

"... God only loves His elect, and only desires their salvation." *Pastor Andy Lanning – Hyper-Calvinists? Hardly!*

"... we have seen the twofold effect of the Word – some are edified by the preaching, while others are repelled by it." *Pastor Martyn McGeown – The Mission Fields in Limerick and South Wales*

"The primary purpose in the preaching of the gospel is the Glory of God – and rightly so." *Elder Leong Fai Chong – CERC Church Theme 2015*



**salt shakers**  
joel 3:16 matthew 5:16

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Matt 24:14 "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come."

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SS has reached the big 3 'oh' (Issue 30)! We thank God for another milestone as these are constant reminders of His sustaining hand upon our work. May God be pleased to grant us many more years of service ahead as a witness of the Gospel to His children in this world.

CERC's theme this year is "The Gospel: A Witness to All Nations". This is a wonderful direction to take because, in this day and age, the Gospel that is to the glory of God alone and which speaks of God's gracious salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ is being watered down and attacked incessantly like never before because of the openness and wildfire-nature of new and social media. Credibility and truth have taken a backseat while popularity and the absurd has taken centre-stage.

Keeping quiet in this age will be expressing agreement by default, and that is a dangerous path to tread for the church who is called to be the pillar and ground of the truth. And so we are compelled to say something—we'd better. If false teachers shall be zealous with the wrong gospel, then we had better be even more zealous about the true Gospel! If enemies of the Gospel have many questionable things to say about Christians and our beliefs, then we had better be more ready than ever to set the record straight with the true Gospel! If we have been hiding in the dark because of fear or lack of knowledge, it is time to strengthen those feeble hands and knees to do the work of the Lord!

We are encouraged to know that we are not alone in this labour of the Gospel. God is with us; we are the weak instruments which the Creator uses to do His mighty will. And so we do our part, as fellow-labourers, depending on our Lord for the harvest according to His will.

How blessed it is to be constantly reminded of God's wondrous work in saving the lost and heathen from their sin whenever a child of God is found and turns from his sin and misery. May this cause our jaded minds to never forget how precious this God-given grace was to us when it first appeared in our very own lives.

Blessed reading, and remember to be a bright light shining for our Lord. Start out by passing the Salt!

Christ regardless  
paul

p.s. We are gathering feedback from our dear readers—yes, YOU—about various aspects of Salt Shakers! Please help us **complete a simple survey at <http://tinyurl.com/SaltShakersSurvey>** alright?

Thank you! =)

# HYPER-CALVINISTS? HARDLY!

>> Pastor Andy Lanning



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The general consensus appears to be that the Protestant Reformed Churches and Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church are hyper-Calvinists. I was reminded of this charge when I saw that Rev. Maurice Roberts, retired minister in the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), had recently arrived in Singapore to preach, lecture, and lead in some Reformation Day Conferences. In the past, Rev. Roberts has publicly accused Herman Hoeksema and his followers of being hyper-Calvinist. Therefore, I thought Rev. Roberts' visit would be a good opportunity for the readers of Salt Shakers to face the question, "Are we hyper-Calvinists?"

The controversy behind this accusation has to do with the preaching of the gospel. Some, like Rev. Roberts, teach a "well-meant gospel offer" (WMGO). According to the WMGO, God loves all who hear the preaching and sincerely desires their salvation. He expresses

that love through a serious, well-meant offer of salvation to everyone who hears the gospel. Others, like Herman Hoeksema, PRC, CPRCNI, PRCP, EPCA, and CERC, reject the WMGO. According to this rejection, God only loves His elect, and only desires their salvation. Through the general and promiscuous preaching of the gospel, God sovereignly saves His elect.

Rev. Roberts accuses Herman Hoeksema and his followers of being hyper-Calvinist because of our rejection of the teaching of the well-meant gospel offer. In an article in *The Banner of Truth*, Rev. Roberts states and evaluates Hoeksema's position this way: "God gives no 'well-meant' offer to any but to the elect. This view might be termed 'Dutch-American Hyper-Calvinism', as it is associated with the Dutch American theologian of the twentieth century, Herman Hoeksema, the founder of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America" (Maurice Roberts, "The Free Offer of the Gospel", in *The Banner of Truth* Aug-Sep 2005, p. 40). This accusation affects Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church, since we just as vigorously reject the well-meant offer.

This charge is serious, because a hyper-Calvinist is a theological extremist. By affixing to us this label, Rev. Roberts discredits us as those who go beyond ("hyper") Reformed ("-Calvinist") doctrine, and therefore as those

who abuse that doctrine. It is sin for a Reformed church to be hyper-Calvinist, because hyper-Calvinism is a corruption of the biblical doctrine of the call of the gospel. Undoubtedly, Rev. Roberts has not made his accusation lightly, and we certainly do not take it lightly.

But the accusation is false. Indeed, the PRC and CERC reject the teaching of the well-meant gospel offer. But the PRC and CERC are not hyper-Calvinist. This can be demonstrated.

A hyper-Calvinist denies the external call of the gospel. That is, a hyper-Calvinist denies that God calls all men who hear the gospel to repent of their sins and believe in Jesus Christ. Therefore, a hyper-Calvinist does not allow the minister to command repentance and faith as the duty of everyone who hears the gospel. This hyper-Calvinism is expressed by the gospel Standard (Baptist) Churches of England in their Articles of Faith and Rules:

"Article 26: We deny duty faith and duty repentance – these terms signifying that it is every man's duty to spiritually and savingly repent and believe. We deny also that there is any capability in man by nature to any spiritual good whatever. So that we reject the doctrine that men in a state of nature should be exhorted to believe in or turn to God.

"Article 33: Therefore, that for ministers in the present day to

address unconverted persons, or indiscriminately all in a mixed congregation, calling upon them to savingly repent, believe, and receive Christ, or perform any other acts dependent upon the new creative power of the Holy Ghost, is, on the one hand, to imply creature power, and, on the other, to deny the doctrine of special redemption.”

As these articles make plain, the hyper-Calvinist denies the external call of the gospel because he supposes it undermines the Reformed doctrinal pillars of election on the one hand and total depravity on the other hand. For the true hyper-Calvinist, proclaiming the gospel call generally denies election’s particularity. Only few are chosen, so only few may be called. Also, for the true hyper-Calvinist, commanding faith and repentance of all implies that all who hear are able to obey by their own free will. The command to obey, they suppose, implies the natural ability to obey.

Such is the teaching and practice of a hyper-Calvinist. Such is not the teaching or practice of the PRC or CERC. The PRC and CERC believe that God commands all who hear the gospel to repent and believe in Jesus Christ. We require our ministers, in the preaching of the gospel, to command repentance and faith (Mark 1:15).

We do even more: not only do we require the minister to make commands, but also to make promises. As he preaches, he must promise that whoever comes to Jesus Christ in repentance and faith shall be saved (Acts 16:31), shall find rest for his soul (Matthew 11:28-30), and shall take of the water of life freely (Revelation 22:17). And we proclaim

this, not merely as our fervent hope, but as the earnest, sincere promise of God himself.

We do all this without the slightest fear that such a general call will deny the truth of total depravity. There is no lurking suspicion in our minds that the call of the gospel, heard by the unregenerate, somehow implies their ability to obey of their own free will. On the contrary, we believe that the sinner is dead in sins (Ephesians 2:1), unable even to desire his own salvation by himself (Romans 9:16). Therefore, the call of the gospel does not appeal to any innate power of man, but the gospel itself is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). Through the call of the gospel, God draws his people to himself in faith. “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (John 6:44). What does the general call of the gospel imply? Not man’s ability to save himself, but God’s ability to save his people.

Nor do we fear that the call of the gospel denies the truth of election. God’s general command that men believe sets man before his duty, but the general command does not compromise the particularity of God’s sovereign election. The external call of the gospel comes to many who are not chosen of God. “For many are called, but few are chosen” (Matthew 22:14). However, the call does not imply God’s love for all who hear it, since it is God’s sovereign good pleasure to use that call to harden the reprobate in their sin (2 Corinthians 2:15, 16). A general call and particular love are perfectly compatible.

This view of preaching is solidly Reformed. It is the view of the Canons of Dordt in Head II, Article

5: “Moreover, the promise of the gospel is that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified shall not perish, but have everlasting life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of his good pleasure sends the gospel.”

Promiscuous preaching of the command and promise of the gospel: the view of the Canons, and the practice of the PRC and CERC. Surely this is not hyper-Calvinism, but Calvinism!

However, as important as all of this is, none of this so far is the real issue. The central issue is not whether God externally calls everyone who hears the preaching, but whether God loves everyone who hears the preaching. Not whether God sincerely commands them all to repent and believe, but whether he sincerely desires them all to repent and believe. To put the question as concisely as possible: Does God love the reprobate? Does he both will their salvation and will their damnation?

Therefore, the real issue is not what someone might claim about the PRC, but what someone claims about God. What does the theory of the well-meant gospel offer claim about God? Several things are explicitly taught, while several others are implied. For our purposes, it will be enough to mention two specific claims of the WMGO.

First, the WMGO claims that God loves everyone who hears the preaching of the gospel, including both the elect and the reprobate. From Rev. Roberts’ article in *The Banner of Truth*, “The Offer made is for all who

hear it, whether they be elect or not... The Offer is an expression of love and grace on God's part towards sinful, unbelieving men" (p. 39).

Second, the WMGO claims that God sincerely desires the salvation of everyone who hears the gospel. That is, it is His divine will that they be saved, even though God's divine will for the reprobate is also that they be damned. Again, from *The Banner of Truth*: "So we affirm both God's eternal election and his well-meant offer to all sinners who hear the gospel.... Put simply, it is this: God has fixed the number of the elect from eternity past; yet God desires every sinner who hears His gospel to receive it and to be eternally blessed in Christ" (pp. 41-42).

This, then, is the system that claims to be Calvinist. In fact, this is the system that claims it is the sole representative of true Calvinism. All rejections of this system, we are told, are hyper-Calvinist perversions of true Calvinism. But is the WMGO Calvinist? That is, is it Reformed? This can be tested by comparing the WMGO with one of the great Reformed confessions, the Canons of Dordt.

The main theological principle of the WMGO is a universal love of God. According to the WMGO, God's love is not restricted to His elect people, but extends to every single person who hears the gospel, elect and reprobate alike. According to the WMGO, this universal love is what motivates God to make a well-meant offer of salvation to all.

Is this Reformed? The Canons of Dordt speak of God's love. God's love is manifested in salvation (Canons I.2.), and God's love is manifested in the preaching of the gospel (Canons I.3.). However, in both salvation and

the preaching of the gospel, God's love is particular, strictly for the elect. The Canons clearly teach that the elect are the only ones who believe the gospel and are saved (Canons I.7.) Therefore, the elect are the only ones who are beloved of God. They alone can adore God's mercies to them (Canons I.13.). The Canons know nothing of a universal love of God for the elect and reprobate alike. They speak only of "everlasting love towards the elect" (Canons II.9.), never towards the reprobate. Regarding the reprobate, the Canons speak only of God's justice, wrath, and condemnation (Canons I.4, 15.).

The WMGO teaches God's universal love for the elect and reprobate. The Canons teach God's particular love for the elect alone. The WMGO is not Reformed.

A second major theological principle of the WMGO is resistible grace. According to the WMGO, God's offer in the gospel to all sinners is gracious. God sincerely, graciously, lovingly invites them to be saved in Christ. However, not every sinner who hears will accept the offer. Some will resist it, reject it, and perish.

Is this Reformed? The Canons speak of God's grace as the power of God by which men repent and believe the gospel (Canons III/IV.12, 13, 15.). This grace is sovereign and powerful, for it is nothing less than the efficacious power of the Holy Spirit (Canons III/IV.11.). The shorthand way that Reformed people speak of this sovereign, powerful, efficacious grace is Irresistible Grace. Indeed, this truth of irresistible grace is so essential to Reformed doctrine that it is well-known as one of the five points of Calvinism, the "I" in "TULIP?"

The WMGO teaches resistible grace. The Canons teach irresistible grace. The WMGO is not Reformed. If the WMGO is not Reformed, then what is it?

At the time the Canons were written, there was a party that taught a universal love of God for all men and a resistible grace of God for all who heard the preaching. That party was the Arminians, foe of Calvinism in 1618 at the Synod of Dordt, and foe of true Calvinism today. In fact, in the Opinions of the Remonstrants, delivered by the Arminians to the Synod of Dordt, the Arminians described their doctrine of the preaching. Although they did not use the term "well-meant gospel offer," they taught the same theological principles as the WMGO today:

"Whomsoever God calls, he calls them seriously, that is, with a sincere and not with a dissembled intention and will of saving them. Neither do we subscribe to the opinion of those persons who assert that God outwardly calls certain men whom he does not will to call inwardly, that is, whom he is unwilling to be truly converted, even prior to their rejection of the grace of calling (*Opinions of the Remonstrants*, III/IV.8)."

The WMGO is not Reformed. It is Arminian.

This charge is chilling and sobering for all who want to be Reformed, but have been taken in by the Arminian lie of the WMGO. Though the WMGO masquerades as Reformed and Calvinist, and though it loudly accuses all who oppose it as hyper-Calvinist, under the mask it is sheer Arminianism.

What is the truth of the preaching of the gospel? First, God sends the gospel

wherever he wills. The church's calling is not to attempt the impossible task of distinguishing between elect and reprobate before she preaches, and then direct the preaching only to the elect. Rather, where God sends the gospel, the church must preach promiscuously and without distinction.

Second, the content of the gospel is the cross of Jesus Christ, including the command to all to repent of their sins and believe in Jesus Christ for salvation, and including the promise that all who do repent and believe shall surely be saved.

Third, the love of God that sends the gospel forth is particular love for his elect alone in Jesus Christ. Out of love for them and them alone, God sends them the gospel as the means of their salvation.

Fourth, though the gospel is proclaimed generally and promiscuously, the promise of salvation is always particular. The promise of salvation is heard by all in the audience, but is not for all in the audience. Rather, the promise is for all in the audience who are thirsty, all who are burdened, all who are willing, all who believe. God makes his elect alone thirst, sigh, desire, and believe. Therefore, when the promise "Whosoever will may come" is made to a general audience, that promise is particular, for the elect, whom God always makes willing to come.

Fifth, God's purpose with the gospel to the reprobate is not to save them. God's call is serious and sincere, but his will is that they be hardened by that serious call, not saved by it. According to God's eternal decrees of election and reprobation, the preaching of the gospel accomplishes God's purpose of saving His people (a

savour of life unto life) and damning the reprobate (a savour of death unto death) (2 Corinthians 2:14-17).

This is the doctrine of the gospel taught and practiced by the Protestant Reformed Churches and Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church. It is not hyper-Calvinist, but biblical and Reformed. The alternative is the WMGO and its God-dishonouring Arminianism.

The differences are stark and clear. Let all who hold the WMGO repent of their Arminianism. Let all who sympathise with the WMGO and allow it to be taught among them put that lie away, before the leaven of Arminianism spreads through every doctrine, and all be destroyed.

Above all, let the church honour God for His sovereign, particular love that powerfully and effectually saves us from our sins through the gospel of Jesus Christ!



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*Belgic Confession 7: The Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures to Be the Only Rule of Faith*

*We believe that those Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe unto salvation is sufficiently taught therein. For, since the whole manner of worship which God requires of us is written in them at large, it is unlawful for any one, though an apostle, to teach otherwise than we are now taught in the Holy Scriptures; nay, though it were an angel from heaven, as the apostle Paul saith. For, since it is forbidden to add unto or take away any thing from the Word of God, it doth thereby evidently appear that the doctrine thereof is most perfect and complete in all respects.*

*Neither do we consider of equal value any writing of men, however holy these men may have been, with those divine Scriptures, nor ought we to consider custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity, or succession of times and persons, or councils, decrees, or statutes, as of equal value with the truth of God, for the truth is above all; for all men are of themselves liars and more vain than vanity itself. Therefore we reject with all our hearts whatsoever doth not agree with this infallible rule, which the apostles have taught us, saying, Try the spirits whether they are of God. Likewise, if there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house.*

As Reformed Christians, we believe what are popularly called the Five Points of Calvinism or “TULIP”: (1) Total Depravity, (2) Unconditional Election (and Reprobation), (3) Limited (or Particular) Atonement, (4) Irresistible Grace and (5) the Perseverance of the Saints. We also believe another five great truths: the five solas or alones or onlys of the Reformation. Salvation is in (1) Christ alone, by (2) grace alone, through (3) faith alone, to (4) the glory of God alone and according to (5) Scripture alone (sola Scriptura).

The last of these, sola Scriptura, is our present subject. To oversimplify Belgic Confession 7, if its first paragraph deals with the sufficiency of Scripture (which we have considered in the previous three articles), its second paragraph speaks of Scripture alone. To what does the phrase “Scripture alone” refer? What is “Scripture alone”? What does “Scripture alone” do?

### **What Sola Scriptura Does Not Mean**

Let us clear up some misunderstandings

regarding sola Scriptura. It does not mean that the Bible is the only thing you need to pass your exams at school or university. The Word of God alone will not provide you with the latest news in politics, business or sport. Protestants do not believe that only Scripture is needed to operate one’s computer.

Even in the religious sphere, we need to be clear as to what is not meant by sola Scriptura. First, not only the Bible but also the Holy Spirit is necessary for our salvation, for He enables us to believe, understand and obey Scripture. Second, it is not enough for you to stay at home with your Bible alone; Christians need the church. Third, it will not do for you merely to commune with God through your Bible. You also need fellowship with other believers. Fourth, the Reformed faith does not understand sola Scriptura to exclude faithful preaching. Fifth, we hold to Scripture alone but this does not rule out the two Christian sacraments, baptism and the Lord’s Supper, as means of grace. Sixth, the same Reformation movement which taught sola Scriptura also and thereby insisted upon biblical office-bearers: pastors, elders and deacons. Seventh, it is precisely the Reformed churches which teach most clearly sola Scriptura which also produce and read good Christian books (other than the Bible), whether they be commentaries, theological works, devotional materials, church histories, etc. Eighth, sola Scriptura is not inconsistent with creeds either. Indeed, our Three Forms of Unity were written by men, and have been and are confessed by believers, who hold to “Scripture alone”. In fact, Belgic Confession 7 actually teaches sola Scriptura.

### **What Sola Scriptura Does Mean**

In order to grasp what sola Scriptura means, let us consider some of the Word’s own distinctive perfections. First, the Bible alone is inspired or God-breathed: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). No other book is inspired and the Bible’s inspiration is the basis for its other qualities.

Second, the Bible alone is infallible, that is, it cannot fail. Scripture is inerrant, without error or mistake, because it is infallible. Is Holy Writ the only thing which is inerrant? No. The statement  $2 + 2 = 4$  is inerrant. It is not false to claim that Paris is the capital of France. Even a fallible person can make inerrant assertions. But Scripture is the only infallible book in the world for, unlike fallible men and their fallible writings and speeches, God’s Word cannot err.

Third, the Bible alone is God’s verbal revelation today. I added the word “verbal” to the previous statement because there is non-verbal general revelation (Belgic Confession 2; Ps. 19:1-6). I added the word “today” because there was (oral) verbal revelation in the biblical days of the prophets and apostles.

“The Bible alone is the Word of God” is a famous Reformation slogan. In the light of the previous three paragraphs, we could faithfully explain it by expanding it: The Bible alone is the inspired and infallible written Word of God today. As such, Holy Writ is the highest and supreme judge in all doctrinal and ethical issues, regarding both faith and life, and indeed anything that it addresses.

Since only the Bible is inspired and inerrant verbal revelation, this unique book from God is the ultimate and final standard. Sola Scriptura concerns the authority, the judicial authority, of the Word of God and the God of the Word. You could say that the preposition of sola Scriptura is “over”, for the Word of God is over all things as the highest judge.

This is Westminster Confession 1:10 affirming sola Scriptura: “The supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of counsels, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the scripture.”

As the divine standard and authoritative judge, the Word of God (which is the speech of the Holy Spirit) tests, discerns, judges and passes sentence. Negatively, it condemns and damns evil doctrines and practices. Positively, it approves and commends godly doctrines and practices. Neutrally, it proclaims Christian liberty regarding non-moral issues, such as wearing brown or black shoes (adiaphora).

### **Proving Sola Scriptura**

Now let us prove sola Scriptura from Scripture alone, the very Scriptures themselves! Out of the many passages which speak of God’s Word as the highest judge and supreme standard for all doctrine and practice, I have chosen three.

First, we consider Isaiah 8:20: “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” Scripture, “the law” and “the testimony” (v. 20),

is the highest standard, according to which all spiritualists and wizards and their utterances (v. 19) must be judged. This principal of the supremacy of the Bible applies to all people and things, such that “if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (v. 20).

Second, Acts 17:10-11 reads, “And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.” If the Bereans were commended by the Holy Spirit for testing the teaching of an apostle (Paul) to see if it agreed with the (Old Testament) Scriptures, then all doctrine and practice must be tested according to this perfect standard.

A third passage is Matthew 15:1-14, although it is too long to quote here. In this scene, there is a clash of religious teachers in the Jewish church: our Lord Jesus Christ versus the scribes and Pharisees (v. 1). Our Saviour explains, contrary to these false teachers, that God’s Word trumps (erroneous) church traditions (vv. 3-6). Then He issues divine judgment upon these false teachers. He tells them that they are “hypocrites” (vv. 7-8) and that their “worship” is “vain” (v. 9). At this, these religious leaders are “offended,” as Christ’s disciples inform Him (v. 12). The Lord answers by pointing out that they are reprobate: “Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up” (v. 13). Since these men are “blind leaders of the blind,” Jesus commands His disciples not to

apologise or try to mollify them: “Let them alone” (v. 14).

How blind they were to deny sola Scriptura by putting their own uninspired, fallible, errant and wicked traditions over the Word of God! How blind they were to lead others in their wicked ways! How blind they were to be offended at the Son of God for admonishing them! Hating sola Scriptura was a manifestation of their reprobation (v. 13).

On the other hand, those whose eyes are opened and illuminated by the Spirit of Jesus Christ see, recognise and rejoice in the Bible as the very oracles of God. Jehovah, the supreme judge of all men, thoughts, words, books and institutions, has appointed His Word as the highest authority. Thus the believer submits to its righteous judgment on him, his life, his family, his church, his country, etc., and seeks forgiveness and new obedience in the cross of Jesus Christ. Loving sola Scriptura is a manifestation of God’s gracious election.

### **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

1. What are the Five Points of Calvinism and the five solas? How are they related?
2. What is the difference and relationship between the inerrancy and the infallibility of Scripture?
3. Express in your own words what sola Scriptura does and does not mean.
4. How would you prove this crucial biblical and Reformed truth from the Word of God?



# SING!

>> Chua Lee Yang



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Is any merry? Let him sing Psalms.

James 5:13

Throughout the ages, singing has been a pillar for the Church in the worship of God. Today, and indeed through history, the world has stolen music, twisted it into a secular abomination that shows its hatred of God— be it in sweet melodious tunes or order-defying noise. However, we can praise God— for we may still use this precious gift.

As singers today for Christ, we may trace our lineage through thousands of years of church history, counted among the great cloud of witnesses. Jehoshaphat led his army into battle singing the Psalms (2 Chron 20:21). Isaiah described singing with a “holy solemnity” (Isa 30:29). David, the great poet and composer, was a master of the harp and song. The book of Psalms itself, titled the “Book of Praises”, was written for singing.

In the New Testament too, we find not only a vivid history of singing, as when Paul and Silas sang in prison

after being beaten (Acts 16:25), but we also have specific instructions from the Spirit how we too may, and must sing. “Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Eph 5:19) – the church is instructed that it must use singing in worship and admonishing one another in love (Col 3:16).

Singing was used in the early NT church too, although corrupting influences were introduced, and gradually this gift was almost lost entirely in the pre-reformation Roman Catholic church polity. As children of the reformation, it is important for us to remember the efforts and the price paid by the reformers to return this gift to the church, and specifically, the singing of the Psalms. The reformation’s greatest triumph was to restore the Word of God to the church, for in the Roman Catholic Church the scripture had been taken from the people, to be read and studied only by the priests. Singing in the worship service too, was restricted to trained choirs, often singing in Latin, unintelligible to the lay congregation. Singing the Psalms from the Psalter in Sunday worship in CERC this day, it may seem routine for us but we would do well to reflect with thankfulness the work of God in restoring His Word to us in singing.

When we lift up our voices in song— and what better lyrics to use than the Spirits’ own, written for that very purpose – we not only nourish our

souls with the Word, but also have the comfort of God’s wonderful creation in music. This is where singing has its unique place and value in the worship. When we listen to a faithful sermon, or receive God’s benediction, our souls are blessed and are filled to overflowing with joy, and singing allows us to respond together as one voice. This is reflected in our own church order of worship, when the reading of the Law, the congregation prayer and sermon are each followed by our response in song to Jehovah. Singing is a distinct and irreplaceable element of the worship service.

When we sing, we must take care not to be distracted or place a higher emphasis on the tunes, the musical lines, however beautiful and intricate, the singing of others, or anything aesthetic. A trivial or glancing attention on the words of God, focusing on the music and the feelings stirred, is no better than listening to or singing the music of the world, with its emphasis on exciting human emotion and promoting ungodly themes. This incorrect focus is the error of many churches of our day, with their use of well-trained bands and worship leaders; cutting-edge sound engineering – often with amazing skill – but singing lyrics that are a poor mixture of sinful man’s composition and scripture. Increasingly, scripture itself goes missing or takes a vague back seat. Even in songs that are relatively more faithful, the emphasis in many

“ In singing the Holy Spirit’s inspired Psalms, we have full sufficiency for praising God and learning about the full measure of His ways. ”

churches is to sing only uplifting songs about (certain, universally acceptable aspects of) God’s love. As a result, the congregation learns only this, and while their feelings and emotions are fed to drunkenness, they are starved of the bread of the Word. It is nothing short of a voluntary return to the captivity of Rome that the reformation fathers fought so hard to leave behind.

In singing the Holy Spirit’s inspired Psalms, we have full sufficiency for praising God and learning about the full measure of His ways. Who can point us closer to Christ but the Spirit? (1 Cor 12:3) A brief glance at the index of the Psalter reveals the hundreds of themes found in the Psalms, all of which are important for the child of God. In the Psalms, we sing of Christ, God’s wondrous, particular love, praise and celebration of blessing. But also, we learn those Psalms of Christian grief, the affliction of the Church, the wickedness of the end times and God’s wrath upon sin. The Spirit does not limit His teaching to vague anthems of universal love, but unashamedly reveals the entire counsel of God. Unlike man, the Spirit is not afraid to offend, but lovingly admonishes and reproves us as well.

This is not to say however, that in our focus and concentration on good lyrics, we may not appreciate the wonder of music and its special place in God’s creation. Just a fleeting glimpse into

the realm of music theory reveals a perfect law embedded in nature. It is in music that God’s attributes of order and beauty are revealed. Take a look in your Psalter. Do you see that at every word, there are 4 different notes in the musical score? The highest is the melody, that is, the tune of the song. In the Psalter, the songs are written for 4 singing parts: soprano, alto, tenor and bass. Every note has a particular, precise sound frequency that allows it to blend with others into what we call harmony.

Sung accurately, each part singing a different note at the same time blends perfectly in such a way that the sound is rich and unified. This is because the laws that God has written into the creation itself are operating. “C” and “E” will harmonize, but “C” and “D” will result in dissonance. The laws of music are of interest to the Christian, for the spirit of the times, the prince of the power of the air, the spirit of disobedience (Eph 2:2) is also at work. There are certain forms of music in the world, and more than ever in churches that seek to appeal to “youth relevance”, that seek not to obey the unwritten codes in the creation but to deliberately contravene them. This is evident in the genres of “Rock” and ‘Metal’.

Used rightly by master composers, dissonance can create moments of tension and indeed, beautiful

musicality. However, it is no coincidence that rock music and metal are associated with teenage rebellion. These genres are deliberate attempts to abuse dissonance and abandon harmonics, creating harsh clashes and extreme cadences to stir up base and crude emotion. Satan’s attempts to lead the world in disregarding the laws and truth of the creation are evident in the music of this postmodern age. “Christian Rock” is not a legitimate form of music for the church.

Our singing therefore, is also an important aspect of our witness and antithetical living. For many of us youth, learning music and singing are a large part of our lives. Are the songs we sing and listen to filled with the richness of scripture, or are they corrupt, sappy and humanistic, that unbelievers would be at home with? Are we comfortable when the worldly rebellion of rock and the emotional exuberance of pop creep into the church world, and our own sin-loving ears?

As the youth of our church, let us be filled with joy as we sing God’s praises from His word. As the early church and reformers were zealous for the Psalms, let our zeal too, be like theirs in insisting on and preferring, not man’s hymns and fallible imagination but the inspired teaching of the Spirit in the Psalms. Let us rejoice in the creation, not by condoning and partaking in postmodern musical elements but celebrating that which is faithful to God’s ordinances.

The church throughout the ages received God’s blessing of music and singing, and alone by Jehovah’s providence it has, and will endure. Let us, too, be among many faithful generations in our careful, informed and reverent use of this priceless gift.

# What is Reformed?

## Reformed Worship Part VII - Reformed In Listening

>> Prof. Hanko



*Prof Hanko* is a retired professor of the Protestant Reformed Theological School. His present work consists of preaching at Hope Protestant Reformed Church, writing for the Salt Shakers magazine, writing in a forum for the young people in Singapore, and writing new books.

I think I may have told you this story before, but if I did, you will excuse me, for it is worth telling again.

Shortly after I became a minister, way back in 1955, almost 60 years ago, my grandfather came to see us as he did from time to time. He himself had studied briefly in our Seminary and had always aspired to the ministry, although the Lord never called him; he did not complete his Seminary studies.

He said to me, in the course of our conversation, that now I was behind the pulpit and he was sitting in the pew – although I doubt whether he ever heard me preach; I do not remember that he did. He reminded me that it was far more difficult to sit in the pew and listen to a sermon than to be behind the pulpit and preach a sermon.

I thought, at the time, that this was merely a remark from a frustrated man who never did preach.

Many years later, when I became a professor in the Seminary and did sit in the pew from time to time, I learned to my dismay, that he was right. It was more difficult to sit in the pew and listen properly than it was to preach.

He was not, I think, referring to the making of a sermon, but the actual preaching of it. Making a sermon is hard and difficult work. It was often “blood, sweat, and tears,” to use a familiar expression. It took me many hours—usually two full days—to make a sermon. But he was referring to being on the pulpit and delivering a sermon, as compared with sitting in the pew and listening to a sermon, in a God-pleasing way. My grandfather was right.

Listening properly to a sermon requires intense and constant concentration that is most difficult to maintain. Preaching has always been a pleasure. I think I am not exaggerating when I say that my most enjoyable times are when I am delivering a sermon from the pulpit. After preaching, I have a sense of exhilaration and say to myself, “If the congregation was half as edified by the preaching as I was, it would be wonderful.”

I am fully aware of the fact that such exhilaration is not always the case, and surely the minister who takes his calling seriously has moments when

he is not very satisfied with his own sermon. Besides, he is not always as spiritually prepared to preach as he ought to be; and that leaves him somewhat down in spirit.

But sitting in the pew and listening properly is difficult. You understand that I mean “proper listening,” that is, listening as God would have us listen.

Jesus points out that there are different ways to listen, and some are very bad. You can find this in Matthew 13 in the parable of the four kinds of soil. Some listeners do not listen at all, but are thinking of many other things. They are thinking perhaps about their jobs, about their problems, about their carnal desires, or something else.

A minister told me once that he was accustomed to asking people on family visitation what he had preached on the previous Sunday. He asked them what the subject of the sermon was, what the text was, and to relate just one point they remembered from the whole sermon. The response from the people was so discouraging that he quit asking.

There are “hard-soil hearers.” They hear at the moment the sermon is being preached, but they forget so soon that ten minutes after church they cannot remember what the sermon was about.

There are “shallow-soil hearers,” who are even excited about what they hear and are thrilled by the sermon. But when they face suffering, especially

“ But sitting in the pew and listening properly is difficult. ”

persecution for their faith, the Word is not only forgotten, but denied.

There are also “weedy-field hearers.” They hear the word also, but they are so much worried about their jobs, or their business, or their riches, or the cares of life, that God’s Word is choked out of their minds, and they never remember a thing of it.

But then, there are the “good-soil hearers” who also listen. Their chief characteristic, Jesus says, is that they bring forth fruit – some more than others, and sometimes more than

other times, but they bring forth fruit in their lives.

We are talking here about these latter hearers who bring forth fruit. How do they listen?

When I was in the pastoral ministry, an old lady in my congregation would sit on the front edge of her seat, with her hands folded in her lap, and her eyes fixed on me. She never moved a muscle the whole sermon, except that from time to time, a small smile would lift the corners of her mouth. She was a true hearer.

My father told me of a time he preached in his congregation on the song of praise Hannah sang to God when God gave her Samuel. Over ten years later, he was asked unexpectedly to preach in the same congregation while he was visiting there. He preached once again on the song of Hannah. After the service, a lady came up to him and said, “Reverend, you preached on that text when you

were minister here, but you changed the introduction somewhat.” My father admitted that what she said was true. One can only do that if one is a true listener.

Here are especially two passages in Scripture that speak on this matter of listening to the preaching. One is in James 1:19-25. It is a long passage, too long to quote here; and you all have your Bibles and can easily look it up for yourself. It is very important. Pay special attention to verses 19 to 22.

The second passage is in Ecclesiastes 5:1-2: “Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.”

We will, God willing, consider this subject more at length in the next issue of SS.

## God’s Sovereign Hand in Ebola

>> Julia Ong



Julia Ong is a confessing young adult in CERC.

Ebola — the virus which strikes fear into the hearts of many. The thread-like virus is divided into five different species. Since its first recognized appearance in 1976, the Zaire species (being named after the former name of the Democratic Republic of the Congo) has caused multiple large outbreaks with mortality rates of 55-88%, usually due to complications of abnormal bleeding and organ failure.

By far, the largest outbreak of Ebola

virus disease ever recorded is currently occurring in West Africa with the Zaire species of the virus. This outbreak started in the West African nation of Guinea in late 2013 and was confirmed by the World Health Organization (WHO) in March 2014. The outbreak subsequently spread to Liberia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Senegal, and Mali with a case-fatality rate estimated to be approximately 70%.

“May we look forward to Christ’s coming, and the new heavens and the new earth, with great hope and anticipation.”

Despite the documented extensive spread of the outbreak, its magnitude has probably still been underestimated; this is due in part to individuals with the disease being cared for outside the hospital setting. As of November 11, 2014, the cumulative number of probable, suspected, and laboratory-confirmed cases attributed to Ebola virus is 14,413, including 5177 deaths. These include 570 healthcare workers, of whom approximately 55% have died.

In Singapore, the chalet originally booked for the Vacation Bible School in December 2014 has been identified as an Ebola quarantine centre. This shows that the Government is mindful that Ebola may spread to Singapore, and is taking precautionary steps.

What does a Christian have to say amidst this?

### 1. The frailty of man

In recent years, we have heard of the implications of frightening disease. Apart from cancers, strokes, or bacterial infections, many viral outbreaks (e.g. influenza developing deadly strains, Dengue virus causing mortality locally) have caused widespread fear. As we progress and attempt to develop vaccines rapidly to counteract these viruses, we must be reminded of the feebleness of our

attempts as we spend large amounts of money on research, frequently coming to naught at the end. Even though we claim to be able to decipher the entire human genome, we are unable to claim victory over viruses with small linear, single stranded genome. In the case of Ebola, it has less than 20,000 nucleotides as part of its genome, in contrast to the human genome which is more than 3,000,000,000 nucleotides long.

### 2. The sovereignty of God

The word of God does speak of the suffering of mankind. In Revelation 16, the men with the mark of the beast are described to have “a noisome and grievous sore”. The pale horse and his rider, described in Revelation 6:8, were given power over the fourth part of the earth, “to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth”.

Even as the kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together against the LORD and against His anointed, the Lord shall laugh and have them in derision. He shall speak unto them in His wrath, and vex them in His sore displeasure (Psalm 2:2-5). Let God be God: He has all power both in heaven and in earth, and is Head over all things to the church, in spite of the restless

endeavours of His enemies.

Ultimately, God is sovereign over life and death—and this is our great comfort. Whatever diseases may rage in the earth, He alone determines the length of our lives (Job 14:5). May we confess together with Job, the Old Testament saint who in a single day lost his seven sons and three daughters, all his livestock and all but four servants, saying, “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.” (Job 1:21)

### 3. Sign of the end times

The vials of God’s wrath are being poured out on the earth, in ways including but not limited to disease and pestilence. There is evidence of Matthew 24:7 all around us, with nation rising against nation, and kingdom against kingdom and earthquakes occurring.

Pastor Gise Van Baren writes in relation to the HIV virus: The trumpet of the Lord’s angel is sounding. And those with the mark of the beast, who worship his image, are especially affected. The economic and social consequences likely will be terrible. But then we can truly look up — for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

May we look forward to Christ’s coming, and the new heavens and the new earth, with great hope and anticipation. For then, there will be no more disease, suffering, or death as we live eternally in the presence of our loving Father.

# CERC Church Theme 2015

>> Elder Leong Fai Chong



*Leong Fai Chong* is an Elder in CERC and Advisor to Salt Shakers.

**Theme:** The Gospel: a Witness to All Nations

**Theme Verse:** Matthew 24:14 “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.”

The Gospel – A Witness unto all nations? Yes, this wonderful truth of the gospel is what we want CERC and her members to embrace in our hearts and lives. When we speak about the gospel, the first thing that comes to our mind is evangelism and mission work. Though evangelism and mission work are two very important callings of the church in relation to the gospel, yet the gospel which our Lord Jesus Christ entrusted to His Church to preach has

a much greater purpose and calling than these. In fact, evangelism and mission work will be the natural fruits of the church when she embraces this greater purpose of the gospel. We hope and pray that through the emphasis of this theme, we will be brought to a greater appreciation of the gospel; and through this means, may we have a greater love and zeal to preach the gospel here in Singapore and abroad.

In this year’s theme, we want the church to focus on the importance and the purpose of preaching the gospel. The primary purpose in the preaching of the gospel is the Glory of God—and rightly so. As Reformed believers, we believe that all things serve for and to the Glory of God. How much more the preaching of the gospel, which demonstrates to us the love and power of God in saving His people in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. When we lay this truth in our hearts and souls, it becomes a natural progression to love God and our Lord Jesus. It will also become our obvious calling to maintain the pure and unadulterated preaching of the gospel in our midst. It will surely help us to grow in the love and zeal to declare the

gospel to those around us, even to the ends of the world.

The theme verse demonstrates to us this truth; it reminds us that “this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations”. What is the gospel a witness of?

First, the gospel is a witness of God’s Glory. His Glory is declared when the gospel reveals to us that Jehovah is the only true God. It also reveals God’s ultimate purpose in creation and His absolute sovereignty in all things, especially in the salvation of His people.

Second, the gospel is a witness of God’s Mercy. In the gospel, God’s saving love for His people in Christ is revealed to us. His mercy is also revealed in His giving of His onlybegotten Son to suffer and die on the cross to make propitiation for our sins and to impute His righteousness to us.

Third, the gospel is a witness of God’s Power. It reveals to us His power in quickening one that is dead in trespasses and sins and gives to him life—even life everlasting. It also reveals His power through the Holy Spirit in calling this person out of darkness into His marvellous light.

Last, the gospel is a witness to His beloved church and her members. The gospel demonstrates His Grace in the gathering of His church from all tongues, tribes, and nations through the preaching of the gospel. It witnesses to us His Covenant faithfulness in

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...the gospel is a witness to the whole world when the last elect is gathered through the preaching of the gospel...

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establishing the promise to His people that He will be our God and the God of our children in the generations to come. It also witnesses to us His constant and abiding love when the gospel is preached to us every Lord's Day.

Finally, the gospel is a witness to the whole world when the last elect is gathered through the preaching of the

gospel and the Lord Jesus will come in His power and glory to judge the world.

As we see and become convinced that the primary purpose in the preaching of the gospel is to glorify God, may we be motivated to grow in these three areas in the years to come. May it first motivate us to grow more and more to show forth the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His

marvellous light. May it also motivate us to be courageous to defend and maintain the pure and unadulterated gospel in our midst. Last but not least, when we believe that the preaching of the gospel is to declare the Glory of God, what can possibly stop us from faithfully and zealously preaching the gospel to where the Lord has placed us in and to where the Lord will send us to?

## Our Children's Education: A Covenant Necessity (Part I)

>> Aaron Lim



*Aaron Lim* is a confessing young adult in CERC. He has been studying in the Protestant Reformed Seminary since August 2013.

Dear Covenant Parents,

Few subjects deserve our greater spiritual attention more than the education of our children. As guardians of the precious Reformed faith, we confess the blessed truth that Jehovah establishes His Covenant with us and our seed. In a wonder of sovereign grace, He purposed to save us and our children in their generations in Jesus Christ. These are "the children which God hath graciously given" to us His servants (Gen. 33:5). In giving to us Covenant seed, the LORD entrusts us with the high calling to raise them

up according to His ways. This is Covenant privilege of the highest kind; for in raising Covenant seed, we proclaim together with the Psalmist, "One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts" (Psalm 145:4).

In October 2014, Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church (CERC) established her own school society and board. This important development testifies to her zeal for Covenant education. She is a young, second-generation church. The cause of Christian education is an important one for her. Like Israel of old, a solid Covenant education is indispensable to the church in succeeding generations. CERC's goal of establishing a Christian school for her Covenant seed is crucial for the well-being of her children in their generations.

The effects of not having a Christian school has been felt by CERC. Some parents send their children to public schools, while others decide to homeschool. Homeschooling has been a good alternative for many

parents in our church as they seek the establishment of a Christian school. Many of these parents band together for a common cause. Some take lessons together, while many families have joint outings and educational activities together.

Christian education is not complete without recognising the evils of public education. The public schools are no longer innocent places of learning where our children simply receive an education in the languages, arts and sciences. They have become more assertive and influential in the lives of our children, especially as they climb the education ladder. It is not groundless to say that the public education system will shape the characters of our Covenant children in tremendous ways if we send them there, and therefore parents must do so with much prayer and carefulness.

The calling of Christian education must be a call that has its basis in Scripture. It must be a call that is in harmony with our confessions. It is a call rooted in our Covenant obligations

as Reformed parents to raise Covenant seed in the fear of the LORD. Scripture directs our attention to the truth that our children are an heritage from the LORD (Psalm 127:3), entrusted to us for our utmost care and upbringing. As Covenant parents, we vow to teach our children the ways of the LORD and bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4).

Christian education in Singapore, if done through homeschooling, is not advantageous. This is because local universities require qualifications from government recognised schools for enrolment. It follows that if qualifications from the Christian school are not recognised by universities, our children will suffer. Some may find it harder to find jobs; career opportunities may be restricted; promotions may be hard to come by; incomes may be meagre. From a social and material viewpoint, our children may suffer loss.

Persecution is also inevitable for our Covenant seed if we place them on the path of a Christian education in our own Christian school. Our children will suffer scorn from the world. They will be mocked at for studying in the school of Christ rather than enjoying the academic pleasures of this world. They will be ridiculed for wasting their talents to the cause of God's kingdom instead of developing them to gain the riches of this world.

Nevertheless, our Covenant duty must stand firm. It is our most sacred obligation to raise up Covenant seed in the ways of God, and Scripture is clear that God's ways are often accompanied by suffering. All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer. Our children are not excluded, for they are also members of God's

Covenant as much as we are.

The subject of a Reformed education has weighed heavily on my soul throughout the years of my public schooling. The desperate wickedness of a public education and its sinful influences that threaten to destroy Covenant young people struck me forcefully during these years. I am absolutely convinced that, without the faithful mercy of God, we in CERC shall have little to speak of the Reformed faith if we further subject our children to another generation of public education. The young people are the future of the church. For this reason the education they receive from infancy onwards ought to prepare them for God's kingdom. There is only one kind of education that Covenant children must receive – a Covenant education.

There is much for parents in CERC to learn from our brethren in the Protestant Reformed Churches in America (PRCA), who walk before us in the critical call to raise up Covenant seed. Many of their parents do this with great personal sacrifices, knowing that faithfulness to our Lord's calling will come at great costs. Their maturity in the faith is indeed remarkable, and they have a heritage from which we will greatly benefit to learn from.

I am indebted to the PRCA for all that they have taught me on this subject through their literature and especially their schools. A trip to Grand Rapids in the winter of December 2006 opened insights for me to see what Reformed schools were really all about. Far more important were the spiritual lessons they taught me. If we are to be serious about our high calling to raise Covenant seed for the LORD, it is imperative that we

learn from them. I would rather the readers of this paper read Prof. David Engelsma's book *Reformed Education - The Christian School as Demand of the Covenant* (Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2000). It is a far better and thorough argument than this paper can provide. On his book I must rely extensively for the strength of this argument.

It is my prayerful hope that the Covenant parents in CERC will realise that raising Covenant seed demands Covenant education. I am much encouraged by the present growing support in our midst to give our children such an education through the means of a Christian school. Great will be their reward. May the Lord use these words to promote the cause of a Covenant education to our parents to the end that they may see the wonders of Jehovah's blessings upon them and their children.

With love for God's everlasting Covenant of grace, *Aaron Lim*

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..There is only one kind of education that Covenant children must receive – a Covenant education.

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## Biblical Principles of Proper Judgements (Part I)

>> Matt Kortus



*Matt Kortus* is a member of Faith Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan. He currently works as a Research Associate at the Van Andel Institute in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

The mantra of the world today is “Tolerance”. Society insists that all beliefs and claims are equally valid and must be accepted by everyone as legitimate. Each individual has the right to determine good and evil for himself without any opposition from others. Truth has become relative. Therefore, claiming to know good and evil on the basis of absolute truth has become the most heinous evil someone can commit.

Many beat this drum of tolerance in the name of Christianity, often turning to the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:1, “Judge not that ye be not judged.” They assert that Jesus does not want us to speak out against the sin or doctrine of others.

Does Jesus forbid all forms of judgment in this text? Is there no room for us to evaluate the sin we may observe in others or to deem certain doctrines as false? What does the Bible teach about judgment and reproof?

This article will demonstrate that

Scripture does not forbid us from making judgments about sin or doctrine. Rather, the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:1 call us to avoid Pharisaical judgment that is characterised by legalism, condemnation, hypocrisy, and self-righteousness. Since by nature we are prone to allow these four evils to influence our judgment and reproof of others, we must look to Scripture for guidance.

Many turn to Matthew 7:1 to teach that Jesus forbids all forms of judgments. They believe that Jesus does not want us to determine right and wrong. Instead, we ought to accept all beliefs and values as legitimate, even if they oppose our own. “Judge not,” they cry, and by doing so they elevate tolerance to the pinnacle of human morality. Thus, sincere Christians are often accused of being intolerant and judgmental for speaking out against sin. This accusation can leave us grasping for the right words to answer with. How do we respond to such a claim?

By evaluating the whole of Jesus’ teachings, we can determine that He does not forbid us from formulating opinions, making evaluations, or casting judgments. Already in Matthew 7:6, just a few verses later, we read, “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs; neither cast ye your pearls before the swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.” Here, Jesus commands us to decide, to judge, who

among us are “dogs” and “swine.” We can determine these individuals based on their response to reproof from the Word of God: they trample it under their feet and turn upon the one who brings the reproof, with a desire to tear them to pieces.

To provide another example, we read in Matthew 7:15-16a, “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits.” We are called to determine not only dogs and swine, but also wolves. Especially the wolves! How can we? “Ye shall know them by their fruits” (vs. 16a). Jesus commands us to evaluate the teachings and works of a man and judge whether he is a false prophet. Jesus instructs us that making judgments is a necessary element of the Christian life.

Having established that Jesus does not forbid all forms of judging, the question becomes, what does Jesus mean by these words? What is our calling in this matter?

To properly understand the meaning of the words, “Judge not,” we must first understand the context of Matthew 7:1-5. This text is part of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, which has the “Kingdom of Heaven” as its main theme. Here, Jesus addresses the citizens of that kingdom, the church of God, and their conduct toward one another. Jesus spoke these words to the multitudes of people that gathered around Him, who were astonished by

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We are called to determine not only dogs and swine, but also wolves. Especially the wolves! How can we? “Ye shall know them by their fruits” (vs. 16a)

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His doctrine and the authority with which He spoke. Also gathered in the crowds were many of the religious leaders of that day—specifically the Pharisees, who were keenly interested in the teachings of Jesus. Throughout, the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus repeatedly makes reference to the Pharisees who were present. Much of what Jesus says can be summarised as, “Don’t follow the example of the Pharisees.” In every way, Christ’s teachings directly contradicted the teachings of the Pharisees. Therefore, in commanding the citizens of the kingdom of heaven not to judge, Jesus forbids Pharisaical judging.

The Pharisees represented the religious leaders during the life and time of Christ. They formulated a series of laws that they set before the people as the rule for obedience. This group gave strict attention to external obedience and quickly judged any who failed to meet their standards. Jesus forbids

this Pharisaical judgment which can be characterised in four ways.

First, the Pharisees judged on the basis of man-made laws—they were legalists. The Pharisees established their own laws, which they used as the standard for making judgments. In this way they attempted to impose their own beliefs and values upon the people in that day. We become legalists when we apply our own standards to others and judge them accordingly. Jesus forbids us from making judgments based on what we personally believe is right or wrong.

Second, the Pharisees judged in a spirit of hatred that condemned all those who did not obey the external laws that they had formulated. Hateful judgment is spiteful, malicious, and unfair. In hatred, one not only makes a judgment, but also determines a sentence or punishment. By doing this, the Pharisees sought to dethrone God Almighty from His seat of justice. God alone has the authority to determine the eternal fate of all men. God alone stands as Judge. Therefore, Jesus forbids the leap from judgment to condemnation of someone on the basis of his or her works or doctrines.

Third, the Pharisees were hypocritical in casting judgment. The Pharisees judged others with one set of standards, while applying an entirely different set to themselves. We can use the analogy of a pair of binoculars. Used properly, binoculars magnify or enlarge something in view. Turn the binoculars around and the image becomes very small. Pharisaical judgment magnifies the sins of others, while diminishing one’s own sins. Jesus forbids hypocritical judgment.

Finally, the Pharisees were motivated to judge by a sense of self-righteousness. This is closely related to hypocritical

judging. Every time, the Pharisees judged someone else, they first made a judgment about themselves—a good and positive judgment. They scorned others who did not meet their

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Or, in other words, anytime we judge with a wrong standard, an improper spirit, a lack of self-examination, and an evil motivation, we sin against God.

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standards in order to puff themselves up and appear righteous before men. At root, Pharisaical judgment is steeped in pride. Jesus forbids judgment of others in order to make ourselves appear or seem righteous before men.

To summarise all this, we can conclude that Jesus forbids Pharisaical judgment as characterised by legalism, condemnation, hypocrisy, and self-righteousness. Or, in other words, anytime we judge with a wrong standard, an improper spirit, a lack of self-examination, and an evil motivation, we sin against God. These are negative prohibitions that we must guard against. In the next part, we will examine the positive principles that will guide us in making proper judgments.

# GIFTS FROM GOD AND HUMILITY

>> Joanna Tang



Joanna Tang is a confessing youth in CERC.

We all have gifts. None of us can claim that we do not have gifts or that we cannot do anything well, and therefore have nothing to contribute to the church. No one should remain in a corner with the excuse of letting others who are more “qualified” serve. God has given each one of us unique gifts (Ephesians 4:11-12), and He commands us to use them to edify God’s people and glorify His Name.

But before we go any further, we need to examine one important aspect of using our gifts: humility.

## What is that?

It is not a mere outward show, nor being willing to become a doormat for others to walk on. Humility is an attitude of the heart that fully understands that whatever we do is by the grace and strength of God, and that alone. This attitude resides within the heart and flows out in all of life’s decisions, thoughts, and actions. Using our gifts, then, must stem from this attitude of the heart.

## Why?

“For,” the mighty God says, “every

beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains; and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof” (Psalm 50:10-12). All the world belongs to the Maker of heaven and earth. How can we, mortals formed from dust, then boast in our abilities? When people tell us we are gifted in this or that, should not we remember instantly that what we have are—*gifts*? Gifts are not things we procure for ourselves. Gifts are given by someone else—freely and graciously.

God does not owe us anything. He does not owe us salvation, nor any of the abundance He supplies. Yet He does save us, and fills us with all good things, such that our cups run over with His mercy. Knowing this, what ought our response to be? “Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High” (Psalm 50:14).

## A Heart of Service

“...whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:43-45). We have an example: the perfect example, Jesus Christ. He is THE great King, yet He humbled Himself in coming to this earth to suffer and die, for the sake of us – undeserving sinners.

“Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering” (Colossians 3:12). We do not selfishly enjoy our gifts by ourselves, or use them in the presence of others to obtain the praise of men. Instead, we endeavour to use all our gifts for the benefit of God’s people. We seek to be a blessing to our fellow pilgrims on our sojourn here on earth. Do you have the gift of speaking well? Use that gift to encourage others with the Word of God. Do you play the piano, or some other musical instrument? Play for church services, or use good music to cheer a brother or sister who is down. Young men, are you able to comprehend and explain spiritual things? Consider prayerfully the ministry.

## “Too” humble?

We must be careful not to err on the extremes—on the one hand, we must crush all pride in ourselves, but on the other hand, we do not take on ourselves an air of pietistic subjection, cringing every time someone compliments us or behaving as though we are wretchedly unable to contribute, in any way, to the benefit of the church. God has given each one of us gifts, and we use them, humbly yet boldly, always remembering that they are from His fatherly hand. To use our gifts in pride is sin, but to withhold the use of our gifts, whatever our excuses may be, is also sin.

When someone tells us that we play the piano or some sport well, or are

good at some other thing, it appears that most of us respond in either of two ways. Some of us simply say “thanks” for the compliment, and some of us, in a feeling of half-guilt over being praised, hurriedly brush the compliment aside with a “no *lah*”. The next time someone praises you, why not use the opportunity to proclaim God’s goodness to you, and thank Him for His gifts—in public? This seems simple enough, but so many of us (myself included) most often shy away from doing this. But let us commit even this to God in prayer and seek courage from Him.

### **Using our Gifts—Looking to the Future**

As young people, most of us have many years ahead (unless the Lord wills otherwise). We will be husbands, fathers, wives, mothers, singles, and/or leaders of the church. We do not know exactly what the future holds. God does not tell us whether we are going to have one or ten children, or whether we will be rich or poor, or whether we will be stricken with infirmities, or whether we will be elders or deacons (for the young men). But He has told us what to do with our lives—do all for His glory (1 Corinthians 10:31), serve the church (Ephesians 4:12), and use our station in life to serve Him with all that we are (Matthew 24:14-30 – parable of the talents).

We exercise our gifts knowing that God will use them for our good and salvation no matter where He leads us in life. We are eager to serve Him with all that we are, eager to do all we can to the best of our ability (given of the Lord), and eager to do better and better in using our gifts (only through Christ who strengthens us—Philippians 4:13), not for our own

gain, but for the glory of His Name.

And so, we use our gifts as much as possible! God will use us to accomplish His sovereign will. He will use the gifts He has given to grow us in our various callings. Perhaps one day you will be called to serve as an elder or deacon. Perhaps you will be a Christian school teacher. Perhaps you will be a missionary. Perhaps you will be a mother in Israel, faithfully serving in the home. Perhaps you will be called to a life of singleness, to serve God undividedly with your whole life.

Whatever your calling is, God knows, and the gifts you have are specifically given to you that you may work out your unique calling as He has commanded.

### **Do you have gifts?**

Yes, certainly you do. Do not be discouraged if you cannot find anything you feel you are good at right now. But be diligent in seeking out ways to serve the church and be eager to humble yourself for the sake of others; begin with simple, everyday ways like talking to the newcomer in church or sending a note of Christian encouragement to a friend. And for those of you who are already serving in many areas, be diligent in honing your skills and acquiring new ones that you may contribute all of yourself to the church. Not so that people will see all your many contributions and say you are such a godly and talented young person, or that you can feel good about yourself, but that you may use all that God has given you to the fullest, and do your best for His Name’s sake.

### **We fail. Every day.**

Using our gifts, and using them rightly, is difficult.

We boast in ourselves—I *hope my neighbours appreciate the lovely music I’m playing!* We forget the Giver of all good—I *worked hard; I earned this!* We elevate ourselves above others—*She’s singing all the Psalters out of tune...*

And this brings us back to humility. We cannot obey God’s commands except by His grace—and we do not deserve His grace. Our sinful flesh does not want to obey and does not want grace to obey. But our merciful heavenly Father sanctifies us each day by His Spirit, moulding and making us more like Him, through His Word, the preaching, and prayer. He shows us that we are nothing. But when we see that (only through the lens of faith, by grace!), we run to the cross of Calvary, begging Him to help us obey, to help us be humble, to help us use all He has given as we ought. And there is mercy; there is forgiveness; there is grace. “For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust” (Psalm 103:14).

Thank God for His goodness, of which we do not deserve even an ounce.

And as we use our gifts faithfully, let this be our daily prayer: “Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth’s sake” (Psalm 115:1).

# The Reunion in Heaven (CNY Special)

>> Cheryl Lim



*Cheryl Lim* is a confessing young adult in CERC. She actively serves in the youth committee (Covenant Keepers).

Chinese New Year (CNY) is just round the corner! One element of CNY that many of us look forward to is 團圓飯 (“tuan yuan fan”), or the Reunion Dinner. Traditionally held on the eve of CNY, it is one of the most important events of the fifteen-day CNY celebrations and has been likened to a Christmas dinner in the West. As its name suggests, the essence of the Reunion Dinner is a gathering together of family members, immediate and extended, to “reunite” over a sumptuous meal and usher in the CNY.

Blissful as this may seem, the people of God look forward to a far more blessed reunion – the reunion in Heaven, where we will enjoy perfect fellowship, and feast with our Saviour and heavenly Father for eternity.

## Fellowship

The CNY Reunion Dinner is a joyous occasion for many, and one can just about imagine the scene in a typical Chinese home. As dinner time approaches, family members—young and old—come together from all over

the island and converge around the steamboat or hot-pot (a popular meal choice for this event, the communal cooking adds to the warmth and significance of the Reunion Dinner). The home is filled with chatter as the elders reminisce about old times, interrupted now and then by peals of laughter from young cousins who tease and poke fun at each other. Underlying this is the basic idea of friendship and fellowship that exist by virtue of earthly familial ties.

The fellowship we shall experience in heaven, however, has no match on earth. This is because when in heaven, we will be in the presence of God Himself! As we read in Scripture, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God” (Revelation 21:3). In heaven, God’s Covenant with His people will be fully realised. Dwelling with God in the new heavens and the new earth will be the expression of the most intimate fellowship we can enjoy with Him.

In the old dispensation, God’s people experienced fellowship with Him through the feasts, ceremonies and sacrifices held at the tabernacle and temple. But this was limited, for they could not personally enter into the holy of holies, and were instead represented by the high priest once a year. In the new dispensation, with the coming of the Son of God in our flesh and the in-dwelling of the

Holy Spirit, we more fully experience friendship and fellowship with God. But in the heavenly reunion, we shall see the face of God (Revelation 22:4)! We will be surrounded by the glory of God which will lighten the heavenly city (Revelation 21:23), which glory caused the face of Moses to shine (Exodus 33-34), and in the presence of which the angels covered their faces (Isaiah 6). What blessedness!

And we experience all of this only through Jesus Christ our Saviour. It is only by His work on Calvary that we may be reconciled to our Father and can come into His presence. At the cross, Christ paid the penalty for all our sins while His righteousness was imputed to us, that we may cry to God “Abba, Father” (Galatians 4:3-6).

But, that is not all. In heaven, we will also be gathered together with the saints of all ages, from Adam and Eve to the last elect. We will see and talk with the heroes of faith such as Abraham, Noah, Joseph, David or Paul. We may interact with the Reformers like Martin Luther, John Calvin or Augustine. We will also reunite with family and friends who belong to Christ. And while our fellowship on earth is tainted and corrupted with sin (yes, even at Reunion Dinners), fellowship in heaven will be in the absence of sin! No more will we have to struggle against wicked thoughts, speech and deeds towards the neighbour. In stark contrast, we will see the glory

of God reflected in each other as we are conformed to the image of Christ in true knowledge, righteousness and holiness.

### Feasting

Closely related to the idea of fellowship is that of feasting. The CNY Reunion Dinner is a time of much eating and drinking. Probably the most important meal in the year for Chinese families, the best food is served—in abundance. Traditionally, such abundance was believed to bring the family ample material wealth in the New Year. Most of the chosen dishes would carry a certain significance or symbolism. For example, fish can almost always be found at this occasion because its homophone (yú) is associated with a remainder, thus representing a surplus or extra savings at the end of the year. For this reason, certain families will not finish or even eat the fish during the Reunion Dinner. Homophones of other foods are connected with

longevity, reunion, perfection, good luck, health, diligence, satisfaction, promotion etc.

Likewise, feasting has frequently been used to describe the reunion in Heaven. In Revelations, we read of the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:9), while in two separate parables, Christ likened the Kingdom of God to a great supper (Luke 14:16-24) and a wedding feast (Matthew 22:1-10). In his book, *Mysteries of the Kingdom*, Prof. Hanko explains that such a figure “depicts not only the intimate relationship of marriage, but also the fellowship and communion, the joy and happiness of a banquet... Eating and drinking, feasting and banqueting, are signs of rejoicing” (p. 348). In an earthly way, we experience this when we gather around the table for Reunion Dinners. There is communion and conversation at the table, talking and sharing, laughter and joy. What delight we shall have when we enjoy

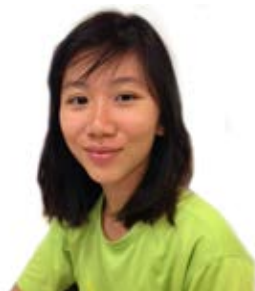
intimate, covenantal fellowship with our Lord and fellow saints in Heaven!

And what shall we partake of? We have the promises of our Saviour: “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God” (Revelation 2:7b), and “I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely” (Revelation 21:6b). Partaking of these, we will never hunger or thirst again. We shall have an eternity of fellowship with God, enjoying all the blessings of salvation—knowledge, wisdom, righteousness, holiness and many others—through the Holy Spirit. These all flow into the church and her members from Christ, constantly refreshing and quickening her unto eternal life. Can any feast compare to this?

And so, even as we welcome the CNY Reunion Dinner, let us look forward to the eternal blessed state of fellowship we shall enjoy in the Heavenly Reunion!

## The Errors of Korean Dramas (Part II)

>> Lim Tze Yan



Tze Yan Lim is a confessing young adult in CERC.

### Introduction

In the first article on the error of Korean dramas, we learnt that although Korean dramas portray many traditional and seemingly good values, it is not a justified reason for us to watch dramas. This is because Korean dramas, through those traditional values, pull us away from knowing God; they deceive us with the lie that man is able to do good if

he wants to, and thus, be able to lead a happy and fulfilling life.

Yet, some may argue, “But, I am tired after a long day at work (or, at school)! I am stuffed with work to do and problems to deal with! Can’t I take a short break by watching Korean dramas? It is entertaining, and it takes my mind off work!”

The above argument gives the Korean

Wave another reason for its popularity. It is because Korean dramas are a “fantasy space” (Meagan, 2014, para. 1). Korean dramas depict a world that we can only wish to have—a simple, comfortable, trouble-free, effortless, and relaxed life. In other words, portraying a life of ease is the goal of majority of Korean dramas. Thus, the utopian life shown makes Korean dramas “so satisfying and endearing” (Meagan, 2014, para. 1).

However, should seeking “a life of ease” be a reason why we, as Reformed Christians, are drawn into watching Korean dramas? How should we view and respond to the portrayal of the utopian lifestyles in Korean dramas?

### **The Fantasy Space of Korean Dramas**

Picture this—having a boyfriend with chiselled features, a dazzling smile, who sweeps you off your feet with his charismatic personality, who is sensitive to your every need, and who protects you from danger. Or, picture having a girlfriend with soft and delicate features, fair skin, who not only has beauty but also the brains, and who has a loveable personality.

Here is another scenario: Imagine—progressing from struggling to have ends meet to gaining affluence and riches without “surrendering [your] souls to the cooperate world” (Meagan, 2014, para. 1). Or, imagine the transformation of a common man into a famous and well-known superstar, in just a snap of one’s fingers, all because he caught the eye of a prominent person.

And it gets even better—imagine all your worries and troubles eventually ceasing because good always triumphs over evil. Because if you are a good person, circumstances will just iron out and life will somehow “turn out

good” again.

Do not these scenarios make us go “Ah! How I wish...”? These scenarios are the portrayals of life in Korean dramas. One example is the 2005 Korean drama titled, *Delightful Girl Chun-hyang*.

As mentioned in the previous article, Chun-hyang, the pretty female protagonist, is portrayed as a hardworking girl who holds multiple jobs to support herself and her mother financially (Wikipedia, 2014). Despite juggling between jobs and her studies, she ranks the top spot in school (Wikipedia, 2014). In a twist of events, Chun-hyang is forced into a marriage engagement with the male protagonist, Mong-ryong—the rebellious yet cool and good-looking son of a police chief. In an instant, Chun-hyang’s financial woes are taken care off when she moves into Mong-ryong’s house—her lodging, daily necessities, and school tuition are paid for by Mong-ryong’s parents. However, Chun-hyang and Mong-ryong continue to lead individual lives, because they both disagree to their marriage arrangement. Chun-hyang continues to search for ways to fulfil her dream to be a designer. Fortunately, she meets a director of an entertainment agency who provides her with opportunities to showcase her work. Finally, after many obstacles and misunderstandings, Chun-hyang and Mong-ryong’s relationship grew, and the pair finally got married.

### **God’s Definition of Comfort**

The short summary of the above drama sounds pretty blissful and innocent, does it not? Chun-hyang’s burdens are always taken care of and her relationship with Mong-ryong blossoms—she finally leads a life of comfort and ease! However, what does

the Word of God and Confessions say about true comfort?

“That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ...” (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 1, Q&A 1).

Our comfort, as children of God, lies not in the quantity of earthly goods we have; it lies not in whether or not we get what we want; it lies not in whether or not we lead a smooth-sailing life. But it lies in the reality that our whole life and body belong to God, for we are bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20)! However, the plots of Korean dramas want us to believe otherwise. They want us to believe that our comfort in life is determined by pleasant physical circumstances and material goods. Although there are conflicts throughout the development of the drama’s plot, majority of the Korean dramas conclude with the protagonists leading a blissful and comfortable life.

The error (and the unreality) of Korean dramas—and all other dramas where applicable—is that it equates a “happy ending” in life with whether all goes well for one’s self. And to reach such a goal in life, many Korean dramas use ‘indicators’ to define what a smooth-sailing life is. They want us to define our lives by whether we have riches, whether we have a partner with wealth and status, whether we have brought honour to our family name, and the list goes on.

When we are entertained by Korean dramas, we are sucked into their lies, and essentially, the lies of the Devil. We are drawn away from what God defines as true comfort, and we adopt these “philosophies” and covet after what the drama characters have. And as a result, we continually turn to

“Knowing what true comfort is for the believer, where should we find rest when we are burdened by the things of the world? “From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I”...

the unreality of Korean dramas as a distraction and a place to seek refuge from the reality of our lives. But, a child of God should never seek refuge from Korean dramas!

### God’s Definition of Reality

As God’s children, the things of the world should not, and must not, be indicators of whether we are receiving true comfort. As children of God, we ought never to seek worldly and unrealistic entertainment as a way to run away from the burdens of this life. As children of God, the reality of our life points us toward our true comfort.

“... The first, how great my sins and miseries are; the second, how I may be delivered from all my sins and miseries; and third, how I shall express my gratitude to God for such deliverance” (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 1, Q&A 2).

The knowledge of our sins, of how we are delivered from them, and how we may live a life of thanksgiving are the three things we need to know to enjoy a life of true comfort. What a stark contrast from the portrayal of life in Korean dramas! The knowledge of these three things present to us the reality of our life and the state that we are in. They present to us that in this earthly life, there will always be conflict because we are totally depraved (Romans 3:10). There will always be, without fail, war between our sinful nature and the new man

within us (Romans 7:14-20). There will be conflict with others because we are sinners—we will say and do things that hurt our neighbours. There will always be a battle between us and the world because we are the children of light, and there is no fellowship between righteousness and unrighteousness; furthermore, we are called to not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers; but to fight the temptations of the world (2 Corinthians 6:14).

### Our Hope and Comfort Founded in Christ Alone

We do not fight alone.

“... my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ, who with His precious blood, hath fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must be subservient to my salvation...”

Christ has delivered us, His people, from the cause of our misery (sin) and the wrath of God by paying the price for our sins—on the Cross (Hebrews 2:14-15). Christ is now Lord over us; He has freed us from the bondage of our sins. Though we war against us and our sinful flesh, the Devil, and the world, they have no more dominion over us (Romans 6:14)! Furthermore, all circumstances and callings that we are placed in are willed

by our Heavenly Father. If our earthly fathers, who are sinful, give us what is good for us, how much more shall our Heavenly Father, who is perfect and all-wise, give us good (Matthew 7:11)? Does not God work all things out for our good—our salvation (Romans 8:28)? The meaning of true comfort, then, is this: Christ, our Victor, has redeemed us from all sin and misery and His Lordship over us gives us the assurance that all things work for our salvation.

Our attitude towards trials, conflicts, burdens, and even our callings in this life should not be one of despondency, hopelessness, discontent, and yearning for what the characters in Korean dramas have. But, our attitude should be one of hope and contentment—rejoicing in whatever circumstances that God has placed us in, rejoicing in whatever He has given us (Philippians 4:12).

### Our Response towards Our Circumstances in Life

Knowing what true comfort is for the believer, where should we find rest when we are burdened by the things of the world? “From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I” (Psalm 61:2).

The Psalmist cries to God for deliverance “to the rock that is higher” than himself. He cries to God for salvation and assurance of his safety.



The Psalmist knows that God works this assurance only by His grace through faith. The Psalmist does not want to face his troubles with any wisdom and power of his own. Instead he desires the power of God for deliverance. He knows that God's power and promises are where he should seek refuge from.

Similarly, instead of turning to Korean dramas (or any other worldly entertainment) for refuge, we must

seek Christ, Who is our Rock; when we are drained by the warring of our flesh, by the spiritual battles we face in the world, and by the secular callings that we have to fulfil. The only way we can seek Christ is to read the Word of God and let His Word lead us to Himself. Jehovah-Nissi – Who is higher than all our circumstances in life!

What a comfort the children of God have in Christ! May we no longer seek

after comfort from the world in the form of Korean dramas, but direct our attention and pleas to our Lord Jesus Christ.

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## THE MISSION FIELDS IN LIMERICK AND SOUTH WALES

>> Pastor Martyn McGeown



Pastor Martyn McGeown is a missionary in Limerick, Ireland (<http://www.limerickreformed.com/>).

### Limerick

The Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland (CPRC) supports a mission field in Limerick, Ireland. Readers of *Salt Shakers* should be aware that Ballymena, the home of the CPRC, and Limerick, the home of the Limerick Reformed Fellowship (LRF) are in different jurisdictions. The island of Ireland, known by many as the Emerald Isle, is divided into Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The two countries are very

similar in nature—similar people, similar climate, similar customs. The one major difference—apart from political affiliations—is religious. The vast majority of people in the Republic of Ireland (population c. 4.6 million) are Roman Catholic. Of course, a large number are nominal Roman Catholics—they rarely attend Mass, but they do seek baptism for their children and a priest for their funerals. The population of Northern Ireland is about 60%-40% split of Protestant-Catholic (population c. 1.8 million). Of course, many Protestants and Catholics are nominal also, although there is a sizeable evangelical presence, much larger than in the Republic of Ireland, where evangelicalism is minimal. Of the very small number of evangelicals in Ireland, most are Arminian, Baptist, Pentecostal, Dispensationalist and Independent. To reform such a population is very difficult. The Reformed Faith demands a complete change in Soteriology

(doctrine of salvation), Ecclesiology (doctrine and practice of the church) and Eschatology (doctrine of the last things)! Few are willing to make the necessary sacrifices.

For many years Pastor Stewart (and before him Pastor Ron Hanko, presently pastor in Lynden, WA, USA) has produced a monthly newsletter – Covenant Reformed News (CRN). This made its way to a pastor in Wales, who was a friend of Bill Davies, originally from Wales but living in Limerick, Ireland. (population c. 105,000). It was through the CRN that Bill Davies came into contact with the CPRC and Pastor Stewart. Unhappy with the preaching and teaching in the evangelical churches in Limerick, Bill requested copies of the sermons preached in Ballymena. Bill was also able to get the CRN and copies of sermons into the hands of other men in Limerick. Slowly, a very small group of people who were

hungry for the truth of God's Word was formed. In 2004, Prof. Hanko, who was vacationing in Ireland at the time, visited this group and gave them a lecture on "What Is a Reformed Church?" Prof. Hanko urged Pastor Stewart and the CPRC to investigate Limerick as a possible field, whereupon Pastor Stewart gave his first Limerick Lecture on "Predestination: What Does the Bible Say?" on 28 September 2004. There were, as you might imagine, mixed reactions to that topic. Pastor Stewart recalls a very lively Q&A time after the speech—some people were very angry while others were more interested. Between September 2004 and June 2010, Pastor Stewart (and, occasionally, visiting pastors from the PRCA) delivered over forty lectures ([www.cprf.co.uk/limerick.htm](http://www.cprf.co.uk/limerick.htm)). Gradually, a small group began to form in Limerick, calling themselves the Limerick Reformed Fellowship. They began meeting in members' homes to listen to recorded messages from the CPRC. As the group developed, they began to hold worship services in a public hall—Conradh na Gaelige, an Irish language school situated in Limerick city centre—and develop a website, [www.limerickreformed.ie/](http://www.limerickreformed.ie/).

During this time (September 2006–June 2010), I, Martyn McGeown, a native of Northern Ireland, was in the PRC seminary. It became clear to the CPRC Council that the LRF was ready for their own missionary. In June 2010, I received and accepted the call to labour in Limerick and on 31 July 2010 I was ordained. My inaugural sermon, "Desire the Word!" (1 Peter 2:2) was preached on 1 August 2010. Since that time the LRF have been holding two worship services every Lord's Day (11:00AM and 5:30PM), as well as conducting catechism classes, Bible studies and doctrinal

classes, and occasional public lectures. Since August 2010, the LRF has seen two weddings and four baptisms. Bill Davies, our oldest—and founder—member is still with us, and will be 80 years old on his next birthday. We have an average attendance of between 15–20 souls every Lord's Day. Many are young families; a small and enthusiastic group of Reformed saints. In our short time, we have seen members come and go; we have seen the twofold effect of the Word—some are edified by the preaching, while others are repelled by it. Our greatest challenge is to make and keep new contacts. This is a common problem on the mission field—the core group is often small and keen for growth, but gaining new members is difficult. The members are busy with work and family, and it is hard to find the time for "extra projects" such as evangelism efforts. In addition, Ireland is hard to reach. Superstition, ignorance and disinterest are formidable obstacles. Yet we know that Christ will gather His church, using weakest means to fulfil His will. We covet the prayers of our brethren in Singapore.

It may interest our Singaporean brethren to know that the University of Limerick offers study abroad programmes, where students can take courses in Ireland. Lisa Ong was studying in Limerick on such a programme. We invite others to follow in her footsteps.

### **South Wales**

Across the Irish sea is Wales, part of Great Britain, with a population of some 3 million. Pastor Ron Hanko was PRCA missionary in Ballymena from March 1993. During his time there, he lectured and preached regularly in Wales, especially in a small coastal town called Porthcawl, finishing his ministry there in 2000.

After a gap of some years, Prof. Hanko brought the Word there in December 2003 on "The Sovereignty of God and the Signs of the Times." Pastor Stewart first lectured there in February 2004 on "The Glory of God," and has been faithfully travelling there ever since. I gave my first lecture there on 24 February 2011—I had planned to be there in December 2010, but wintery weather prevented me travelling from Ireland to Wales. Pastor Stewart and I travel to Wales every other month or so. The venue is Port Talbot, after our former venue in Porthcawl, an old people's rest home called "The Rest" closed last year.

The work in Wales is more difficult than the work in Limerick. The core group is smaller—and dwindling due to the age and the infirmity of many of the saints. Brian Harris, Richard Holt and David Hutchings, all of whom were at the 2014 British Reformed Fellowship Conference, make up the core group at present. The group is also more scattered over a wider area. One man drives a considerable distance after milking his cows to come to the lectures. The Word is, however, gladly received by the few who come, and they purchase many books and CDs/DVDs. Wales is spiritually dead—it was a land of "revivals"; but today, few Welsh people attend any kind of public worship. In the last census, Wales had the highest percentage of people reporting that they had "no religion."

Brethren, pray for us: for our mission fields in Limerick and Wales, that the Lord might open up other fruitful mission fields, and that He might provide labourers in His vineyard. Let us not despise the day of small things, but let us labour while it is still day, for the night comes when no man can labour.



# News from the Churches

## **SINGAPORE**

On 1st January 2015, CERC held their annual New Year Church Retreat to start the new year together as a Church. Session gave an introduction on the Church theme for the year, “The Gospel: A Witness to All Nations”, which is based on Matthew 24:14.

On 24th January 2015, CK/CKS held her anniversary based on the theme “Lead me in the Way Everlasting”. We thank God for blessing the youths in the past year and pray that He will continue to lead and guide them in 2015.

We rejoice with Sister Poh Har and Brother Zong Jie on their Confession of Faith on 18th Jan and pray that God will continue to establish and uphold them in their faith.

## **USA**

On 21st December 2014, Pastor Ron Van Overloop declined the call from First PRC, Grand Rapids, Michigan and Peace PRC, Lansing, Illinois.

The councils of both Peace PRC and First PRC have since announced new trios to call a Pastor.

The council of Peace PRC (Lansing, IL) announced a trio of Pastor C. Griess, Pastor R. Kleyn and Pastor W. Langerak and plans to call at a congregational meeting on Jan 22nd, Thursday.

The council of First PRC (Grand Rapids, MI) announced a trio of Pastor N. Decker, Pastor C. Haak and Pastor R. Smit and plans to vote from this trio on Jan 18th, Sunday.

## **PHILIPPINES**

Over 2 Sundays (7th and 14th December), four ladies from CERC—Daisy, Kah Pik, Peng Lan, and Chek Shiang—visited the Philippines. On their first Sunday in the Philippines, they attended Protestant Reformed Church in Bulacan where Pastor Flores is minister. On their second Sunday there, the four ladies, together with two other brethren from CERC—Brother Ishu and Brother Suan Kiat—accompanied Pastor and Mrs Kleyn as they visited Provident Christian Church in Marikina and had a blessed time of fellowship with the saints there.

In addition, Prof. Engelsma visited the Philippines over two Sundays (21st and 28th December) and gave a conference on the 5 Solas of the Reformation on 30th December at Bantayog Memorial Centre.

On Sunday Morning, December 7th, 2014, Pastor Jonathan Mahtani, Pastor of Cornerstone PRC, Dyer, IN, rejected the call to the Philippines.



Cycling at Pulau Ubin for CK/CKS Camp



Paper tower building during Church Retreat



Kids learning about the armour of God during VBS Camp



Kids dressing up during VBS Camp



Youth singing during Open Sunday

"We are planning to include a new rubric into future SS issues! Readers will have the opportunity to write in their questions on doctrine and Christian living which may be answered in this rubric.  
  
We would like to invite SS readers to note down such questions and email them to [cksaltshakers@gmail.com](mailto:cksaltshakers@gmail.com).  
Thank you!"

**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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