churches and by her missionaries and other men from the PRCA that God sent to help and guide her in the first years of her history. These men included me and later Rev. Jason Kortering who spent altogether 11 years as missionary pastor in the ERCS. Others also gave themselves to periods of labours in the ERCS.

The years of the history of the church are also the history of growing and developing in the understanding of the Word of God and its application. The church has existed in the world since the time of the apostles, longer even – from the beginning of time. When a new church is established in any country, she learns from the church which has gone before and in particular from the church God uses to establish her. This is necessary and good in the providence of God. This is really an indication of the truth that the church is one in the truth, even as

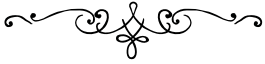
she is established in one nation after another. She is and must be one in the truth. The readiness and willingness of the members of the church to do this is their wisdom and godliness. This is the reason that the constant remembrance of church history is valuable. Every new church will soon face the challenges of defending the truth which other churches in other part of the world have faced in their particular history. She will have to defend the truth often against the same errors and heresies which soon arise in every land.

The PRCA, who was used of God to establish ERCS in Singapore, was deeply concerned about the future of the church and her growing in the knowledge of the truth and remaining faithful to the truth once delivered to her over the years. This concern was born out of a deep love of the Lord which had grown over the years of labouring through our missionary and in other ways with the ERCS. The author of these articles had a very great personal interest in all of this over the years.

There were several issues which were in part brought into the ERCS by the PRCA, but also because ERCS would soon in the providence of God have to face these same issues within her. The PRCA in her history had to defend the truth of God's sovereign and particular grace over against the entrance into the Reformed Churches of the idea of false concept of Common Grace. Several very important questions were involved in this whole controversy. "Is God gracious only to His people, or is He gracious also to the ungodly world?" The second question is, "Does God have both a saving and a non-saving grace?" Related to these important and foundational issues is the question of whether God, in the preaching of the Gospel, makes a general well-meant offer to all men of salvation. Does God desire to save all men or does He desire to save only His chosen people whom He loved from



“ ERCS was from the beginning of her history blessed, we humbly believe, through the guidance of the Protestant Reformed Churches and by her missionaries and other men from the PRCA that God sent to help and guide her in the first years of her history. ”



eternity? Does God realise this desire so that all those whom He desires to save will actually be saved, or is it the case that many whom he desires to save are finally not saved because of their own resistance to the offer of the Gospel? The PRCA was led by God's grace to understand the great issues of the truth involved in all these questions. She was led to understand that the doctrinal controversies that were brought into the Reformed Churches were a challenge to all the wonderful doctrines of grace which over the years have come to be known as the Five Points of Calvinism and the TULIP doctrines.

Before I close this chapter of my series of articles I will also just mention several other important areas of understanding and maintaining the truth of God that the influence of the PRCA brought into the ERCS. A very important one had to do with the right understanding of the truth of God's Covenant of Grace with His people. Is this Covenant sovereign and

unconditional or was this Covenant dependent on the condition of faith on the part of children born of Covenant parents? Does the Covenant of God depend on the decision of these children to accept their place in God's Covenant?

A third area of the truth of God which was brought into ERCS was a question of great practical concern in the life of the church. It had to do with marriage – whether marriage is an unbreakable lifelong bond established by God and broken only by God at the death of one of those who were united in their marriage by God. This raises the question of the rightness or wrongness of divorce when the vows of marriage are broken by man and treachery is committed by one of the partners against another in marriage. Furthermore, do those who are divorced by the actions of men and sins against marriage have

the right to marry someone else if they so desire? These questions are of very serious practical concern. God's truth and honour are involved. They involve the truth that marriage is intended by God to be a picture of the relationship of Christ and His Church, and the faithfulness of His love for her. These questions concern the important matter of maintaining faithfulness in marriage and are essential for the continued blessing of God on Covenant homes and families.

The PRCA has been criticised for bringing the above mentioned issues into the life of the ERCS. This resulted in controversy. Was this even right? The PRCA is not ashamed of having done this. She did this in love for the truth of God, first of all, and secondly, in love for the future of His beloved church in the ERCS.

Inevitably, and even as part of her

calling in the world, every church will have to decide what her relationship to other churches in the land, and even in the world, should be. The church of Jesus Christ has a broader unity than just the local church. But great carefulness is necessary in making right decisions to join with other denominations.

Questions arose in the ERCS regarding whether the church should hold two worship services on the Lord's Day. Questions arose whether it is proper to use the Heidelberg Catechism in the worship service in connection with the preaching.

How did all of these questions develop over the years in the ERCS? This is certainly a very important part of understanding the history of the church in Singapore and the history of CERC in particular. But, my article is already long. We will tell this part of the history in our next article, DV.

Glorified in Heaven

>> Jonathon Langerak, Jr.



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The theme of this issue of Salt Shakers is "The Golden Chain of Salvation", which is found in Romans 8:29-30:


For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

I have been asked by the Salt Shakers Committee to write an article on heaven, in connection with the last word of verse 30: "glorified". The glorification of the sons and daughters of God is the final link in the so-called "golden chain of salvation". This is the


aspect of the heavenly life that we will consider in this article.

Exodus 33:18-23 is a spell-binding passage wherein Moses asks to see the glory of God. God tells Moses that he will grant his request, but that Moses will only see, as it were, God's back after He has passed by, for, says God, "Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live" (vs. 20). God puts Moses in a cleft of the rock, and covers the opening as it were with his hand while he passes by in all of his glory. In chapter 34, the Holy Spirit has caused to be written for us what Almighty God proclaimed as he passed by (vss. 6-7):

And the LORD passed by before him,



“ The glory of heaven is that it is glorification with Christ, in him beholding the face of God, first in our souls and then after the resurrection also in our bodies. ”



and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children unto the third and to the fourth generation.

Moses' response to this declaration of God's glory was that he "made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped" (Exodus 34:8).

As children of God in the New Testament church, we have the inestimable privilege of seeing God face to face, not just His back. This will be the perfection of the glory of heaven. I say the "perfection"—that is, the completion—of our glorification is in heaven, because our glorification begins now while on this earth—in Jesus Christ our Lord! In response to his disciple Philip, who said "Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us", Jesus said: "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?" We have not yet seen our Lord as he is in his flesh, as the man Jesus Christ. He was born, lived, was crucified, resurrected, and ascended from this earth over 2,000 years ago. He is now at the right hand of God in heaven. When we get to heaven, we shall see him, as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13:12: "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I

know even as also I am known."

The glory we have now is God's work of grace in us. God in grace takes us as ugly, filthy, disgusting, and vile sinners, seized in the bondage of corruption and rotten to our very cores, and turns us into those who are beautiful, pure, delightful, and lovely. We are delivered from hell. The glory that is ours as the children of God shines brightly against the backdrop of the damnation of those who are not children of God. This is the stark reality of election and reprobation. In order for us to be glorified, others had to perish. The reprobate chaff serve the elect kernel and then are cast into the fire. This is very humbling. We deserve the same as the ungodly. Canons I.1 says that God would have done no injustice in "delivering [all] over to condemnation on account of sin." "But, in this the love of God was manifested, that He 'sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (Canons I.2). Glorification is a wonder of grace!

Hannah sings of this in her beautiful song of praise to God in 1 Samuel 2. God had shown his grace to her in granting her prayer for a son, so that the covenant line—from which Christ would be born—would continue in Israel. In response, the Holy Ghost came upon this mother in Zion and she sings, among other things, these words: "[God] raiseth the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the

throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the LORD's, and he hath set the world upon them" (2 Samuel 2:8). This is a figure for God's Covenant grace, whereby God in Covenant love lifts us from the shame of our depravity, takes us out of unbelief and superstition, wherein we were held fast and without hope. And He makes us to become members of His wife and queen, that is, members of the Church of Jesus Christ. This is one of the reasons why we must hold our membership in the church dear and precious above every other earthly good, and attend church faithfully. The first reason, of course, is that God commands us to do this in the Fourth Commandment – and we must obey God's voice. But He does not make this commandment grievous, but encourages us by this: When we attend church and hear the Gospel preached, we hear our heavenly Father saying unto us: "I have lifted you, poor and hopeless, from the dust; I have raised you, beggars and destitute, from the dunghill. I have made you princes and princesses unto me, and caused you to inherit the throne of glory."

Now, we see our inheritance of the throne of glory "darkly," in this life. We suffer much: from sickness and disease; from mental and psychological anguish; from the pressures of school and work to succeed and be great in the eyes of the world. We experience the hatred of the world – the mockery of our non-believing classmates, co-workers, and even family members, and from the temptations they cast in our way to cause us to stumble. We

suffer from the death of loved ones, which is made more painful by the fact that some of our loved ones die outside of the church as non-believers. What a grief this is! And we suffer from our sinfulness and sin. Our worst enemy is within our own heart, that old man who lunges toward every opportunity to iniquity and against whom our new man in Christ wages vicious war, so that at day's end we find ourselves exhausted from the conflict. And, oh, our pride, that immediately rears its head whenever we think we have done a good work, or which lashes out whenever someone tries to correct us, so that we wound even our brothers and sisters in Christ. How we need the hope of heaven! Hope which lays hold of heaven and looks to the perfection of the glory that by faith we confess is ours in this life, though it be dimmed by all our afflictions.

The Holy Spirit, knowing all our afflictions, inspired Paul to write in the same chapter of Romans where the "golden chain of salvation" is found these words: "And if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together [with him]. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8: 17, 18). Indeed, when we arrive at last at the glory of heaven, we will say as the Queen of Sheba, when she saw Solomon arrayed in all his glory: "Behold, the half was not told me" (1 Kings 10:7).

The glory of heaven is that it is glorification *with Christ*, in him beholding the face of God, first in our souls and then after the resurrection also in our bodies. We are given a vision of this glory with the Apostle John in Revelation 21:1-4, wherein he sees the New Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven. The vision is dazzling: a massive city, whose foundations are 12 precious stones, with walls like jasper, with

gates of pearls, streets paved with gold, and a sea of glittering crystal. But these details are not to be taken literally. They are given to illustrate the glory of the New Jerusalem as the consummation of the Covenant of God! "Behold," a voice from heaven says, "the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21:3,4). That this is the essence of heaven is the instruction of Herman Hoeksema: "[Heaven's] essence, the heart of all its joy, is Father's embrace. He is there, and in the house of many mansions there is perfect communion with him... there in Father's house is Father, and I shall see him face-to-face and know Him as I am known, and in love perfected I shall draw very near, never to part again."

Are we in danger of minimising this essence of the glory of heaven, that there is Father's embrace and that the former things are passed away? Many today do deny this. Those who claim to have gone to heaven and seen what it is like write books describing these experiences. These books discuss only their dreams. The fear of God and His Covenant are entirely absent from them. They press forward with their accounts of "near death" or "near heaven" experiences but what they proclaim is not the truth but the productions of their own imaginations. Some religions imagine "paradise" to be a place where their every fantasy and lust can be fulfilled – a place reserved only for those willing to die for their faith. The Roman Catholics teach that one only enters heaven after he has finished atoning for his sins in purgatory. What do we say to this? We cling tenaciously to the Bible! "Behold, the tabernacle of God

is with men!" And we warn those who insist on promoting the dreams of their own brains that if they without repentance continue to "add to the things that are written in this book," then "God shall add unto them the plagues that are written in this book" (Revelation 22:18).

Heaven is the glorification of the elect from every nation – Singapore, the Philippines, Ireland, the United States, and every nation on earth. "And the nations of them that were saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it" (vs. 24). Herman Hoeksema describes this aspect of the glory of Father's house of many mansions:

It is the embodiment of the unity of perfect and heavenly love. All that here separates, there shall be no more. All sinful barriers, restraining love's communion before Father and his children, between the Son and his brethren, and between the brethren mutually, shall be removed and admonished forever. All earthly limitations of nation and language and distance and time somehow shall there be obliterated, never to cause separation anymore. It shall be one Father and one Lord and one Spirit dwelling in one body, uniting all the children in perfect brotherhood.

It is for the glorification of His people that our Lord Jesus Himself prays in His high priestly prayer in John 17. "Father," He prays, "I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am." Why? "That they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world" (John 17: 24). Beholding Christ's glory, we shall behold in perfection the glory of God Himself face to face: His mercy and grace, His longsuffering, goodness, and truth, and His forgiveness and mercy. And beholding the glory of God, we shall ourselves be glorified in completeness with our dear Saviour.

Special Feature: Amazing Grace!

Christian Family

Mrs Lanning

Q: Did you at any point in your life feel complacent about your faith and found going to church a routine? Why did you feel this way and what did you do from there?

No, I don't think so. Even though I have always gone to church, I have always enjoyed it too. However, I suppose people may feel complacent at some point and may take it for granted. Blessings hit me more when I am in Singapore, especially since in CERC I have heard stories from people who got converted from Buddhism. Also, someone once told me I'm more blessed, coming from a family of many generations of believers. I believe it's not more of a blessing but rather that we are blessed in different ways.

Jonah Chua

Q: Was there a point of time in your life where you felt going to church was a routine? Why did you feel this way and what did you do from there?

Yes, there was a period of time I felt that way. During that time, I was more involved in school activities and studying. I was busy in school, and thus, I placed less time on the activities of the church, specifically youth activities. At times, I even went to my school's activities instead of youth activities. Slowly, I grew spiritually complacent as I spent more time in school.

But, it did not stop there. I started feeling that church was not important. I was slowly shifting away from the life of the church. A disinterest for church grew too. On Sundays, I had to drag

myself to Church.

By the grace of God, however, I noticed this drift that was occurring and realised something had to be done. I began to become more active in church again, and became less participative in school. Through much prayer, I was able to get rid of this feeling of disinterest and enjoyed coming to the house of the Lord again.

“ My parents ridiculed the idea of going to church... My friends ridiculed me as well, for the same reasons as my parents did. Additionally, they thought that going to church was dumb. ”

This experience was a real warning to me (and it should be a warning for all of us). If one is not careful, one will slowly start to focus on the things of this world. Everybody should and must be on their toes; our priorities must be God-centric. Once we become very busy in the secular world, it becomes very easy for us to forget the importance of participating in church activities, to be involved in the organic life of the church. This inevitably snowballs to a disinterest

in worship on Sundays, followed by a lack of attendance. Very quickly, our spiritual lives will be negatively affected.

Q: Having been through this experience, is this spiritual complacency still a current temptation for you?

Yes, it always is. The devil is always seeking to draw us away from God. To not be spiritually complacent is always a struggle, and it is something I have (and all of us have) to constantly pray about.

What makes this a difficult struggle is also the fact that such temptations are very subtle. Before you know it, you are trapped by Satan! All the more we have to remember to always pray and strive to resist the temptations which threaten to draw us away from God.

Non-Christian Family

Aunty Jean

Q: How did you come to know Christ?

I knew about Christ long ago when my sister was first a Christian. However, I only attended Church 6 months after my husband (Deacon Seow Thong) did.

Q: Before and after knowing Christ, how has your life changed?

Before knowing Christ, my life never revolved around God but after knowing Christ, I live for God – in everything that I do or think.

Q: What are some challenges you faced when you first became a Christian?

The challenge that I faced was adopting the will of God. Trusting in God's will is sometimes the hard part. When I first became a Christian, there were

times when I faced trials and stopped praying and reading the Bible. Thank God, however, that He always brought me back to His Word after some time. It makes me think that if I had read more Christian literature, such as a devotional book, I would not have fallen into this sin.

Mdm Lo

Q: How did you come to know Christ?

Ah Moi was the one who brought me to church. At that point in time, I was actually living with another woman who created a lot of trouble. She was troublesome, unreasonable and intrusive so I would often go to the Police for help. As a result, I got to know Ah Moi, who was a police woman at that time. She introduced me to the Christian Old Folks' Home, where I am living right now, and brought me to CERC.

Q: Before and after knowing Christ, how has your life changed?

My life has changed in that I'm not so bored? I have something to depend on and rely on now. Before, I had a lot of problems and conflict with the lady I was living with. Now that I'm living in the Christian home, I feel a lot more peaceful and I have even put on weight! I am not so frustrated over things anymore as I learn to trust God.

Q: What are some challenges you faced when you first became a Christian?

I became a Christian when I was about 81 years old. I had never been an idol-worshipper so it's not like I had to give up another religion. Thanks be to God, I was baptised 2 years later.

Ivan Chew

Q: What was your first impression of a church when you first came?

I remember hearing a sermon preached by Pastor Lau when I came to CERC for the first time. He was preaching on the book of Revelations,

and I was quite lost because I did not know many things, such as who Christ is and what the Trinity is. However, even though I lacked knowledge of the Bible, it struck me that Pastor Lau always took the time to explain the statements he had made before moving on to another point during his sermon. This is in contrast to some of the churches I had visited before coming to CERC. I remember one of the pastors constantly making assertions and statements, such as 'God is love' and 'He is merciful' but never explaining what he meant by those statements.

Q: You mentioned that you knew very little about the Bible when you first came to church. How did that change as you continued attending the worship services?

At the beginning, after every sermon or speech, I would go back home and search the meaning of various terms on the Internet. Most of what I read on the Internet was from Wikipedia. I found it hard to ask anyone in church about my queries, because I just knew too little to even know what to ask.

However, as I heard more sermons and speeches, I learned more about the Reformed faith. The most helpful resource I came across was a well-known book by Pastor Cheah, *The Readable TULIP*. Our youth group (CK) was in the midst of studying into the Five Points of Calvinism, and Pastor Cheah's book was one of the resources we used as we went through our studies. The book was simple and accurate in its explanation of TULIP, and it greatly helped me in my understanding of the Reformed faith.

Q: How did your lifestyle change, as you started attending CERC?

One part of my lifestyle that changed was how I spent my Sunday mornings. Before coming to CE, Sunday mornings were meant for TV shows. After coming to church, that stopped.

A deeper change that occurred

concerned my search for the purpose of life. Since young, I always wondered about the purpose of life. I recall asking my primary school teacher once, "If there was no purpose, why not we all die now?" My teacher gave a rather unsatisfactory answer, so the question remained unanswered. Buddhism, my family's religion, also did not answer my question at all, as the whole religion was unrealistic. Their gods themselves were unreal, having eyes which were unable to see anything. Also, the religion was clearly man-made, making it impossible for the religion to answer the question I had.

A last change I recall was a gradual, conscious desire to obey God's commandments. Initially, as I heard sermons preached weekly, I obeyed Scripture's commands out of fear. This was in contrast to the way I reacted to the commands the Buddhist statues 'gave'. I did not fear the statues as I knew they were unreal. But when I came to church, I dared not disregard God's commands, as His commands were plainly revealed and spelled out in Scripture. Slowly, however, the motive of obedience changed from a fear and terror of God to a love for God and His commands.

I cannot remember every single change that occurred in my lifestyle, but it definitely was a slow and gradual change.

Q: Did you face opposition from anyone when you came to church? If you did, how did you overcome the opposition?

Yes. My parents ridiculed the idea of going to church. They were puzzled to find me having interest in attending a church; they thought I was never a 'religious' person. I cannot exactly remember how I overcame their ridicules, but I generally ignored them. My friends ridiculed me as well, for the same reasons as my parents did. Additionally, they thought that going to church was dumb.

News from the Churches

Singapore - VBS

The VBS theme this year was 'Growing in God's Love'. The children learnt that God is love, and God's love is revealed to us through Christ. The lessons also covered the origin of sin, and the consequences of sin with regards to our relationship with God. Following, the children learnt about how we should love and forgive one another in Christ just as how God loves and forgives us. In the closing lessons, the children learnt about loving God's Word as well as loving God's Church.

The children had a great time of fellowship and bonding throughout the four days in VBS. They learnt to care for one another, to serve one another and to love one another. We thank God for this year's VBS as we acknowledge that it is only by God's grace and provisions that this year's VBS was made possible. May God's Word bear fruit in the hearts and lives of our children!

US - Reformed witness hour

The council (Session) of First PRC has recently released new radio messages schedules.

Since October 1941, the Reformed witness hour has been broadcasting messages to spread the Gospel. Rev. Herman Hoeksema was the first full-time radio pastor. They currently broadcast through stations in the United States, Canada, Ireland, and the Philippines. Let us continue to pray for this outreach work done by our brothers-in-Christ.

2013 December's Sermons	Text
A God fearing man's labour	Psalms 128:1-2
The blessedness of Family	Psalms 128:3-4
Church and Family	Psalms 128:5-6
While they were there	Luke 2:6
Great is thy faithfulness	Lamentations 2:22-23

Visit www.reformedwitnesshour.org to download these and other edifying sermons.

Philippines

Typhoon Yolanda/Haiyan on 7th and 8th November 2013 has destroyed or severely damaged the houses of saints from the Protestant Reformed Fellowship in Albuera, Leyte. God has preserved the lives of our brothers and sisters from the fellowship.

Missionary Pastor Richard Smit shares in the Protestant Reformed Foreign Missions December Newsletter:

"We, with the First Reformed Church, are very thankful to the Lord for the overwhelming concern and love expressed for the families of the PRF in Albuera from many in the PRCA, CERCS, and CPRCNI. We are very humbled to see a clear example of the fact that when some of the body of Christ suffer, the other members, though separated by a gap of great distance, yet suffer with them. May God be praised by His saints and through our common concern and compassion for one another in our Lord Jesus Christ."

Delay in Denomination organisation

The organisation of the Berean Protestant Reformed Church (Cubao, Metro Manila) and the First Reformed Church (Muzon, Bulacan) into a new federation has been delayed due to a problem of registration of the desired name "The Federation of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines, Inc."

Roof leakage Repaired in First Reformed church

First Reformed Church in Philippines did major roof repair work to end the leakage. The saints are thankful to God for providing for them and that the repair could be made before the harsh rainy season.

God's Providence for Berean PRC

Berean PRC has recently purchased a property and a house that will serve as a worship venue and provide a residence for Pastor Ibe and his family.

New Doors Opened!

A Bible study group conducted by the PR missionaries on Monday nights in Bacolod City has recently requested Pastor Smit or Pastor Kleyn to lead their worship services on 19th January 2014. Thank God for opening many doors for the Gospel of sovereign grace to spread.



Youth forming the word "CKCKS" at CK/CKS Camp



Youth enjoying games at the camp



Caroling on Christmas Eve



Children having fun at VBS



Secondary school teens singing during Open Sunday



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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.

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

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

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