



“Godly parents understand their own weaknesses, recognise their inability to change their child’s heart, and know the Saviour who can and does give His grace and Holy Spirit only to those who ask.”

Pastor Jonathan Mahtani - Seven Scriptural Observations for Parents



“... a Christian school should be grounded in Scripture and the Confessions, shown to be a means to assist parents in the fulfilment of their Baptismal vows, and in line with the historical traditions of believers.”

Rick Noorman - A Reformed Christian School in Singapore



“... point others in the direction of the giver of Light Himself! Both you and I are used as lights to help the lost find salvation in Christ.”

Jonah Chua - God’s Witnesses



salt shakers

joel 3:16 matthew 5:16

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Children are gifts to be sought after,
embraced, thanked for, and made
to know of their mother’s and
father’s joy in them.

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DEAR READERS, WELCOME TO THE 34TH ISSUE OF SALT SHAKERS!

We pray for God's blessings upon you wherever you may be reading this copy of Salt Shakers, and may you be edified and nourished by the many interesting articles that follow this note.

God's people in Singapore have been blessed by His providing hand through our government. Since we are not always aware—much less, appreciative—of it, the General Elections that have just concluded is indeed a timely reminder to be conscious of God's providence even through those who are in authority over us. Being conscious, we have much to be thankful for:

First, we immediately recognise the mercy of God in allowing us to worship Him in safety and without fear of violent opposition. We have the weekly privilege of coming together to worship publicly and boldly shine forth the Word of Life that is entrusted to us. We have doors that are open to anyone who would come to hear of the wonderful Gospel of Grace. Do we appreciate this knowing that it only remains as such by the grace of God? Are we making full use of this season by being a city set on a hill?

Second, we see God's hand in providing all things needful for us through the progressive work of our government over the years. Singapore has prospered, and we as her citizens have also benefitted in one way or another. With food, shelter, and clothing, God indeed causes us to have no need for worry about these things. What do we then worry about? Are we concerned about Kingdom work, and are we worried for the poor and needy in our midst? Or are we concerned with more sumptuous food, larger dwellings, and more expensive adornings?

Last, we are reminded of our blessed Lord Jesus, the Owner and Giver of all authority in heaven and on earth, whenever we see those who are placed in authority over us. Jesus, the King of kings and the Lord of lords, is pleased to place a government in authority over us for the spiritual good of our souls. What comfort and peace it brings, to know that those in power are only able to function and lead because they are subservient to the will and power of our Lord. And not just any lord, our dearest King of kings is also the One who loved us, and gave Himself for us. Does this thought not warm our hearts and cause us to want to burst forth in praise? Glory to the triune God, who loves and takes care of us through the powers that be in our land. May this be your song of praise, too, wherever you may be.

Christ regardless
paul



Yea, Hath God Said?

>> Chua Lee Yang



Chua Lee Yang is a confessing young adult in CERC and serves as Chairman of Salt Shakers.

Yea, Hath God Said?

Ask any of your Christian friends today: is the Bible the inspired word of God? Yes, of course it is, most will say. All 66 books? Yes, surely. But is Scripture clear? Can you understand it, all of it?

It is easily confessed by most Christians today that Scripture is inspired, although even that confession does not bear close inspection. The difficulty, however, say many, is that Scripture is hard to understand. It is an obscure book, full of hidden meanings. To understand even a fraction of it, we need new translations, creative tools of interpretation, open minds, and even “special revelations”. No one may have the hubris to say he “understands” the Bible—not even a minister—and for a lay church member, and a youth, what pride!

We need not be very surprised when we hear this position from our supposedly Bible-believing friends and associations. The postmodern attack on the clarity of Scripture is a subtle

one, and therefore a highly dangerous one—and one that has been creeping into Christian circles for decades and longer. On the surface, it appears that saying Scripture is unclear does not equate to unbelief. Why does it matter if the phrase “of the dust of the ground” (Genesis 2:7) refers to a literal, miraculous creation, or to theistic evolution and the “period theory”, if both were by God’s hand? Need we split hairs over the meaning of “world” (John 3:16), so long as we believe Jesus died for us?

Invariably, however, if one pursues the question deeper—why is the Bible unclear? The answer comes down to: Scripture is unclear because it is at least partly the work of men. God spake the words, but men wrote it down. Or Moses only heard the story of creation from the mouths of others and recorded it. Or the Bible is full of errors or parts that God has “chosen not to reveal”. But do not be deceived – denial of the clarity of Scripture is always a denial of inspiration! In such doubting, we hear the echo of the serpent in Eden: “Yea, hath God said?”

By the grace of God, we confess that all (66 books) of Scripture are the “holy and divine writings” of God (Belgic Confession, Article 3). We believe all things in it (Article 5) and that it is perfect and complete (Article 7). Going further, and importantly however, we also confess that it is clear or “perspicuous”, understandable by not just ministers and theologians,

but ordinary Christians—you, and me. We may be convicted of this not in pride, but by what Scripture says of itself.

It is striking that often, young children have a deeper and fuller understanding of the origins of the world than do old scientists and professors who have expended a lifetime of study. Timothy knew, and could know what the bible said from the time he was a child (2 Timothy 3:15). When God speaks, he speaks clearly, for His “word is a lamp unto my feet” (Psalm 119:105)—a lamp illuminates, and does not obscure. This is not to say that there are no difficult passages in the Bible, but we believe that every doctrine of faith and all things necessary for Christian living are clearly presented. As the Belgic Confession puts it: Scripture is so clear that even “the very blind are able to perceive that the things foretold in them are fulfilling” (Article 5).

God speaks clearly to you and me, not only to pastors, not in visions, signs and dreams as some like to think in this day, but in His holy Word. We can believe that Scripture is clear, only because we know in our hearts that it is entirely, in every single word, the very breath (2 Timothy 3:16) of God and not at all of man.

This confession that Scripture is clear is not to boast, but a basic requirement of Christianity, both for the church and its members. Is it a boast for a child to say that he can recognise the voice of his father? Is it

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pride that one understands the speech of his loved ones? No, it is only our duty. For Jesus says: “my sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27). The Word is Christ! Every child of God knows that, when the Scriptures are read, our hearts testify that we hear the voice of our Saviour himself.

Implied for us in this duty to be able to hear the voice of Christ in His Word: the Bible must be opened in our homes, read among us, studied and discussed. Though by grace we confess the clarity of God in our doctrine, we must be careful not to deny it in our practical lives. The light of the Bible that shines and illuminates in a dark

world- does it shine in our lives? How often do we stumble in the darkness of our self-will and fear? How often do Satan and our own sinful hearts tempt us to doubt the goodness of God and the truth of his promises stated clear in holy writ? And how often do we look for all sorts of medicines for our soul’s hurt- when the balm (Jeremiah 8:22) is lying unopened on the shelf?

Dear reader, I speak of Bible study. Solid, energetic and deliberate study should be an inherent part, and even a need of our life as youth in the church. Not just on our own at home, but together as well. Leaders, are you solid in the faith, well prepared and ready to guide energetic discussions? Members, do you come eager to discuss your faithful preparation over the week, or do you come merely to hear a lecture by the leader? Does the study of the revealed will of God for your life, and hearing the beloved voice of Christ take precedence in your busy schedule?

Implied also, of course, is that we attend these meetings to study the Bible together, when they are available and we are able, and do so with deliberate and sustained interest. It is discouraging to members when the leaders are weak and unprepared, and to leaders when members come empty handed and disinterested. It is doubly discouraging, when church members are able to find any reason to meet up during the busy week, but

are otherwise absent often from the official societies.

Do we need to search for reasons to attend and love Bible studies together, where we may sharpen one another (Proverbs 27:17)? Coming for society meetings, we may ask difficult questions of faith and living to one another, and expect sound, helpful answers. We may invite friends to join our discussion of doctrine and fellowship. But the most compelling reason to come, is simply that God is there—“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20).

Bible study is only possible because the Word of God is clear, and it is only desirable because the Word of God is wholly the Word of God alone. Our confession that the Scripture is inspired and clear must show forth not only in our doctrine, but also in our practical living. This being our duty, we can be assured of great blessing in walking in its way, in the sweet communion that we enjoy with one another and God, and in the knowledge of His truths; our hearts fail not for fear, in the days that things come upon the earth (Luke 21:26).

Yea, hath God said? Let us long to come together and find out what God has really said, and let the light of Scripture shine on our life’s pathway, in the midst of days of growing darkness.

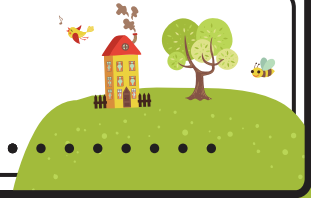
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The light of the Bible that shines and illuminates in a dark world- does it shine in our lives? How often do we stumble in the darkness of our self-will and fear?

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How Do We View and Treat Our Government?

>> Elder Wee Gim Theng



Wee Gim Theng is an Elder in CERC. He is the husband of Patricia and their family is blessed with four children.

This question immediately brings to mind passages such as Romans 13, 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Peter 2. The word of God indeed has instructions for us concerning our Christian view towards those in authority over us and what our attitude should be towards them.

The exhortation from Apostle Paul in Romans 13:1 reminds us that 'every soul be subject to higher powers'. It is not only Christians who are required to be subject to higher powers but it is required of every man. The 'higher powers' refer to those who are above us or who rule over us. In the context, it refers to the civil authorities. It is important to note that 'to be subject' does not simply mean to obey without question, but rather to submit (1Pet 2:13, Tit 3:1 and Eccl 8:22) to the rule and authority. It is NOT blind obedience, resignation, apathy or simply submitting to everything we are being told without any involvement or feedback. As Christians, we are to carry out the will of God in this whole matter of law and of the government.

The Apostle Paul provides us with several reasons why we should be subject to authorities.

The first reason is that 'there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God' (Rom 13:1). God, being a sovereign God who rules, governs and upholds all things according to His sovereign will and good pleasure (Rev 4:11), ordains all authorities, good or bad, to rule over us to fulfill His counsel. The authorities are to rule over us in the civil realm of our lives. No power therefore can rule without God first giving them their existence and the power to rule. The Apostle Paul calls the authorities that rule 'the minister of God' in Rom 13:4. The word 'minister' means servant. It follows that the authorities that rule over us are God's servants. Servants do not do their own will but the will of the Master. We are establishing an important basis here on the rule of the authorities. Since it is God who gives the authorities the legitimacy to rule and they are the servants of the Most High, they will have to rule according to all the commandments of God and not the will of the majority of the people. While it is true that in this day and age, many governments are elected via the majority votes, it is still incumbent of these governments to rule on the basis of the commandments of God.

The higher powers are termed in Romans 13:1 as 'powers that be'. It means that they are the powers of that day, the existing authorities at any

given time in history. The scripture does not sanction any particular form of government i.e. whether it be democracy, socialism etc. The higher powers are the powers that be whose legitimacy to rule is given by God. They are the authorities at the particular point in history that God has ordained to rule. In the days of the Apostles, the power that be was the ruler of the Roman Empire. Though the early Christians were persecuted by the Roman government of the day, the Christians still had the obligations to subject themselves to the power that be. They might not resist or rebel. We should, therefore as God's people, submit to all powers that be.

The second reason for submitting to higher powers is that if we resist such higher powers we are resisting God Himself (Rom 13:2). This follows naturally from the point above. If God is the One who places such higher powers to rule over us, we are not only to submit to their rule, we may not resist their rule. The word 'resist' in the verse means 'to set oneself against' or 'to array oneself in battle against'. Hence when we resist the higher powers, we are 'going against' or 'battling against' them. To resist their rule is to resist God Himself! This is a sin that many thought little of or have disregarded. The consequence is that God will inflict His judgement (damnation) on us.

The third reason for submitting to higher powers is that they are sent by God for the punishment of evildoers



...ruler 'is a minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil'.



and to protect the good for 'for rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil' (Rom 13:3a). 1Pet 2:14 tells us that rulers 'are sent by Him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well'. This is the calling and role God has given to the ordained higher powers. They are to punish the evildoers; praise and protect those who do well. The Apostle Paul in Rom 13:4 continues to say that the ruler 'is a minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil'. The sword is a symbol of the power of life and death which the civil magistrate is invested with. God does not give to the magistrate his power without purpose (in vain) as the appointed magistrate is to mete out punishments (wrath) upon the offenders.

Romans 13:5 gives us the fourth reason for submitting ourselves to the higher powers. We are to subject to them not only because we are afraid of punishments but for conscience sake as well. This is required of us as God has appointed them and obliged us to subject to them out of 'duty to God' since it is the will of God for us to submit to them. This is the obligation of our conscience. To go against it is to go against our conscience and sin against God.

Now that we have established the reasons why we should subject ourselves to the higher powers, what should be our attitude towards them?

First of all, we should treat all authorities with honour and respect due unto them. In the conclusion of his discourse on civil authorities, the Apostle Paul exhorts the Christians in Rome (and all of us) from Romans 13:7 to 'render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to who custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour'. The Apostle Paul did not encourage the persecuted Christians in Rome to rebel or speak disparagingly of the Roman authorities. This exhortation, to render what is due, was given despite the wickedness of the Romans' rule at that time. This is a good reminder to all of us concerning our deportment towards the authorities over us despite our not liking some of the policies or hard statements made by them.

As mentioned earlier, we should submit to all authorities, good or bad since God has put them there. However when the authorities forbid us to do that which God has called us to do, we have to 'obey God rather than men' (Acts 5:29). Our obedience to authorities is only proper when our obedience does not contradict our loyalty/allegiance to God and our keeping of His Commandments. Acts 4: 18-20 relate an incident where the Apostles Peter and John were

threatened by the religious authorities of that day for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. In reply to their threat, the Apostles answered and said 'Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.' While the Apostles disobeyed the order of the authorities to cease preaching the Gospel, nevertheless they cheerfully bore the consequences of imprisonment and beatings. They did not incite the church to rebellion and armed resistance, but rather were 'rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.' (Acts 5:40) In our submission to authority, we must follow this same principle.

Our submission to the authorities is practically shown by the Apostle Paul in Rom 13:6 where we are exhorted to 'pay ye tribute'. Our obligations as citizens of the land is to pay our taxes and all our legal dues. This is in support of the authorities and the work they have to do. Our Lord Jesus, in reply to the question put forward by the Pharisees that tempted Him, says in Matt 22:21 'Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's'. Do exactly what our Lord says my dear readers. Render to the authorities what is due to them but do not forget to render unto God what are rightly His, which we often times overlooked.

As Christians we are called to be the best citizens in our country. We are to submit to the rule of the authorities as long as it does not go against God's will and His commandments. The Heidelberg Catechism in Lord Day 39 admonishes us to obey them since

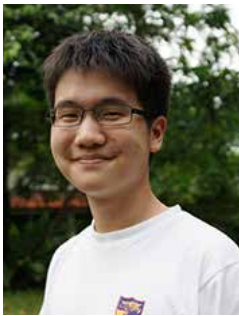
'it pleases God to govern us by their hand'. We have been admonished in 1 Timothy 2:1-2 to 'pray for our leaders so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty'. As we are keenly aware of how much the government policies

and legislations will affect our lives and our Christian faith, it is therefore of great necessity to uphold these authorities in prayers often.

May God help us and grant us grace to do so.

THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS (EXAMS)

>> Joseph Teo



Joseph Teo is a confessing young adult in CERC.

We all have either experienced or seen the numerous ways in which public schools have lured us away from serving God with the best of our abilities. Why is this so? We must first examine the culture of exams in our local context to better understand why. Ensuring that students ace their exams is a top priority for most public schools in Singapore. This comes as no surprise to a country which places such a huge emphasis on the quality of our human resources for survival, due to the lack of natural resources in our land. As a result, the chase for academic qualifications has been increasing throughout the years, and many of our youth today feel the pressure to attain the highest qualification and the best results they

possibly can in order to attain their desired occupation of choice in the future.

This extremely competitive exam culture results in students from public schools facing long hours of lessons and even additional remedial lessons after school. Furthermore, a seemingly endless number of class tests and assignments to complete, coupled with tuition classes that students may attend only aggravates the stress they may face in doing well for their exams. It does not help that their parents and teachers also place additional pressure on them to see the importance of doing well in their exams. Besides stress, the long hours spent on exam preparation also take away a large proportion of a student's time. This leaves Christian students in public schools with minimal time to do their daily devotions and attend church activities. Hence, we can see how exams are a major way in which Christian students are lured away from their calling to lead an antithetical life as a pilgrim and stranger on this earth. Their spiritual life will suffer as a result.

The exams that we face in public schools are part of the vocation that God has placed in the life of a Christian student, and is in itself neither wrong nor evil. Despite the danger that exams could lure us away from God, not giving any attention to them at all is also not the attitude that a Christian student should have towards exams. This will be downright disrespectful and unthankful for the vocation that the Lord has placed us in. We are called to honour God and glorify his name in whatever we do by putting in our best effort always. Ecclesiastes 9:10 says that "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might..." If totally avoiding exams is not an option, how then should we approach the exams that we face in public schools as Christians?

First and foremost, we need to understand that growing in our spiritual life ought to be a constant priority in our lives, and thus we have to take an extremely conscientious effort in planning our activities for the upcoming week or even months ahead. Planning is crucial in ensuring that we are able to better strike a

balance between our God-given vocation of studying for our exams, as well as setting aside time for our devotions and church activities. Since the amount of workload we have each week and the number of church activities changes each week as well, it may be difficult to maintain a perfect balance between the amount of time spent on exam preparation versus our spiritual commitments. At times, this may result in unforeseen sacrifices between our commitments. As imperfect human beings, this could be due to our oversight of the planning of our timetables, thus resulting in poor allocation of time for our various commitments.

On the other hand, our workload at that juncture might just be too much for us to manage, or perhaps because we have squandered much of our time away and we have to “burn the midnight oil” leading to our exams! Should we not have used the precious time that God has given us to carry out our Christian duties, do not fret over it but instead repent and seek forgiveness with God and learn from our mistakes. For 1 John 1:9 tells us that “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

More often than not, should we choose to conscientiously plan a schedule for our weekly activities and have the discipline to faithfully follow it, we should not often find ourselves sacrificing our spiritual obligations for the sake of our exams. Signs that we are sacrificing our spiritual obligations include studying late on a Saturday night into the wee hours of a Sunday morning and feeling extremely lethargic for the church service that morning, skipping one’s personal devotions and frequent absence from

church activities such as the weekly planned CK activities on Saturdays. May God give us the grace and strength to ensure that such spiritual obligations are not compromised, or at most to a minimum. Thus, we can see that the balance between our studies and our spiritual obligations is essential in our God-glorifying approach towards our exams.

Besides simply following the schedule we have planned, we too must be strategic in putting the God-given time we have in school and for our personal studying to good use. As far as possible, we should pay full attention to our lessons in school so as to minimise the amount of revision time we need to spend on the same topic as our teachers have taught in school. Instead of using our precious revision time to learn the basic concepts and facts of the topic we have just learnt earlier in school, we can use the time to consolidate our misconceptions and the areas which are harder for us to understand on our own. We can then consult our teachers on those areas immediately after the lesson, or on the day after we have revised the topic on our own. However, due to our sinful flesh, this is often easier said than done. How often do we find ourselves being distracted in class by our casual conversations with our classmate sitting next to us, or even falling asleep in class during the lessons from teachers that we deem as unimportant or even boring? May God forbid that we fall into such temptations since there are also ways in which we squander away the time that we have in our preparations for our exams.

Another reason this may be difficult for us is also due to the pride that we have in ourselves. This may particularly be felt amongst those

who are weaker in their studies and are aware that the questions that they ask may be perceived by their classmates or teachers to be very basic in understanding. Hence, for fear of being labelled as stupid or weak by their classmates or teachers, we often keep these questions to ourselves for fear of humiliation, only to be extremely disappointed when we once again fail to score good grades for our exams and guilty that we did not give our best efforts to God when we could have done better. Should we diligently listen in class, regularly revise what we have learnt and have the courage to clarify our doubts often, we will feel more confident in our exams and less likely to have to forgo our spiritual obligations during our exam periods.

Finally, we should commit all things to God in prayer. Prayer is our personal opportunity to go to God for comfort and speak to Him of both our problems we face in our vocation as a student and to seek for forgiveness of the sins that we commit. However, prayer is also an outlet to be greedy with our requests of God, such that it may become unreasonable demands also. Such unreasonable demands will be questioning God’s sovereignty in rewarding us fairly for the amount of hard work we have put into exams by giving us the good grades that we desire, and for refusing to thank God for it. The grades we receive are not an indication of how well we have served Him in our vocation as a student, but are all because of His mercy in giving us those results. Whether our good grades or less desirable grades lead us to a future vocation in life that we may or may not want, it is all in God’s plan for the good of our spiritual welfare.

In conclusion, just as we have our salvation in Christ alone, we should also see that we must lead a life of

thanksgiving towards God through glorifying him in our exams as well. Colossians 2:6-7 “As ye have therefore

received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye

have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.”

A Reformed Christian School in Singapore

>> Rick Noorman



Rick Noorman currently serves as Administrator of Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He is member of Faith Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison. He and his wife, Sue, are blessed with 6 children and 11 grandchildren.

For parents to have the opportunity to send their children to a school that teaches all things in accordance to God’s Word is a great blessing. The formation and operations of such a school will always involve a great deal of work, sacrifice, and prayer. I was asked by the staff of Salt Shakers to write an article that would help those who seek to form a Christian school in Singapore to understand some of the possible difficulties that they might face. It will become evident that throughout the process leading to a Christian school there is great importance in relying upon God in this pursuit. My experience over the years has generally been with existing Christian schools in Michigan.

However, over the last 20 years, I have followed with great interest the formation of Faith Christian grade school in Randolph, Wisconsin, and new high schools in St. John, Indiana (Heritage Christian), and Hull, Iowa (Trinity Christian), and the extension of the grade schools into high schools in Loveland, Colorado, and Randolph, Wisconsin.

Before going any further, I would like to admit my lack of knowledge about Singapore and its educational system. Please forgive me if I say things that, from your point of view, are simply not practical or possible. For example, I do not know if it is even practical for the children of the church to all come together in one place five days a week to have school. I don’t know what the facility requirements would be for a school and if the cost of a facility is within the means of the association. Most importantly, I also know very little about the Singaporean government’s regulations or requirements for education and schools. I am aware that it is a system with very high standards and it is the foundation upon which the future of the economic stability of the nation rests. Some brief Internet searching does show that exceptions and alternatives to public education are

possible if assurances are made that the educational goals of the state can be met. So, with those caveats in place I will proceed.

The formation and successful operation of a Christian school is a tremendous undertaking for any group of people. If it has never been a part of the life of the church, it may seem like an insurmountable task to begin. It always takes a great amount of dedicated work and sacrifice on the part of many people to make it happen, but it must always be viewed as a work of God. It would never be possible without the guiding and sustaining hand of God. Pastor R. Hanko comments on this in his book, *The Coming of Zion’s Redeemer*, in his discussion on Zechariah 4:6. He writes, “God works through his people and uses their efforts to build his kingdom, but nothing depends on them. The work is really the work of the Spirit in them and through them, done in such a way that all the glory of the work is God’s. Our confidence, therefore, in doing the work God gives us is still the same as it was for Zechariah and the Jews: “Not by might, not by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.” If we thought that anything depended on us, we would despair of the work as soon as it was begun and would very

quickly become unfaithful. If we did not know that the Spirit works in us and through us, the work would look as impossible as it did to the Jews, who were poor, oppressed, and few in number.” (p.185-186) This sums up well the attitude that we must have as we work to promote and develop Christian education.

The formation of a Christian school should be based on the answers to three basic questions. First, why should we have a Christian school? Second, how do we go about having a Christian school? And third, what are the expected results of a Christian school? These questions must be answered by those who strive to have a Christian school in their community. Answers that are well grounded in the Scriptures and Confessions and based upon sound principles will help to overcome obstacles that are sure to crop up along the way.

Why?

The pursuit of a Christian school must be based upon the reason why a school is desired. The underlying philosophy for having a Christian school should be grounded in Scripture and the Confessions, shown to be a means to assist parents in the fulfilment of their Baptismal vows, and in line with the historical traditions of believers. These basic beliefs should be the foundation of the organization, stated in the constitution of the parent association, as well as the guide to all practice in the school. An example of this can be found in the booklet, “The Faith and Practice of the Protestant Reformed Churches: A Summary” written by Pastor S. Key. He makes these statements: “The basis for Christian education is exactly that we are a Covenant people who serve a Covenant God, and God’s Covenant

embraces all of life. Because the Lord is one Lord, Lord over all, He and His precepts may not be excluded from any sphere of life.”

It is important to remember that each Christian school association may have its own perspective on the shaping of the organisation and the rules and regulations of the operations of the school. These will flow naturally from the history of the community, the local customs and expectations, and the government regulations and allowances. But the essential existence of the school will have common threads with all other faithful schools.

It is the answer to this “Why?” question that will provide the motivation for parents to form a school and to choose to send their children to this Christian school. Without the option for a Christian school based upon Reformed principles, parents will send their children to, what they believe to be, the best school for their children. The criteria that they use to make this decision may be that the school has the best preparatory program for the next level of schooling, a good curriculum that will meet the needs or interests of the child, or good preparation that the child will receive for state testing. Regardless of the reason, they will make the decision based upon what they perceive to be the best interests of their child. Parents will hopefully see that, with the option of a Reformed Christian school, the criteria will have an added dimension; one that is of extreme importance.

How?

It will certainly be that the answer to this question which will be the source of difficulties for those involved in the Christian school. This is the area where differences of opinion will often surface. This is why care should

be taken, by the association of parents, in setting up the structure and the governance of the school so that the operations of the school are guided by principles and not personalities; by policies and not by individual parents. It will be these principles and policies that will guide the personnel of the school, including the Board, the Administrator, and the teachers, as they do their work.

These policies should determine who can be a member of the parent association and what is required of members. They should clearly lay out the responsibilities and the authority of the Administrator. They should provide guidelines for who can teach in the school and what the requirements are of teachers. They should determine how teachers will be evaluated and the process for dealing with the development of teachers. These policies will also include a process for the development of the curriculum that will be taught in the school.

The answers to these “how” questions should include how and why there is adherence to local conditions and laws. This may explain the required teacher qualifications, the inclusion of mandatory courses in Government, Reading, Physical Education, or any other required course and the adherence to required state or provincial testing. It will also determine how the school will be funded in order to remain free from government regulations.

What?

The work of the Reformed Christian school can be summed up in this quote from Pastor S. Key’s booklet, “The purpose of Protestant Reformed Christian education is to help our children understand and relate to God,

to man, and to the rest of creation in harmony with what God reveals in Scripture of Himself and His purposes and works.” (S. Key) The school is to teach everything in light of this Covenant relationship that God has established with his people. All of this is done in the school to bring honour and glory to God. This work is done so that our children, when they are ready to become independent and take their place outside of the school, will be able to consciously live as a citizen of the kingdom of God wherever God sees fit to place him or her.

The expectation would be that their children would be as well prepared in these schools as any child that has come through the government

schools. But, there would be additional expectations. There would be the expectation of the development of the ability to view all things as serving God’s purpose. There would also be an expectation of a development of the ability to live life under the moral obligations as a citizen of the kingdom of God and well as a citizen of the nation. There should not have to be a compromise of quality nor of the excellence that is sought in public education. The Christian should have a high motivation to excel and use their gifts of learning to the fullest. This may even apply to the excellence sought in the arts, music, and other extracurricular interests. When done in the context of the Christian life,

these things will add to the overall development of the child and fit him or her for service in many legitimate areas of society and the church.

The prayers of the saints are lifted up regularly for the continued blessing of God upon our schools and for those who desire a school. We all must pray that God will continue to work in the hearts of men and women to have the desire to teach and serve as teachers in our schools. We pray that in God’s time it may be possible to have a Protestant Reformed Christian school in Singapore so that parents and children can labour together in this wonderful aspect of the Covenant life.

DESIRING MARRIAGE: THINKING COVENANTALLY

>> Pastor Arie Den Hartog



Pastor Arie Den Hartog has been Minister of the Word at Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan since 2005.

One of the greatest joys of our years in Singapore was the privilege of officiating at wedding ceremonies. When the Evangelical Reformed Church was first established in Singapore, the majority of the

members were single young people. Many of them were college and university students, eagerly pursuing their life’s careers. In the midst of the lively and exciting fellowship of the church, young men and women began to take a special interest in each other. Soon there was in the newly established Reformed church, the great excitement of dating couples. Marriage proposals were being made, engagements celebrated, and finally there were many weddings. Wedding celebrations were usually attended by almost the whole church. Few things are as beautiful and exciting in the church as the marriages of its young people, especially when these marriages are in the Lord and among

her members. It was understood by those marrying that marriage is a picture of Christ and His church. This was often talked about.

There was great desire for instruction about dating. There was need for warnings in the preaching about dating persons outside of the church and even those who were not believers. Many of the members of the church had been raised in pagan homes where they did not grow up with examples of Christian parents and families. CERC now has in her midst those who are patterns and examples of godliness in their marriages and families.

God blessed Sherry and I with seven Covenant children, two of whom

were born in Singapore. Our children greatly benefited from living for seven years of their early childhood and youth in Singapore. They learnt the importance of being disciplined and focused in their days of youth in studying and preparing for a life's career. As in every age, so also in the days of youth, Christian young people must use their time and talents wisely in the providence of God. They must diligently prepare for their future. Our children witnessed the zeal of recently converted Christians. They were part of all the excitement of the weddings that were taking place. There was constant discussion in our home on important issues about Christian living for marriage.

All our children have now found Christian partners and are married in the Lord. We daily remind ourselves of the abundant reasons we have for giving thanks to God. How humbled we are by the rich blessing of the Lord on us. Surely without the Lord's help, all our efforts to raise our children in the fear of the Lord would have failed miserably. Through the marriages of our seven children, God has given us twenty-nine grandchildren. It is our great joy to see them walking in the Truth. All of them are very active in the life of the church. Some have already in their youth been office bearers in the church. All of them are now spending great efforts to raise their God-given Covenant children in the fear of the Lord. All of our girls have chosen to be stay at home mothers, and keepers of their Christian homes, even after having studied and obtained college and university degrees. Life and fellowship in our now broader family is a source of great joy and happiness for us all. The truth of the Lord Jesus unites us.

We have noticed that in Singapore,

more and more young people have been postponing marriage. We have great concern about the reasons for this. One wonders whether some even possess the in-created strong natural desire for marriage. Many of the arguments in defense of this practice is that early marriage and the birth of children could threaten the drive for success in one's career. Children of youth, and certainly too many children in a family could cost so much that couples would have to forgo the many trappings of wealth that modern day Singapore has become accustomed to. It is imagined by many that before marriage a person must have the accumulated resources to purchase a very nice flat furnished with beautiful furniture. One must also be able to own a car (which we know requires a lot of money in Singapore). On the other hand, modern day Singapore makes it possible to live without a car—something impossible in America. In pursuit of these high standards of living, one has to join the so-called 'rat race' of life in society, including meeting excessive company demands at work that consume almost all the daylight hours and almost all the time and energy needed for family living. Many companies, because of the circumstances in Singapore, prefer overseas degree holders who may be more willing to travel on business. Such employees are often required to go on regular business trips to faraway places. Because of the busy-ness of life in modern day Singapore, many have put off plans of marriage to the distant future. Over time there have been less and less weddings in the church. This has been the case not only because fewer young people are joining the church but also because young people who now are those born and raised in the Christian families are putting off marriage. Many are hesitant to

take on the serious obligations of raising a family. Over time, patterns of life have been established. Young people in the church have often been greatly pressured, often even by their own Christian parents, to strive for very high educational achievements and prestigious careers. But the time has to come when we must ask ourselves, "Is it all worth it?" Are we following God's direction in our lives? Are we continuing our interest in the preservation and increase of the church of Jesus Christ among us? Do we believe that Christian marriage and building a Christian home is a very important part of Christian living, and is very important for the continuation of the church of Jesus Christ among His people?

It truly thrills our hearts to hear of growing Covenantal thinking among the members of CERC, and also among the youth. The truly Reformed believer must think Covenantally in all areas of his and her life.

But, what exactly is Covenantal thinking? It has to do with knowing the blessed truth that God is our God. It has to do with humbly and thankfully living in the consciousness that we are, by His amazing grace in Christ Jesus, His special chosen people in the world. It has to do with a profound understanding that we are the Covenant friend-servants of the Lord in this world and as members of His church, we are called to live a life of devotion to God. The Lord our God calls us to be a separate and holy people—different, even radically different, from the world that we live in. In short, Covenantal thinking is God-centred thinking. It means that we make serving God the absolute central purpose of our whole life. We have, by His grace, no greater joy than to serve God and to live according to

His Word in every part of our life. Without God and without His favour on us, our lives will have no meaning and the pursuit of riches and glory in the world will draw us away from God. Those who make the pursuit of riches the goal in life, will find that in the end they have nothing.

Marriage has as its purpose the establishing and maintaining of a truly Christian home. This perspective of marriage keeps us from having marriages which are self-centred in life. It tempers and directs the interest we have in material things and worldly riches.

To have a Covenant home, we must of course begin with seeking a wise and godly person who has the same love for the Truth and same desire and purpose to live to the glory of God. Earnest prayer, careful consideration, and waiting on the Lord is required for this endeavour. We must be ever so careful that we do not end up marrying the wrong person. If we set our hearts on a worldly person, or even on someone outside of the church, we will become unequally yoked with unbelievers. Then being God-centred as husband and wife will involve a life long struggle with someone who simply does not have the same perspective as we do on life.

Covenantal thinking also means that we understand that God is pleased by sovereign grace to continue His church in the line of believers and their children. This has many implications. In our modern day world, giving birth to children and doing everything necessary to raise these children is considered by so many to be too great of a burden and soon becomes a hindrance to worldly pursuits. There are couples who from the beginning of their marriage decide

to have no children. Others severely limit the number of children they will have and some even have self-serving ideals of having one boy and one girl. They may even look to wonders of modern day medical science to realise this ideal.

Bringing forth and raising several children in the fear of God requires a tremendous amount of personal sacrifice from both the young mother and the young father in marriage. Great blocks of time and tremendous amounts of energy and commitment are required. A man may have to temper his career pursuits, consider that overseas study may be too expensive, and decide that world travel takes him away from his calling in his Covenant home and from his responsibility in the church.

There is no area of Christian living that does not require a great amount of personal sacrifice. Jesus said that if any man would follow after Him, he must be ready daily to deny himself, take up his cross and follow His Lord. There are few areas of Christian living that require greater measure of personal sacrifices and self-denial than being a faithful father and a godly mother in a Christian home.

God created marriage for the blessing of His people and also in order that He might raise up a Covenant seed from His people. God is pleased to continue His church among the children of believers from generation to generation. This is the purpose of His sovereign grace. This is not something genetic in the children themselves which they inherit from their parents. The Reformed believer knows that our children are conceived and born in sin. Great effort has to be made, and discipline exercised, to bring up our children in the way of the Lord.

The history of the world, from the beginning to the present, proves clearly that God continued his church with the believing sons and daughters of the Covenant. Parents have a serious responsibility to train their children in the truth of God's Covenant. As difficult as this task is, they have the assurance of the blessing and guidance of the Lord their Covenant God when they continue in the fear of His name.

Having a Covenantal perspective must not dampen the zeal of the church to continue to preach the Gospel outside of the church to those who do not yet know the Lord, and to earnestly call them to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. There is no conflict between the Covenantal perspective in the church and the calling of the church to do missions. However, if the church loses its Covenantal perspective, it will not continue in the world.

After you have finished reading this article, read Psalm 127 and 128 to know for yourself that what I have said in this article is the truth. These Psalms were probably composed after the Jews had returned from the Babylonian exile. Rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem and restoring God's Holy temple among them was their great concern. So today, the church is blessed and continues by the grace of God in this ungodly world through strong Covenant homes in her midst.

GOD'S WITNESSES

>> Jonah Chua



Jonah Chua is a confessing young adult in CERC and is a member of the Salt Shakers committee.

We face a fundamental question: Must we be witnesses of God?

Scripture makes it very clear about our calling: to witness! Along with this calling comes the importance and necessity of being God's witnesses.

Isaiah 43:10 declares, "*Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me*".

In the early part of the chapter, God reminds Judah, through the prophet, of their redemption from spiritual slavery. As they passed through difficult trials, God never left them and He continued to be with them. God will preserve His people and they have no need to fear or worry what will come upon them. These words were spoken to Judah just before Judah's captivity, but it goes all the way ahead to the time when she would go into captivity and later return to the land of Canaan. In the later part

of the chapter (vs 9), the nations are gathered and called to bring forth their own witnesses to testify, and to seek justification for the idols they were worshipping. But none of them could do so, for there was no salvation in these idol gods.

God's exaltation and glory can be seen throughout chapters 43 and 44 of Isaiah. They boast of the existence and absoluteness of God, and there being none other than Him. The last two lines of verse 13 are an exposition of what it means to be God. God cries out, "*Yea, before the day was I am he; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand: I will work, and who shall let it?*" God exalts that He is God! Even from eternity, He is God! No one can stand in the way of Him, much less reverse what He did. God's deity and sovereignty is proclaimed. Our very existence, our life in this world, is owed to God who created us. The purpose? It is to show forth God's praise (vs 21). We pause here for a moment to consider this truth and to wonder at the greatness of God.

A question next enters our mind: Is there a purpose for this wonder? Undoubtedly, yes! God creates a wonder in us, so that it will translate into witnessing. Football fans, if you have just witnessed your favourite team score an amazing goal which leads them to claim the victory, would you not jump up from your seats in excitement and start celebrating? This earthly analogy brings out the point that people of God will continuously

show forth the praise of their God, for they have come to know of the great wonder of His divinity and sovereignty.

Isaiah 43:10 draws our attention to three main points. First, God's witnesses are chosen by God Himself. When we know God, believe God, and understand God, it is because God chose us to know, believe in, and understand Him. In His sovereignty, God imparts to us wisdom and knowledge of Himself, so that we can come to confess that He is our mighty God and our King.

Second, God's witnesses are His servants. Being servant-witnesses of God, we ought to shine with the light given to us. We are not called to hide our lights under the bushel (Matt 5:15), but to let this light shine before men, so that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven (vs 16).

Third, God's witnesses are to bear witness of God alone. With the knowledge of God and servant-attitude, witnesses of God are to testify of the existence of the one true and living God, His sovereignty, His eternal dwelling, His faithfulness and His work of salvation (Isa 43:11).

The calling to be a witness for God prepares us to be ready to give an answer to every man that asks us a reason of the hope that is in us with meekness and fear (1 Peter 3:15).

As Living Witnesses

As Christians living in this world near the end times, it is of utmost importance that our lives be a living witness to God. In Matthew 5, Jesus calls us the “salt of the earth” and the “light of the world”.

“Salt”

It was said that in ancient times, salt was of one of the most highly prized minerals because not only does it have seasoning and preservative qualities, but it also made a good antiseptic (TIME, 1982). So significant was salt in those days that it a Roman soldier’s pay consisted in part of it. There were instances also where salt was thrown throughout conquered cities to symbolise that the city was separated from its past. Today, salt is most commonly used for flavouring and preserving food. Adding small amounts of salt to a plate of noodles will largely alter its taste. To be the “salt of the earth”, Jesus meant that we are to influence lives with seasoning, and for preservation unto eternity. Notice that Jesus did not say that we “should be” or “ought to be” the “salt of the earth”, but we are given the calling to BE a salt witness, by showing others the principles of Christian living.

Where there is strife and unhappiness, we are called to be peacemakers. Where there is sorrow, we are called to be comforters, being given the Spirit of the Comfort—the Comfort being our Lord Jesus Himself. Where there are those who are lost or who are in need of spiritual encouragement, we are called to feed them by bringing them God’s word. Where there is hatred, we are called to show the love of God, founded in His Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who was made a sacrifice for all our sins. This very love of God also enables us to be salt witnesses, as being

filled with His love in our hearts, it sweetens our lives and we are made a blessing to those around us.

“Light”

The presence of Christians in this world must shine like a bright light in a dark room. This may sound trivial, but there is a twofold meaning. First, the testimony of our good deeds must be evident for all to see. Second, the light of the truth of God’s word must enter into the dark and sinful hearts of man. As men see our good deeds, they will “glorify your Father which is in heaven (Matthew 5:16)”.

The true Light, as we confess in John 1, is Jesus, which “lighteth every man that cometh into the world.” (vs 9). We are witnesses of this true Light, so we are reflections of this light. Being “little lights” ourselves, we live the life of Jesus here on this earth, following His ways. Those who see us will know that we do not belong to this world, that we are not our own, but we belong to the Lord.

Why do we need light? Light reveals the marvel in all the darkness. It will not serve its purpose if it were to be hidden under a bushel. This leads us to the point that is no such thing as a “secret Christian”. We need to be a light at all times. Our light shines so that those living in darkness may open their eyes to see things around them. We must also be careful not to draw attention to ourselves, but to point others in the direction of the giver of Light Himself!

Both you and I are used as lights to help the lost find salvation in Christ. Our source of power comes from God Himself. We are daily charged up to bring the gospel of Christ, a power unto salvation, to all those around us. What happens when our light flickers and it fails to give light to others? Well, it could be a faulty connection

between the power source and the light bulb. In order to fix this, we have to faithfully read God’s word, continually pray fervently to God for strength, and obey Him. Once our lights are shining brightly again, we will be able to be faithful living witnesses to those around us, testifying of the greatness of God in our lives.

People need to see the salt and light witness. They need to see how you are of godly influence when you mingle with them. A simple question from your friends “Why aren’t you able to join us for Sunday morning outings?” gives you an opportunity be a witness of God about the way you consecrate your Sundays to Him. People also need to see that there is Christ in our lives—we grow to be more like Him (the new man) and less of ourselves (the old man).

We must be willing to bear witness to God, even though it might bring persecution. Our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, was persecuted by many who hated him. If we are to lead lives conforming more and more to Jesus, we will likewise be persecuted. But let us not worry or fear, for God has promised us, just as He promised the people of Israel, that He will ever be with us.

In conclusion, must we witness? We must! Not only must we heed the calling to be witnesses, we must also be cheerful witnesses, because we are testifying of our gracious Father in Heaven who has made us heirs of His heavenly Kingdom.

TRULY, GOD IS GOOD TO ISRAEL

>> Lee Kong Wee



Lee Kong Wee is an Elder in CERC. He is married to Dorcas and their family is blessed with two children.

Introduction

God is good to Israel. God is good to His chosen people whom He has redeemed by the death of His own Son. *Really?*

The child of God faces a very real temptation in this present earthly life. Among the many temptations he faces, within and without, one of the most powerful and common temptations is to doubt God's goodness towards him in times of trouble. Earthly troubles. Troubles of sickness, troubles of losses, troubles of relationships, troubles of financial hardship. Especially powerful is this temptation when his own troubled life is compared to the seemingly prosperous, comfortable, peaceful and trouble-free life of the wicked and unbelieving. God's apparent 'blessing' of the prosperous wicked and apparent 'cursing' of the afflicted righteous vexes the soul of the child of God greatly. So great is this temptation that the child of God begins to envy the wicked and doubt his Father's goodness towards him.

The Holy Spirit, through the pen of Asaph in Psalm 73, records for us the experience of such a temptation that is common to every child of God. The temptation is overcome and the perplexing providential incongruity is resolved only when Asaph entered the sanctuary of God, and there understood the end of the wicked.

The Prosperous Wicked

As a rule, the wicked prosper. Their lives are characterized by ease and abundance of this world's goods. Of course there are unbelievers whose lives are difficult and from an external point of view unpleasant and not enviable. Asaph knows this, and so do we. Nevertheless, outward, physical ease and prosperity is the condition of many wicked and godless men and women. From **v4-12**, Asaph describes how the wicked enjoy their smooth-sailing, generally trouble-free and comfortable life: "*They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men.*" (**v5**). They are filled with the things of this world, and there seems to be nothing that they lack: "*Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish.*" (**v7**). At the end of their prosperous and comfortable life, many die peacefully, seemingly without terror of judgment for their sins: "*For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm.*" (**v4**). Furthermore, through their prosperity, material abundance and earthly successes, they become very proud. They openly flaunt their pride in their behaviour and word (**v6, 8**). In

their shameless pride, they defy God. They are so full of themselves and think themselves to be invincible that they blaspheme and deny God out rightly (**v9, 11**). Asaph sums up the prosperity of the wicked in **v12** "*Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches.*" The literal translation of this verse is "Behold, these are the ungodly, who are everlastingly at ease in the world." Their comfortable, abundant and trouble-free lives continue throughout their lives until they die.

Such godless, self-indulgent, arrogant blasphemers prosper.

The Troubled Saints

On the contrary, as a rule, the godly suffer. Again there are exceptions of course, just as there are with regards to the general rule that the wicked prosper. But experience shows that the norm is that the righteous suffer much in this life. They are troubled on every side in the earthly circumstances of their lives. That there is only one verse describing the troubles of the righteous compared to the many verses that describe the prosperity of the wicked by no means imply that the troubles are trivial and light. Asaph spoke of his troubles as 'plagues' and 'chastisements'. They strike at him, crush him, weigh him down, and bring him low. Not just for a time, but day after day, week after week. There does not seem to be any relief in sight. These troubles gnaw away at his soul and drain the life out of him. The cry of Asaph is a cry that has often been

uttered by the children of God down through the ages, and still yet today, *“For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning.”* (v14)

The Sore Temptation

When Asaph saw the prosperity of the wicked around him, contrasted against his own troubles, when he saw the wicked seemingly blessed of God, while the righteous seemingly cursed of God, his soul was sorely vexed. He was baffled. He could *not* make sense of the perplexing and seemingly contradictory providence of God. He could *not* reconcile the truth of God’s goodness with the prosperity of the wicked and suffering of the righteous. *“If God is good to His people, why do they suffer so much, while the wicked seem to prosper?”* Is God really good to Israel? The mental and spiritual wrestling over this seeming reality left his soul in pain and anguish: *“When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me”* (v16). So great and sore was the temptation to doubt and question God’s goodness towards him that Asaph was almost ready to give up his faith. *“Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.”* (v13). We could imagine Asaph thinking to himself “What good is it anyway to continue to live a godly life, when all it seems to bring is suffering, while the ungodly do what they want, and live in ease and pleasure apart from God? I might as well live like the ungodly!” His faith wavered. His steps faltered. *“But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped.”* (v2). Spiritual disaster threatened.

Asaph’s temptation is also our temptation. How many of us have not secretly envied our unbelieving neighbours and colleagues, especially in times of great difficulties and trials in our lives? How many of us have not

entertained the thought that perhaps we’ve lived our life of godliness in vain after all? When our bodies are wracked by diseases and our portion in life is a long, weary road of darkness and troubles with no end in sight, it is all too easy to fall into the sin of envying the wicked, whose prosperous and comfortable life seems so desirable and far more ‘blessed’. Not just Asaph, but we too confess, with shame *“For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.”* (v3)

Until the Sanctuary

But when Asaph entered the sanctuary of God, then all was made clear. Then the temptation disappeared. For then he understood the end of the wicked.

Shall we judge the outward, external prosperity and ease of the wicked as God’s blessing upon them? Is God displaying a favourable attitude towards them in sending them an abundance of this world’s goods, a comfortable life, a healthy body and a happy family? Is God showing ‘common grace’ to the wicked in such circumstances of their lives? Absolutely not! Rather, *‘surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image.’* (v18-20). In fact, all the prosperity and ease and pleasures that belong to the portion of the wicked in this life are but so many things that lead them to destruction! Whatever the circumstances of life, God has given those circumstances as slippery places to the wicked, including their prosperity and ease and pleasure, so that they may slide into ruin. This is the explicit teaching of Psalm 73:18 (confer Psalm 37:2,9,10,20).

Upon whom does God pronounce His

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...God has given those circumstances as slippery places to the wicked, including their prosperity and ease and pleasure, so that they may slide into ruin.

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blessing? To whom is God gracious? The consistent testimony of Psalm 73, the entire Book of Psalms and other parts of Scripture is that the God-fearing, God-seeking, believing, obedient, repentant and forgiven man is the man who is blessed. *“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.”* (Psalm 1:1-2) *“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.”* (Psalm 32:1) (cf Psalm 33:12, 40:4, 128:1; Jeremiah 17:7; Matthew 5:3-11). Not the man who has abundance of material things, whose eyes stand out with fatness and who have more than heart could wish (v7); and certainly not those who *“set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth.”* (v9), who say *“how doth God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?”* (v11); who are far from God, and who go a whoring from Him (v27). Not the foolish unbelieving wicked who say in

their hearts, “There is no God”. Such are not blessed of God, whatever their earthly circumstances may be. Such are not recipients of God’s grace or favour, however comfortable and trouble-free their lives may be.

If indeed the possession of an abundance of this world’s goods and a comfortable, easy earthly life are blessings of God, or tokens of His grace and favour, then, by necessary implication, the lack of material goods and a life plagued by earthly troubles are the curses and disfavour of God! Then the prosperous wicked are blessed of God while the troubled saints are cursed of God! Does God curse Israel, His chosen, precious blood-bought children to Whom He has promised that He will be their God, and they His people? Will He Who has chosen His elect in Jesus Christ unto glory from all eternity curse them in time in this life? Never! At the Cross, the full measure of God’s wrath and curse against us for our sins has been poured out on Christ, and the full treasure of the spiritual blessings of salvation has been secured and bestowed upon us. Just as there are no curses for the people of God, so there are no blessings for the ungodly.

For all their outward, earthly prosperity and enjoyment of pleasures and riches in this life, the sure and certain end of the wicked is destruction. In light of the end of the prosperous wicked, all the prosperity of the wicked is seen to be curse, only curse. *“The curse of the LORD is in the house of the wicked”* (Proverbs 3:33a) Are we still envious of the prosperity of the wicked?

When the Asaph entered the sanctuary of God, not only did he understand the end of the wicked, he also understood, and beholds afresh with great comfort and delight of soul, the end of the godly (v23-24). In the sanctuary, he repented of his foolishness of envying

the wicked and rejoice in the truth that God is always with him, holding him by his right hand, leading and guiding him every step of his pilgrim’s pathway, until He leads him finally, infallibly, to glory. It is, and it must needs be, *through* all the troubles and afflictions that plagued our lives that God leads us home to glory – *“we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God”* (Acts 14:22b). Each strand of sorrow and affliction has a place, and is weaved skilfully and lovingly by Father’s Hand into His tapestry of grace. In light of the end of the troubled saints, all their troubles are blessing, only blessing. *“he blesseth the habitation of the just.”* (Proverbs 3:33b)

If we are ever tempted to envy the prosperity of the wicked, and doubt God’s goodness towards us, then, beloved, *go to the sanctuary! Go to church!* Do not say that you have cleansed your heart in vain. Do not become weary in well-doing. Do not look at your earthly circumstances, your seemingly insurmountable troubles, your wasting body, that tragic loss and conclude (mistakenly) that God is not good, that He has forgotten you and left you to pine under your pain and struggle. No, rather go to church. Go to the pillar and ground of the truth. There, and there alone, your doubts will be removed, your faith restored, and your heart strengthened as you hear the authoritative and powerful declaration *“He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”* (Romans 8:32) *“For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly.”* (Psalm 84:11). *“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.”* (Jeremiah 29:11)

It is only in the sanctuary that we will be convinced that the prosperous wicked are cursed, while the troubled saints are blessed. It is only in the sanctuary that we will learn to walk by faith, and not by sight. It is only in the sanctuary that we will realise and repent from our utter foolishness of envying the wicked (v21-22). Only in the sanctuary.

Conclusion

God is good to Israel. *Truly*, God is good to His chosen people Whom He has redeemed by the death of His own Son. Always. Regardless. Eternally. He was, He is, and He always will be. Not just in saving them from their sins and promising them a *future* heaven. But also in the circumstances of their earthly life *presently*, today and every day. On the contrary, God is *not* good to those who are *not* Israel. *Truly*, God is *not* good to the wicked. Always. Regardless. Eternally. He never was. He never is. He never will be.

This is the wonderful truth of Psalm 73. This is the great comforting truth of Psalm 73, indeed of all of Scripture, for the troubled and afflicted child of God: *“Truly, God is good to Israel.” Only to Israel, and to none else.*

“

... God is not good to those who are not Israel. Truly, God is not good to the wicked. Always. Regardless. Eternally. He never was. He never is. He never will be.

”

Follow-up Work: The Individual (II)

>> Marcus Wee



Marcus Wee is a confessing young adult in CERC.

Differences in Follow-up Work

As defined previously, follow-up work is the specific application of the calling to love our neighbour—our neighbour being (1) our fellow brethren in the church who experience difficulties, and (2) newcomers in the church. How does follow-up work differ for (1) and (2)? The neighbour in question is different. A brother/sister in Christ in the church is one whom we are familiar with. We usually know their names, backgrounds, characteristics, or at least, we recognise them. Importantly, they are also one in the faith with us; we believe in the same infallible, authoritative Scripture and the creeds which faithfully proclaim it. They may range from a distant, fellow church member to a close, bosom friend. On the other hand, a newcomer in church typically is one whom we have little or no information about.

Knowing our calling to engage in follow-up work, we talk to the newcomer and begin the continuous process of seeking his/her salvation. This we have seen in the previous article.

Through this continuous process, though, we gain information about the newcomer. We learn about their names, backgrounds, and beliefs. We begin to see what sort of people they are, by what they verbally tell us, and through other non-verbal cues. We, too, share similar information. In this process, a friendship is being forged, and they cease to be ‘newcomers’, and become acquaintances, and even friends.

Similarities

It is at such a point that the nature of follow-up work for brethren in Christ and for newcomers is rather similar. It is ‘similar’—and not ‘same’—because while we are one in Christ with our fellow brethren, this may not be so with the newcomer-turned-acquaintance (we shall continue to use ‘newcomer’ for ease of reference). Nevertheless, insofar as we are able to continue follow-up work with the newcomer (if he/she is receptive), we can follow the same set of guidelines as we would for follow-up work with our brethren in Christ. We are able to do so because the goal of *all* follow-up work is to seek the salvation of our neighbour, regardless of whether he/she is a newcomer or a brother/sister in Christ.

Guidelines

These guidelines are taken from the Godly Friendships Workshop series by Pastor Lanning. I highly recommend us to listen to the recordings of the workshop, or if we have already done so, to listen to them once again, or review our notes on the series. It is profitable

and provides sound instruction from Scripture about how we can be helps to our friends. In future, perhaps a series of Salt Shaker articles could be written on the workshop!

The workshop series is centred on this verse:

Proverbs 17:17 A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

As friends, we have a calling to love each other at *all* times, and in times of adversity, a special friend, known as a brother, is formed. When we engage in follow-up work, we do so in the capacity of a friend, seeking to help our brother/sister in Christ who experiences adversity. It is through helping them in such times that we become brothers and sisters!

Pastor Lanning used the acronym ‘CERC’ for the set of guidelines in being a godly friend, which we shall use as the guidelines for follow-up work.

(1) Compassion is being personally touched by the circumstances of others so that we are moved to enter into those circumstances to help them. Literally, it means to feel (‘passion’) with (‘com’). Compassion does not remain a mere feeling *for* others (e.g. pity), but is moved in such a way that we feel *with* others, and seek to actively help them in their difficulties.

If we have gone through a similar situation before, we are better able to empathise with our friend, and able to share our experience and give advice. If we have not, we must do our best to

understand our friend's situation, and also seek to help him/her. The best way we show compassion, after all, is not by having a wealth of experience to share—though that is useful—but it is by emulating the example of our High Priest, to be personally touched by our friend's infirmities, and sacrifice ourselves to help him/her.

(2) Encouragement is supplying strength/health/courage in place of weakness/wounds/fear. As friends, we always need general encouragement, even when all is going well, because we all have the weakness of sin, and require encouragement as we are sanctified. At times, we also need specific encouragement, strength to overcome a particular weakness that we have in our lives. We as godly friends are able to supply this strength.

This strength must come from God's Word. We do not make up our own content for encouragement, but use God's Word, the best strength we can give to our friends. Often, the encouragement we give to our friends will be, "Stop looking at yourself, and look at God!" We must also trust God's Spirit, the Comforter, which applies God's Word to the heart of our friend. Our friend does not rely upon us—he/she relies on God!

(3) Rebuking is confronting our friend with a sin, calling him/her to repent from his/her sin, and calling our friend back to his/her duty before he/she sinned. The only way to sin is to go against God's commands, and thus only God may rebuke. We are merely instruments of God in rebuking. Rebuking is something that we have to be especially careful about, and we must be certain that we use God's standards to rebuke rather than our own personal preferences.

Rebuking may be unpleasant as it

involves a confrontation with our friend, but we are commanded to do so—love for our brother requires it (Leviticus 19:17)!

How to Rebuke:

a. Publicly vs Privately

God's Word instructs us to rebuke both privately (Matthew 18:15) and publicly (1 Timothy 5:20). If the sin is a private one, we must begin with a private rebuke, and if the brother refuses to repent, we must follow the steps of Matthew 18:16-17. We only rebuke publicly if the sin is public, and even then, we might start with a private rebuke first, depending on the situation.

b. Humbly

We must rebuke with humility, and not as someone taking a moral high ground. We might not be committing the particular sin our friend is committing, but we are totally depraved sinners after all, saved only by God's grace. We must be uncompromising about the seriousness of our friend's sin, yet not talk down to our friend, but rather, approach him/her as a fellow sinner and seek God's grace together.

c. Obtaining the complete picture

We need to understand the complete picture before we rebuke, especially our sinning friend's side of the story. This prevents any misunderstanding and ensures that we properly rebuke our friend for only the sin committed and no more or less.

d. Pointing to God's grace

We must not only point out the sin of our friend, but point our friend to God's grace which empowers us to repent, and to the blessedness experienced upon repentance.

(4) Communication is the exchange of information within godly fellowship

with the goal of edifying our friend. Compassion, encouragement, and rebuking all have their root in communication, for it is only through communication that we are able to practise them.

Proper communication involves both talking and listening. When helping our friend, we do not merely load her up with information, but we listen to what she has to say. There is a time to keep silence, and a time to speak (Ecclesiastes 3:7). Listening is an active process, where we seek to understand our friend's problem more before we find the solution to it in God's Word.

Conclusion

As we abide by the guidelines in doing follow-up work, it is important for us to be clear on this: follow-up work is not about "me" at all. I do not choose to do follow-up work when I feel like it—I am to love my friend at all times, and seldom does my friend need my help at a time convenient to me. Recognising my calling, let me then be willing and joyful in doing follow-up work. And before I get all swelled up thinking of *my* importance in doing follow-up work, follow-up work does not depend on me! I am only an instrument used by God to help my friend. Let me then be humble in doing follow-up work.

But then, neither is follow-up work about my friend first of all. Sometimes we tend to think that way, as we are focused on helping our friend. It is first of all about my Friend—God, the true and only help. It is out of that blessed friendship with Him that we receive saving compassion, divine encouragement, and timely rebukes that save our souls from death. We experience all these through our Friend's communication with us in the Covenant, where He speaks to us through His Word, and opens His ears

to our cry (Psalm 34:15,17).

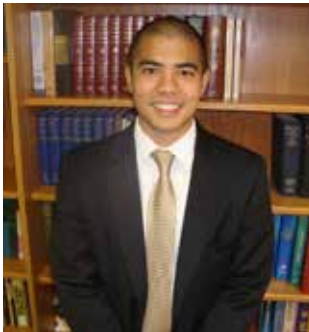
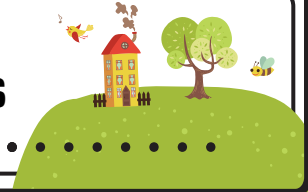
It is out of this blessed friendship that we emulate our Friend in helping our earthly friends. Ultimately, we best

help them by pointing them towards the Friend who alone can help. Our earthly friendships are only meaningful insofar as they cause us as friends to

grow together in our friendship with our Covenant God. May that be our goal as we do follow-up work. Two are better than one; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

SEVEN SCRIPTURAL OBSERVATIONS FOR PARENTS

>> Pastor Jonathan Mahtani



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Godly parents read about parenting. Pious fathers and mothers study Biblical, Reformed literature that give instruction on how to raise their children. In addition to books and articles on child-rearing, parents do well to open the Scriptures themselves and study what God has to say about parenting. There is much to learn therein, not only in the direct exhortations to parents, but also in the concrete historical cases of parents and their children in both the Old and New Testaments. Although this article is not meant to be a comprehensive case study of all the parents and children in the Bible, it does give a sampling of instructive observations gleaned from concrete examples in God's Word. The hope is that these seven observations

not only inform the reader but stir him to further search the Scriptures for many more precious lessons on Christian parenting.

The first observation of parents and their children in the historical narrative of the Bible is the total depravity of every son and daughter. Think of the first parents who were created in perfection, and think of their first son—"And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD (Genesis 4:1)." The first child conceived and born into this world was a disobedient, will-worshipper, who, filled with hatred and jealousy, killed his own brother Abel and dared to ask God, "Am I my brother's keeper?" The first child born into this world and every other child after him (except One), including even Abel and Seth, had such a wicked nature because Adam fell. As an immediate result, he together with Eve could only propagate a vicious, depraved nature. Reprobate and elect alike, male and female, the most adorable of babies, parents pollute with this nature.

Parents tend to forget this—most often intentionally. We do not like this awful truth about ourselves and our innocent-looking child. But it is one of the most

important truths which affects our parenting. Elect, believing parents like Adam and Eve, do not cancel out one bit of a child's depravity. The precious doctrine of the Covenant does not do away with just how lost our children are. And God is not at all obligated to save them just because they are our children!

Yet gracious Jehovah chooses to save the lying Jacobs among our children, who are as wicked as their reprobate brothers. The second observation about parents and children is God's miraculous work of making our spiritually dead children alive in regeneration. Not all, but many children of believers, the Lord resurrects. We could say that about Abel and Seth born after Cain. We could say that about Enoch and Noah and about every elect child born into this world. Dead, but graciously resurrected. God pictures this wondrous work to us through the Bible's record of many physical resurrections of children. When the widow of Zerephath's son died, Elijah the man of God cried out to God and stretched himself upon that child. "And the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived (1 Kings 17:22)." Elisha does something very similar for the son of the Shunamite woman, and

the Lord raised him (2 Kings 4). Then there was Jesus, who entered into Jairus' house after his daughter had died. "And he took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, Talitha cumi, which is, being interpreted, Damsel, I say unto thee, arise. And straightway the damsel arose, and walked; for she was of the age of twelve years (Mark 5:41-42a)."

These cases point to the miracle which Jesus performs by His Spirit in the dead hearts of our children. It is invisible and spiritual, but no less real. Sometimes He raises them very early on, as was the case with John the Baptist leaping within Elizabeth; sometimes He does so later on in their lives. But all elect children of believers are given eternal life earned by His life and death. With this rebirth, the soul is able to believe, able to live a holy life, and able to fight against sin and temptation.

And with this new life, the soul never dies. Parents like David can say at a child's death, "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me (2 Samuel 12:23)." A child may die, sometimes early on, but God will bring his immortal soul to glory. Parents of such infants have no reason to doubt that! And hopeful parents will one day rejoice when these same bodies will rise, be renewed, and rejoin their living souls in the presence of God and all His saints in future glory.

God graciously gives such children of life as a blessing and joy to parents. That is a third observation. Every godly parent in the Scripture rejoiced in the gift of such a child. After Cain slew Abel, God gave Seth to Adam and Eve in order to comfort them in their grief over the spiritual deadness of Cain and the physical death of Abel. A sign of God's favour upon Job was His gift of many children to him. Laughter belonged to Abraham and Sarah in

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Parents pray for the regeneration, the conversion, the faith, the justification, the sanctification, the preservation, and the glorification of each son or daughter.

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the birth of Isaac. Barren women like Hannah and Elizabeth grieved greatly without a child, and rejoiced abundantly when God answered their prayers. God intends for such children to bring great joy to parents.

It is true that God gives other gifts and brings joy in other ways, especially to those whom He chooses not to give children. However, children, and specifically those who grow up to walk in the truth, are unique and special blessings of God. They should not be viewed as masses of cells to be aborted, financial burdens to be prevented, or annoyances to be kept out of our busy schedules. Children, regenerated children, many of them, are gifts to be sought after, embraced, thanked for, and made to know of their mother's and father's joy in them.

A fourth observation is the necessity and duty of parents to instruct and correct their children. Salvation depends only upon God's miraculous work in their hearts, but He uses faithful parents as His means to sanctify them. There are numerous negative historical cases in the Bible. Judge Eli for example had sons, Hophni and Phinehas who "... made themselves vile, and he restrained them not (1 Samuel 3:13)." David is shown as a father who had too much natural affection for Absalom and Adonijah so that he did not restrain and correct them. Concerning his relationship with Adonijah, Scripture says, "And his father had not displeased him at any time in saying, Why hast thou done so? (1 Kings 1:6a)." The result of such lack of correction in both Eli's and David's cases was the spoiling of children. It is true that there is also a real danger of parents being too harsh and even abusive in their chastisement, but there is an equally serious danger of sparing the rod and neglecting correction.

A repeated warning that God gives through many cases in the Old Testament, is the warning of against favouritism or partiality. Isaac favoured Esau and Rebekah his wife favoured Jacob. Jacob favoured Joseph and Benjamin, children of Rachel, over the rest of his sons. David favoured Absalom and Adonijah for their good looks. Not only did this favouritism lead to a lack of discipline toward the most favoured, but it also was the occasion for jealousy, strife, murder, and many other sins within the family.

God warns in His Word about the lack of instruction and restraint by parents, but He also has positive examples through history of parents faithful in this duty. Think of Manoah and his wife committing themselves to raising their son Samson by asking the Lord,

“How shall we order the child, and how shall we do unto him (Judges 13:12)?” Think of Hannah and Elkanah raising Samuel their son and dedicating him to the service of the Lord in His house (1 Samuel 1). Think especially of the mother Lois, and grandma Eunice, seeking to the utmost of their power to teach Timothy their son the inspired holy Scriptures, using them “...for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Timothy 3:16-17).”

One of the keys in raising our children well is the parents’ dedication to God. Notice that as the fifth observation. Faithful parents are those who love their children more than themselves, and love God so much more than their children. The attitude of Mary, the mother of Jesus, is exemplary. After the angel of God had described to this virgin the conception of the Son of the Highest within her, Mary responded with total submission to God. Knowing the shame that she would endure because of her pregnancy before marriage, without fully understanding the mystery of what God was going to do within her, she surrendered herself to His Lordship. “And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word (Luke 1:38).” Godly mothers and fathers like Mary see the God given duty of raising His children as a privileged opportunity to sacrifice of themselves unselfishly as willing slaves to their Lord.

Even more than that though, godly parents are willing to give up their children also! In love for God, Abraham willingly offered up Isaac on an altar (Genesis 22). In dedication to God, Jephthah kept his vow and gave up his only child (Judges 11). With more love for God than for her son, Hannah

brought Samuel to the temple and left him there (1 Samuel 1). When God took away all his children, Job’s grief did not deter him from blessing the name of the Lord instead of cursing Him (Job 1:21). Godly parents did not make idols of their beloved children but made God their first love and the powerful source of their love for His children. This not only made such parents faithful teachers but necessary examples to their children.

A sixth observation is the necessity of a Biblical marriage in parenting. One godly man leading in love and one godly woman submitting in love provides their children God’s intended setting for optimal parenting. Though it is true that God still mercifully saves children within families lacking such healthy marriages, He shows in His word what is best. There are many negative examples. The adultery of Abraham with Hagar, Sarah’s maid, wreaked havoc in the home. The polygamy of Jacob was a detriment to healthy parenting of the twelve sons. The multiplication of wives by King David made it almost impossible for him to have a hand in the rearing of his numerous children. When there is not a marriage according to the ordinance of God, parenting is drastically weakened. Apply that to divorce resulting in single parenting. Apply it to remarriage of divorcees resulting in multiple sets of parents. Apply this to same-sex “marriage” resulting in no natural children at all. Apply this to marriages in which husband and wife still live in the same house, but there is no real love, no real cherishing, and no real submission. Scriptures’ examples show that a faithful parent is first a faithful husband or wife.

A seventh and final observation is that godly parents pray earnestly and continually for their children. Much

has been written on what parents must do, but the best of parents have totally depraved children who are unholy and lost except for the redeeming grace of our Lord. And so, they plead for God’s mercy. Job regularly woke up early in the morning and offered burnt offerings for each of his children, “... for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually (Job 1:5b).” Those sacrifices were Job’s way of praying for the forgiveness of His children, seeking the covering over of their sins by the precious blood of the Lamb. Knowing the weakness of his parenting, David pleaded with God toward the end of his life, “And give unto Solomon my son a perfect heart, to keep thy commandments, thy testimonies, and thy statutes, and to do all these things, and to build the palace, for which I have made provision (1 Chronicles 29:19).” Parents pray for the regeneration, the conversion, the faith, the justification, the sanctification, the preservation, and the glorification of each son or daughter.

Our faith in God’s Covenant promises to save our children may not warp into a presumption that God will save them without our prayer for His mercy! Godly parents understand their own weaknesses, recognise their inability to change their child’s heart, and know the Saviour who can and does give His grace and Holy Spirit only to those who ask. So they daily pray for their children.

There is more, much more, to glean from the parents and children in the history of the Scriptures. Here are seven observations for application. Now search the Scriptures, see if these things be true, and find more lessons for the profit of your children and the glory of your God and Saviour.

The Precursors of Modern Charismatic Christianity

>> Pastor Angus Stewart



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Introduction

Having looked previously at the “three waves” of modern charismatic Christianity in the twentieth century to the present, namely Pentecostalism, Charismaticism and Neo-Charismaticism, we need now to ask such questions as, Did other groups before them hold similar views? What were the tendencies and developments of their movements? What was the theological stature of those who opposed them?

John Wesley

A key figure in Charismatic Christianity or renewalism prior to the outbreak of Pentecostalism, and one in whom many of its chief tenets are found, at least in seed form, is none other than that old rogue, John Wesley (1703-1791).

In Wesley, just as in modern Charismatic Christianity, we have full-blown Arminian free-willism. Over 99% of renewalism openly advocates salvation by man’s free will, as though the Bible did not say that it is not of him who wills nor of him who runs, but it is exclusively of God

who shows mercy (Romans 9:16). Whereas Wesley detested and denied election and reprobation (contra, e.g., Matthew 11:25-27; Romans 9:10-24), using the heretical Arminian view of “foreknowledge”, a common view of predestination in renewal circles goes something like this: God has a wonderful destiny for every individual human being, but it is up to you, with your choices and your decisions and your actions, whether or not you will fulfil it or how much of it will be fulfilled in you. The absolute sovereignty of the true God of heaven and earth is rejected (Psalm 135:4-12) by Pentecostals, Charismatics and Neo-Charismatics. It is very strange that people who are supposedly filled with the Spirit contradict the inspired teaching of the Holy Spirit in the Bible! Renewalists often use the metaphor “of the fresh breezes of the Spirit”, and yet they deny the sovereignty of the regenerating Spirit who blows where He wills (John 3:8). Instead, they are blown about by the ill winds of Arminianism (Ephesians 4:14).

Charismatic phenomena occurred at Wesley’s revival meetings amongst his followers: dreams, visions, revelations, healings, outcries, people falling over, etc. Wesley also taught a post-conversion second work of grace. For him, this second divine work was entire sanctification. Thus he prepared the way for the baptism with the Holy Spirit as a second work of grace. There are other parallels between Wesley’s views and those of modern Charismatic Christianity: lay preaching, women

preaching, women ministers, false ecumenism, the promotion of propaganda through the writing and singing of uninspired hymns, etc.

Here is a simplified genealogy of Charismatic Christianity for the last three hundred years, including a summary of what we have seen so far: Wesley to the Methodist and Holiness churches to revivalism and second-blessing teaching. These movements birthed, and were then largely caught up in Pentecostalism, which led to Charismaticism (when Pentecostal ideas entered the main-line denominations). This, in turn, spawned Neo-Charismaticism, which believes in the Charismatic gifts but which dropped the idea of the baptism with the Holy Spirit and is less confrontational.

Other Precursors

If we look further back into church history, there are other precursors of twentieth and twenty-first century renewalism. Here are some of the better known ones. First, in the early, post-apostolic age, there was Montanism, with its ecstatic utterances, female leaders, new revelation, dreams of an imminent millennium and falsified predictions. Montanism was widely condemned and castigated by the church fathers as a work of the devil. Yet John Wesley called the Montanists “real scriptural Christians”!

Second, the charismatic spirit also worked through the “French prophets,” especially in the two decades before and after 1700. These “prophets” were poorly taught French Protestants

who arose especially after the church's trained leaders and others were massacred under the French King Louis XIV who was Roman Catholic. Some of them and their views spread beyond France to England, for example, where they also caused trouble and grief. A third party who served as a precursor to Pentecostalism was Edward Irving (1792-1834), an apostate Scottish Presbyterian who laboured in London. He taught that Christ was possessed of "sinful flesh" which was only kept from sin by the Lord's great struggle through the Holy Spirit. Irving believed in ongoing prophecy and the gifts of tongues and miracles. Ironically, he died relatively young in the certainty that he would be healed of his last illness. Though dismissed from his church and deposed from the ministry, his old London congregation became the Catholic Apostolic Church, complete with twelve new apostles and people

today in the "fourfold ministry" (Eph. 4:11), which spread renewalist ideas to many countries around the world.

Charismania is also seen in various people and movements in Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, especially in the more mystical traditions of both and particularly among the monks. The "Pentecostal and Charismatic Timeline" in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* has two entries for those movements in the sixteenth century. One of them is the Anabaptist Thomas Müntzer, a rebel leader in the German Peasants' War (1524-1525). Müntzer claimed to receive direct revelation from God in visions and dreams, and taught an imminent millennium. The other is the Roman Catholic Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits and a leading figure in the Counter-Reformation, which sought to wipe out the church of

Jesus Christ in Europe. Loyola boasted of frequent visions and the gift of tears. Maybe the Pentecostals will go in for the gift of tears in the years to come? Some even reckon that Loyola sang in tongues!

Pentecostals, Charismatics and Neo-Charismatics are welcome to such precursors as the Anabaptist rebel, Thomas Müntzer, and the Roman Catholic Jesuit, Ignatius Loyola. However, modern renewalists could not, and did not even attempt, thankfully, to lay claim to anything in the sixteenth-century Reformation. In conclusion, Pentecostalism, Charismaticism, and Neo-Charismaticism are firmly in the line of the development of the false church and are *not* of the true church (*Belgic Confession 29*). Whereas we, by God's grace, stand with Martin Luther and John Calvin against the Anabaptist Zwickau prophets and Roman Catholic miracles.

Our Children's Education: A Covenant Necessity (IV) - Assessing the Damages

>> Aaron Lim



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

That public education can do severe spiritual damage to our Covenant children ought to be clear for all to see.

We must assess these damages from a Biblical viewpoint to understand them better and in order to find a spiritual solution to these problems.

Covenant children brought up by the public education system are bound to be confused, if not frustrated. Religion placed alongside a secular education often creates great conflicts. Where the Bible teaches the world made in six days, the public schools teach evolution in millions of years. Where Scripture insists that sin is the cause of all the evils present in this world, society calls them social evils that can be solved

through social education. Where the church teaches a day of final judgment where all things shall be brought to an end, the world promotes a perpetual earthly paradise.

Because of the high demands of an education system like Singapore's, our Covenant children will be greatly tempted to cave in to its pressures. Studies come first; God and His church come later. That they cave in to such sinful temptations must not be surprising. Parents who spiritually neglect to walk closely with their children are really forcing these

untrained and inexperienced soldiers to fight a fierce spiritual battle alone. Shaped by an ungodly education and piled with pressure, their young and easily impressionable minds cave in.

When their minds cave in to the pressure, the immediate consequence of public education is spiritual ignorance. Because such a system rejects the true knowledge of God, neglected Covenant children who go through it are destroyed for lack of knowledge (Hosea 4:6). Where the only form of spiritual instruction our children receive comes from family devotions and the weekly hour-long catechism classes, their spiritual knowledge will be shallow at best. The evident lack of a spiritual vision in the public education causes our Covenant young to perish, if we are not careful (Proverbs 29:18).

Doctrinal ignorance is another product of such an education. Where academics hold the high ground, knowledge of Reformed doctrine is lost. Covenant children grow up without a strong grasp of Reformed doctrine and without a good understanding of the Reformed faith. I speak the same for myself. Instead of learning the doctrine which is according to godliness (1 Timothy 6:3), public education teaches a doctrine of vanities (Jeremiah 10:8).

Where the only lessons on history are secular, the history of the church is unheard of. Our Covenant children will not be taught the old paths that their spiritual fathers walked in. They will not know the sweat and blood these spiritual warriors sacrificed to deliver the Reformed faith to us. They will not know that the greatest battles in history were fought by faith and not by the sword. They will not know of the great debt they owe to the church of ages past for the blessed Reformed heritage they now possess.

When church friends hardly see one another during the week, their spiritual bonds of friendship will be very weak. I often questioned during the years of my schooling why Covenant young people had little else to talk about other than studies, school life, and the trivia of this world. Why were spiritual discussions amongst Covenant youths so rare? Why were doctrinal discussions only present during the weekly hour of catechism? Rarely do friendships like that of David and Jonathan exist in the church.

In an education system like Singapore's, where students are forced to devote excessive amounts of time to their studies and school activities, Covenant homes suffer. Family worship caves in to the high demands of the children's school timetable. Time for family bonding has to make way for academic pursuits. No wonder Covenant homes are spiritually weak. It must also be evident that public education is the channel by which the floods of worldliness rush into the church. An ungodly education drains the spiritual life out of our Covenant young and moulds them to become servants of Mammon. The ungodly education breeds covetousness in their hearts. It formulates materialism in our Covenant young, teaching them to seek the treasures of this earth rather those of heaven. Parents must be very careful not to allow public education to give their children an ungodly education.

Under the heavy influence of ungodly peers, our Covenant young are often tempted to follow after the ungodly ways of their friends. When we allow the wicked iron of ungodly peers to sharpen the countenance of our Covenant young, we must not be surprised when our children learn from them. We must not be surprised when our young people begin to speak, dress and behave like them. God is not

mocked when He warns His people to be spiritually separate from the ungodly.

If left unchecked, the long-term effects of such an education are not difficult to foresee. Covenant boys raised under this system are bound to be ambitious, career-minded men whose priorities to do not lie with the church and their families. Boys trained to be great leaders for the world will be weak leaders in the home and church. Covenant girls are lured into the evil trap, forsaking their homes to enter the workforce. It is alarming that the newspapers often heap praises upon women who are able to balance work and family life. Scripture knows nothing of this nonsense when it commands Covenant mothers to be keepers at home (Titus 2:5).

In the final analysis, an ungodly education produces spiritually impotent, doctrinally indifferent and ecclesiastically unconcerned children. This accounts for so much of the spiritual weakness present in the church today. How poignant and true are Pastor Ronald Hanko's words, "*Children who are taught in the unbelieving world and by the unbelieving world will seldom be a blessing to the church of Jesus Christ. Even if in time to come they do turn to the Lord, they will be beginners in the faith, having learned little or nothing of Christian doctrine and of the Christian life. And how few of them do turn from the way of the world!*" (Christian Education, <http://www.cprf.co.uk/pamphlets/christianeducation.htm>).

We as Covenant parents can do much to remove this needless suffering. We can—and must—give our children an education that is radically different—one that is based on Scripture alone, and experiences the joy of knowing God in every subject.



News from the Churches

UPDATE ON KOLKATA BY PASTOR ANDY LANNING

From 25 June to 2 July, the delegation of Elder Leong and Pastor Lanning visited Kolkata, India on behalf of CERC's Session. We worshipped with the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Fellowship of Kolkata on Sunday, and on the other days had several meetings with Emmanuel, Abhijit, and Anup.

One major purpose of the delegation was to organise the work between Singapore and Kolkata. The broadest organization has already been decided, because CERC, at the request of Emmanuel and others, has decided to oversee Emmanuel's work. This means that CERC is ultimately responsible, under Christ, for the work in Kolkata. However, that oversight has to be organised and implemented.

The delegation proposed to Emmanuel, Abhijit, and Anup that we form a committee called the *Kolkata Steering Committee*. This committee would be composed of three men from Singapore (the three men on the India Mission Committee) and three men from Kolkata (Emmanuel, Abhijit, and Anup). The Kolkata Steering Committee would be subject to CERC's Session, and it would monitor and discuss all of the issues related to the mission work in Kolkata. Meetings would be held regularly via Skype and would include a formal agenda and minutes. Pray that the Lord would use the means of the Kolkata Steering Committee to guide and organise the work in Kolkata.

The delegation gathered with the saints in Kolkata for worship on Sunday, 28th June. Most of the regular attendees were present, with the exception of one family that was sick. Before and after the service there were many questions, and the delegation was able to spend several hours discussing the faith with the saints. Emmanuel led the fellowship through a simple liturgy, with a few songs, the recitation of the Apostles' Creed, a couple of prayers, and a sermon. Elder Leong led the congregation in one of the prayers, and Pastor Lanning preached a sermon on Genesis 17:7.

In a separate meeting, the delegation read through CERC Session's Study of Baptism with the three brothers from Kolkata. They appreciated the work of the Session, and expressed agreement with the contents. We encouraged them to take the report and study it more carefully together in Kolkata, which they agreed to do.

The entire Fellowship expressed its gratitude to CERC for sending the delegation. Emmanuel and Sonali, Abhijit, and Anup in particular asked that their personal greetings be brought to CERC.



Prof. Gritters speaking at the Family Seminar



Newlyweds Aaron and Iva



Flying the kites high at our CK/CKS outing



Volleyball: one of the highlights of the annual Sports Day



Farewell dinner for our American guests - the Lentings and Van Der Noords

The CERC youth camp will be held from 16-19 Dec, with Pastor Andy Lanning speaking on the topic of "Revelations - Letters to the Churches".

Email the committee at ckckscamp2015@gmail.com for more details.

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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