

... are there labours that we consider to be beneath us, or do we only esteem some work and not others?

A Registry of God's Servants, by Chua Lee Yang

While our homes are places that we love to go to, God promises even better—a building of God, an house not made with hands. . .

Home, by Julia Ong

Persecutions are the result of living the life of a pilgrim. A pilgrim is different, and his conduct and way of life is noticed by those around him.

A Pilgrim's Path: Certainty in an Uncertain World, by Matthias Wee

Is your way dark, so that you are enduring things without understanding what God is doing and why your life is as it is? Certainly it is very often this way for the young Christian.

Joseph's Strength of Youth, by Pastor Rodney Kleyn



salt shakers
joel 3:16 matthew 5:16

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*Being confident of this very thing, that
he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it
until the day of Jesus Christ.*

PHILIPPIANS 1:6



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WELCOME TO THE 38TH ISSUE OF SALT SHAKERS!

Dear readers,

We thank God for a wonderful Church Camp in June where we had a blessed time of hearing the Word of God and having fellowship of the saints for a few days at a stretch. Church Camps and Youth Camps are never long enough, and that is a good thing (if for the right reasons), because if you cannot spend four days with your church friends, how can you expect to go through eternity with them?! But more than that, it is the presence of God that we so enjoy, such that we desire and long for it more and more each day—and when it is time to go back to our earthly lives, we have to snap out of this temporal bliss and head back to the lives we normally lead.

And no, it probably is not just any normal life. It is a life of difficulty, trials, afflictions, and tears. It is a life of temptation, war, weakness, and sin. Everything that would distract us so that our eyes would be removed from our loving Saviour seems to loom larger and larger. We cannot help but desire to stay. What blessedness to be able to hear our Shepherd's voice throughout each day. What blessedness to dwell with those who are called by His name. We feel in our hearts with the Psalmist, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee." We long for heaven, and we desire to be Home.

But, do not deny the Potter's hand upon us. Though painful at times, His purpose and plan is sure in everything He places in our lives. Because our salvation will not fail, so also the work of sanctification in our lives will surely come to pass through the sovereign will of the Potter. So though we long for Heaven and desire our God, yet we humbly submit to His will that we should be placed in our lives and everything that comes with it for our good and sanctification.

There is another reason why we have a place yet on this earth, and it is so that we may declare all the works of our great God. So, while the winds and the waves cannot cause you to drown, we must be careful to never let the winds and the waves drown the voice of our testimony! With each burden, God is faithful to give us the grace necessary to go through it. May our hearts be filled with thanksgiving whenever we look back on our journey and see the Lord's mercy displayed. May we then respond in praise to make known the wisdom and power of God in all His works.

God bless your reading of this Issue, and remember, *pass the salt!*

Christ Regardless, paul

A Registry of God's Servants

>> Chua Lee Yang



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

When we come across long lists of names and genealogies in the Bible, we are often tempted to glance or skip over them. Such a list is found in Nehemiah 3 where we have a chapter dedicated to naming the builders of the walls of Jerusalem. However, if we skipped over Nehemiah 3, we would have missed out on a very precious chapter of Scripture. In your devotions this week, make it a point to read this passage. Who were these people and what did they do? Why is it important for us to know about them? What comfort does this list hold for us? Let us examine these questions.

In Nehemiah 1-2, Nehemiah learns that the Jews who had returned to Jerusalem were in a sorry state. They were “in great affliction and reproach” and the walls remained in ruins and the gates burned. Grieved, Nehemiah prays to God for the forgiveness and deliverance of the people. He seeks, and is granted a commission by Artaxerxes the king, to whom he was cupbearer, to rebuild Jerusalem.

Arriving at Jerusalem, Nehemiah rests for three days, surveys the ruins, and presently calls the people to the work. Seeing the necessity and opportunity for the work, God moved them to respond: “Let us rise up and build.”

What follows is a description of the work and who was appointed to it. Starting at the Sheep Gate, the work goes full circle, to the Fish Gate, the Old Gate, the Valley Gate, the Dung Gate, the Fountain Gate, the Water Gate, the Horse Gate, the East Gate, the Muster Gate, and ending back at the Sheep Gate. From the chapter, we can learn a number of things about the people who worked on the wall.

First, the builders were of diverse backgrounds. There was the high priest and his brethren, rulers of various towns and common folk (who in the Tekoites case, came to the work even when their nobles refused). There were goldsmiths, apothecaries, and merchants. Not only men but also women came to the work, and we read in verse 12 that the daughters of Shallum repaired along with their fathers. We also see a hint of the catholicity of the later New Testament church—the men of Gibeon were found working at the wall, people who were not historical children of Abraham but who God grafted into Israel (Joshua 9-10). The work of the Church brooks no respect of persons. Yet we find that though they are so apparently disparate, they are unified in the work; they built side by side, not each according to their own way

and desire, but in such a way that the whole wall could be joined in one congruent work.

Second, we can see that they were wholly devoted to the work. In relation to the diversity mentioned above, we find that the builders came from many different towns and cities. Leaving their homes and families, their farms and businesses; the people realised that the work was so important that it needed to take precedence over their daily routine. They did not say, “It is too far away! That is a job for those who live nearer”, or “My business or my farm needs me; maybe next time.” As many were not inhabitants of Jerusalem, they had little to gain personally from the rebuilding of the city’s defences; but they recognised that the work was more important than their own personal interests. At tremendous personal sacrifice, the

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people came to the work on the wall.

Third, the work itself was diverse, but the people worked willingly at their appointed stations, whatever they were. Some, like the Tekoites, whose rulers declined to come to the work, were zealous and able enough that when their piece was done, they repaired another part as well, as did Meremoth the son of Urijah. Although all the work was arduous, some builders had the appointment to build at relatively notable and beautiful places, like the various towers and the pool of Siloah. But what about the other parts of the wall? What about places like the Dung Gate? The Dung Gate was the way by which all of the sewage and rubbish of Jerusalem was taken out, not a glorious but certainly a smelly place to be. It might not have been to us a particularly desirable section to be allotted.

In our own lives as members in God's church, are there labours that we consider to be beneath us, or do we only esteem some work and not others? When we think of the work of the church, do we remember only those who serve in the offices and on prominent committees, but fail to recall those who clean the common areas, sanctuary and toilets of the church premises faithfully during the week, every week? In Nehemiah 3, we find that the lowly work of the repairing of the Dung Gate was no obstacle to Malchiah the son of Rechab, the ruler of part of Beth-haccerem. When called upon for that work, he said to Nehemiah, “Set my name down here; I will build where the Lord requires,”

Fourth, in the names of the builders listed, we can observe some of the intense spiritual struggles that attended the work in their personal lives. In Nehemiah 3:30, a certain Meshullam, the son of Berechiah is mentioned building the wall. Later in the book, in Nehemiah 6:18, we find that this same Meshullam's daughter was married to Johanan, the son of the enemy, Tobiah. While Meshullam worked at the walls of Jerusalem, members of his own family were fiercely opposing the work and doing their best to ensure it failed—his, was a house divided.

We, too, sometimes see this in our own lives. The builders of the wall were not distant and mythical people granted extraordinary faith or powers to build the wall amidst fierce opposition. They were ordinary men and women like us, struggling with the same sins, fears and doubts, and facing the same troubles in their families and personal lives. The faith that works in us was the same faith that ran through the builders—the same faith that

strengthened Abraham, David and all other famous saints and pilgrims. And by the grace of God, in spite of great personal troubles, Meshullam's name is found written in this registry of God's servants who faithfully attended to the repairing.

Though at first sight it looks like just another long list of names, yet there are valuable truths for us to observe and consider here in Nehemiah 3. I hope that as we consider this text together in this article, something will strike us as to why this chapter is so precious to the children of God. Nehemiah 3 is a registry of Christians who built the wall of Jerusalem, and if you search closely, you will find your own name written there. No, not in Nehemiah 3 itself, because Nehemiah 3 is but a small excerpt of the true book in which all the names of those who have faithfully attended to the building of the walls of the true, spiritual church through all the ages are carefully written. Not in their own strength, but by the grace of God alone, these faithful men and women built the wall of Jerusalem. If we are true servants of Jehovah and build faithfully in the church, our names will never be blotted out from this registry.

What is our response to the call of our leader—not Nehemiah, but Christ Himself—who calls: “Come, let us build up the walls of Jerusalem”? Is our work in the church marked by the unity and zeal of the builders in Nehemiah's day, or by strife, envy, backbiting, carelessness and slothfulness? How are you and I building in the Church of Christ?

And finally, we see that the builders are used by God to perform a great and shocking work. “*So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day of the*

month Elul, in fifty and two days. And it came to pass, that when all our enemies heard thereof, and all the heathen that were about us saw these things, that they were much cast down in their own eyes, for they perceived that this work was wrought of God.” (Nehemiah 6:15-16) In spite of great obstacles to the work, the wall building project did not fail, but was in fact completed in such a speed that it was clear even to the enemies that God’s hand was in it,

and they were utterly defeated by the mere witnessing of its completion.

So shall it be, when our Lord returns again on the clouds of glory, when the work of the Church on this earth has been completed. Satan and all the wicked who presently scorn and persecute the Church and her builders will see her marvellous glory. In spite of the sinfulness and failures of her members, her works are made perfect

by the blood of the Lamb—and the work is truly *wrought of God*. That is the comfort of Nehemiah 3 for us—our works are sanctified and wrought by God alone, and our names are forever written in the registry of God’s servants. May God thus give us the grace to work faithfully in the building of His Church.

Come, let us build!

SCRIPTURE’S COVENANT YOUTH (I)

>> Prof. Hanko



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Introduction

The reason for this new series of articles is a suggestion by the staff that I write on this subject. I asked the staff whether they had any suggestions for a new series. They suggested the title that appears at the head of this article.

The young people are, under God’s blessing, producing an excellent magazine; I am more than happy to be a part of the writing staff.

The series that was suggested is also, in my judgment, an excellent one. Apparently, the staff have taken note of the fact that Scripture frequently refers to children and young people who were given—by God—important work to do and were asked to represent God’s cause in the world in extraordinary ways.

People such as Isaac, Joseph, Samuel, and Daniel come to mind. Though they were children or youths, they were strong in faith and courageous in their calling to be faithful to God.

Paul writes to the Corinthians, after describing a small part of the history of the nation of Israel, “Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of

the world are come” (1 Corinthians 10:11).

Hebrews 12:1 teaches us the same truth, only in a slightly different way. It speaks of the saints of the Old Testament as men and women of faith who are packed into the stands of a huge arena. On the ground of this arena is a long-distance track on which can be found the saints of the New Testament who are running a long-distance race. The saints in the stands who have already run the race and are now in heaven, are cheering on the saints who are now running, to encourage them and urge them on to faithfulness. “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which does so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.”

This is a beautiful and urgent text that could very well serve as a theme for

one of your youth camps.

You are yourselves children and youth who are running the race set before you. There are children and youths in the stands who have finished the race and are now in heaven. They are cheering you on. You can hear their cheers coming to you from the pages of the Old Testament Scriptures. They cheer you on by telling you of the things that were asked of them as they ran the race. They tell you of how difficult the race is; they tell you of their weariness, their sin, their terror at the thought of their enemies. They tell you that they were but children and young people. But they tell you that, in spite of their young age, they were faithful, and though they were ready to drop from weariness, they kept going, because they looked “to Jesus the author and finisher of their faith, who for the joy that was set before him endure the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2).

All those of whom Scripture speaks were Covenant children and youths. They received Covenant instruction, bore the sign of the Covenant and were called by God to live the antithesis as Covenant children, forsaking the world and serving God in the place God had given them in His church. They were all like you—and you like them. They had the same sins that you do. They had the same calling you have. You have a place in God’s Covenant as they did. You have this calling, not in the mighty deeds of making the world Christ’s kingdom, but in the day-to-day struggle to serve the Lord in our own place in life. They have much to teach us.

One more word about them. Sometimes the Bible does not say very much about them, and we have to imagine how they showed their willingness to run the race by the suggestions that Scripture does give us. An example of such a one is Isaac. Sometimes, while they showed their spiritual strength when they were still

very small, they showed what it meant for the future that they ran the race when they were young.

But they are all there to be our examples and for our instruction. To hear what they have to say to you is exciting. Are you ready to listen to them as they cheer us on in our own race?

Mrs Hanko and I have drawn up a tentative list of those of whom I am thinking about writing. I will include it at the end of this article. There may be names in the list that will be dropped; there may also be children or young people who should be included. Please read the list and let me know what changes you think should be made in the list.

Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Samuel, David, Ahimaaz, Naaman’s wife’s slave, Joash, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, Jeremiah, John the Baptist...

Please let me know!

Charismaticism (IV): Ongoing Prophecy

>> Pastor Angus Stewart



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Having surveyed the history and precursors of modern renewalism (Pentecostalism, Charismaticism and Neo-Charismaticism) and discussed two major aberrations of this movement (the baptism with the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues), we now come to prophecy. By prophecy, renewalists are not simply referring to quotations from the Bible

or explanations and applications of Scripture. By prophecy, Pentecostals, Charismatics, and Neo-Charismatics mean utterances in the post-apostolic era which they claim are direct revelations from God. So what should Christians, and especially Reformed believers, make of all this? Three tests regarding ongoing prophecy are set forth below, as well as the answers to two evasions.

Test 1

Test one involves asking, and getting answers to, these sorts of questions: Have you heard teaching by a modern prophet which is contrary to the Bible's teaching? Do renewalist prophecies contain false predictions? Do you know of a prophecy which was contradicted by events? One brother I know asked these questions to many renewalists and all of the people with whom he spoke said, "Yes!" What a damning indictment!

David Wilkerson, an Anglican Charismatic, predicted in 1972 that within the next twelve months the Berlin Wall would fall. But it fell 17 years later, in 1989! What did the church do in that instance? What did the church do in the many other instances where renewalist predictions have been proven false? If not in all cases, at least in the vast majority of them, Pentecostal and Charismatic congregations do absolutely nothing by way of church discipline. So much for the third mark of a true church (*Belgic Confession 29*)!

Deuteronomy 18:22 declares, "When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him." Regarding a prophet who makes a prediction which does not happen, "that prophet shall die" (v. 20). 1 Corinthians 5 tells us that the New Testament equivalent is excommunication. Has anyone heard of a Pentecostal being excommunicated because his or her prophecies were not fulfilled? Perhaps such a thing occasionally happens but if so it is exceedingly rare!

The Kansas City Prophets maintain that, if two-thirds of their prophecies

come true, that is "pretty good", for that is a lot higher than it has ever been up until then! All the Kansas City Prophets have admitted that they have made predictions which did not come to pass. The Charismatic John White, who prophesied that he was going to live but subsequently died, said that, since we are all human beings, modern prophets will make mistakes in their predictions (even though God is speaking through them)!

Do you know how many false prophecies it takes to reveal a person as a false prophet? One! Just one! Anyone who utters a single false prediction in God's name and remains impenitent should be excommunicated as a liar and a false prophet.

Test 2

Imagine a Pentecostal prophet who makes a prediction that actually happens. However, the one who predicted it teaches false doctrine. How do we evaluate such a thing?

Deuteronomy 13:1-5 deals with this and so provides us with our second test. Verse 1 speaks of a prophet who performs "a sign or a wonder" which comes to pass (v. 2). But this prophet also teaches false doctrine (v. 2). Even though his sign or wonder or prediction came to pass, he too is to be put to death as a false prophet (v. 5) or, in New Testament terms, excommunicated.

Deuteronomy 13 explains that God's purpose in all this is to test His professing people. If you really love God with all your heart and keep His commandments, even though someone does wonderful signs, because he teaches false doctrine, you must renounce him and excommunicate him (vv. 3-5).

If tomorrow morning's newspapers

carry accounts of remarkable prognostications by the Pentecostals that have been fulfilled—let us say, the nation's capital is destroyed by an earthquake and prophets from a Pentecostal assembly had predicted this—we still would not receive them as Christ's messengers. Why? Because mixed in with their proclamations comes Arminian free-willism and other false doctrine. God would thereby be testing you: "Do you love me? Do you love the truth? Or are you more interested in the signs and wonders of a false church?"

Test 3

To go further, here is a third test. Let us say, for sake of argument, that there is a man who claims to be a Christian prophet and who makes predictions that always come to pass and who teaches orthodox doctrines. What would you do then? You ought to remember Ephesians 2:20, which states that "the apostles and prophets" are "the foundation" of Christ's church. This foundation was laid in the first century and, being a foundation, can never again be re-laid or augmented! The doctrine of the apostles and prophets, the foundation, is found in the complete, sufficient, inerrant and infallible Word of God.

Therefore, whether or not an extra-biblical prediction comes to pass, and whether or not their other doctrines are orthodox, any person who claims to be a prophet who receives direct revelation from the Lord is, by definition, a liar and a false prophet. Why? Because God is no longer giving direct revelation, since He has already laid the foundation of His church in the Holy Scriptures He delivered by the apostles and prophets whom He sent almost 2,000 years ago!

Two Evasions

There are two main attempts to wriggle out of this. The first evasion is the claim that there are two types of prophecy: inerrant and infallible prophecy found in the Bible, and fallible and errant modern prophecy which can and does include mistakes. This is the teaching of Wayne Grudem, amongst others.

This ought to strike you as a wretched argument, one to which the renewalists have been driven simply because they know (and practically everybody else knows) that there are numerous failed prophecies in the Pentecostal, Charismatic, and Neo-Charismatic movements. Direct revelation from God is, by definition, authoritative, inerrant and infallible, for He is the God of truth who “cannot lie” (Titus 1:2), unlike the renewalist prophets and their apologists.

The second evasion—and this one is increasingly popular—is that God speaks today to unevangelized heathen (especially, it would appear, to Muslims) by dreams or visions. A number of former Muslims have said that Christ appeared to them in their Islamic lands in a dream or vision and told them to go to such and such a place to hear God’s Word from such and such a church or person.

There are even a number of Presbyterian and Reformed people who accept their claims. For some of these Protestants, this is the start of their own descent to Pentecostalism or Charismaticism, while for others, at the very least, it weakens their grasp of the truth of the sufficiency of Scripture and their opposition to the heresy of ongoing revelation.

Setting aside questions about the sort of church or Christian (whether true

or false) these Muslims went to, and to what sort of Jesus they were converted (whether the true Christ or a false Christ), we deny that God gives direct revelation through dreams or visions, even to unevangelized heathen, even in Islamic countries. We do this because receiving a revelatory dream or vision from God, especially one that does not declare divine judgment upon the recipient (cf. Daniel 2; 4), constitutes a person as a prophet.

A prophet has two aspects to his office. First, he receives direct revelation from God and, second, he passes it on to the people. But the extraordinary office of a prophet has ceased since it was a temporary office involved in the laying of the foundation of the New Testament church (Ephesians 2:20). Today, instead, we have the ordinary office of prophet included in the office of believer. This is a permanent office given to all Christians, in which we search the Scriptures and by the Spirit know the mind of Jesus Christ, and then speak of Him to others.

What we need today is not false prophets or false prophecies but the proper exercise of the believer’s office as prophet, so that he hears, loves, obeys and witnesses of Jesus Christ, as He is set forth in Scripture and through the faithful preaching of His gospel by true ministers in their office of pastor or teacher. Where love for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3) is lost, there is a congregation or an individual wide open to renewalism. Where love for God, His Christ and His Word is strong, the church is based solidly on the only true foundation and so is totally uninterested in the siren song of false prophets and ongoing prophecy!

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The office of believers is the most important office in the church, because finally, the entire rule in the church can be traced back to the office of believers. ”

HOME

>> Julia Ong



Julia Ong is a confessing young adult in CERC.

“I think you should spend more time at home.”

Have you heard that line before? I have heard it a few times but have paid little notice to how important it is to spend more time at home. As I prepare to move out of the home I have spent 26 years in, the fruit of my reflection is that we ought to be thankful for our homes and spend more time at home.

We Have Duties at Home

Do you have any household chores that you are assigned to do? How much do you contribute to the daily life of your home? Simple tasks like washing the dishes, boiling water, and folding the clothes are tangible ways in which we contribute.

As we grow and take up responsibilities of a daughter or son, a grandchild or a sibling, the intangible aspect of the calling as outlined in Ephesians 5-6 is just as important. Interestingly, in each day of our lives, one often concurrently plays multiple roles. We should take time to review how we act towards the other members of our family and align it to what the Bible

describes.

Proverbs 24:3-4 reads, “Through wisdom is an house builded; and by understanding it is established: And by knowledge shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches”. This is a beautiful verse! Indeed, the wisdom that comes from learning one’s place as a member of our God-given family and the exercise of understanding and knowledge of what God instructs us about treating each other is part of “home building”.

Home Is Where Family Is

It is a great blessing to come home each day after school since Primary School to see my mum at home and talk to her about my day to the detail of what I ate for recess break. As the hours at school got longer and the school life gave way to work life, such precious foundations built in a mother-daughter relationship last till today.

Grandparents who stay with us often need our care and support. Learning *Teochew* (a local dialect) entirely from contact with my grandmother, I have heard the many stories of her growing up experiences and how they are vastly different from mine. Embracing her different needs has also taught me how to empathise better with my patients, in particular understanding how mobility becomes difficult and simple day to day tasks require assistance.

Some do not have the blessing of always being with family at home. God may

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Let us also build up treasures in heaven—our eternal home—which is far better and far more glorious than this earthly habitation.

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have in His mercy taken our loved ones to glory, in His will given us a single parent family, or blessed us with life as a single. Yet even among the remnant sojourners and the church militant do we have a semblance of home, and the fellowship in the Lord’s house can be likened to that of a family.

We also ought to be thankful for the peace and security that Singapore affords. We have a safe place to worship and can have church activities in public areas. In our affluent society, any breaks from work and long weekends are immediately taken as opportunities to fly overseas. Holidays are eye opening and can be very refreshing, but there

sure are good breaks that we can take while staying in Singapore as well! It is a blessed thing to have a safe home with family, and Luke 9:58 mentions that even the foxes have their holes and the birds their nests and it is in God's providence that we have shelter and a place to call home.

Those Who Are Not At Home

I know many friends who have stayed overseas for a while, be it while on an overseas exchange programme or for a few years away from home for studies. Many of us deem it a great opportunity to go away for perceived "better education" and "better opportunities" thereafter; but as I have learnt, the opportunity cost is high.

One of my friends experienced severe depression and had to take a gap year off school; others had difficult decisions

to make when their loved ones fell sick while they were overseas—the opportunities away from home had come at a cost and they missed home! Worse yet, there were more than a handful who picked up habits that started out "for the experience" and also subsequently strayed from God. The Bible in Habakkuk 2:5 describes the man who does not keep at home as one who "transgresseth by wine" and "is a proud man".

There are times when we would long to be at home and I immediately recall the domestic helpers in our midst when I think of this point. How they would long to be at home instead of working overseas to bring in the dough! Let us be thankful that we have a home to go back to each day, with family and safety. Furthermore, we can be open

to sharing our blessings with others, to show brotherly love and hospitality even to strangers as we are exhorted to do in Hebrews 13:2.

This is Not Our Ultimate Home

Despite all the creature comforts of home that we enjoy, 1 Corinthians 4:11 mentions that we hunger and thirst, and have no certain dwelling place. How can this be? While our homes are places that we love to go to, God promises even better—a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens (2 Corinthians 5:1). There is a dwelling place for us in "Father's house", and Christ goes before us to prepare us a place. Let us also build up treasures in heaven—our eternal home—which is far better and far more glorious than this earthly habitation.

OUR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION: A COVENANT NECESSITY (VIII) — OBJECTIONS ANSWERED

>> Aaron Lim



Aaron Lim is a confessing young adult in CERC.

Weighty objections have been laid against the idea of a Christian education in Singapore. While it may be true that circumstances in this land make it more difficult to give our children a Covenant education, it only means that we as Covenant parents must be willing to make greater sacrifices for this cause. We do not let the situations in life dictate our Christian walk. Scripture, to which our consciences are bound to, must always be our binding principle.

Objection: A Christian education will raise socially inadequate children. Christian education excessively

shelters our children from the world, producing socially awkward adults.

The concern is valid in that if we place our children in a Christian environment throughout their childhood years, they will not know what the world is really like. They will be ignorant of how the world functions and how to interact with their ungodly colleagues in the workplace when they are of age.

Covenant parents must be assured that this will not be true. A Covenant education that has its basis in Scripture teaches our children true

wisdom—how to walk circumspectly and purposefully according to the station and calling God gives to them. Wisdom will enable our children to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves in the midst of this world (Matthew 10:16).

We are not raising Covenant seed to integrate them into society. From a biblical viewpoint, God's people will always be social outcasts. They are the social pariahs because they are extremely different from the people of this world. They do not share the same principles, goals, and ideals in life. God's people will always be fools in the eyes of this world, but precious and dear to Him. They are preparing to live in the heavenly kingdom.

Dreadful will be the day when our children are comfortable in this world. The day they find themselves at ease with this world is the day they lose their identity as Covenant children. They become comfortable with pursuing the world's ideals and living its philosophies. That day signals the end of the antithesis between God's

children and His enemies.

We are raising our children for war with the enemy. Scripture warns that persecution will always face God's people, and increase in measure as the return of Christ draws nearer. A solid Christian education, contrary to an ungodly and worldly one, prepares them well for this warfare.

Objection: Christian education diminishes our children's Christian witness to the unbelieving world.

The objection stems from the idea that if we shelter our children by giving them a Covenant education, they cannot be effective witnesses for Christ, especially while at school.

It is very unwise to think that our young children can be effective witnesses when their spiritual faculties are not properly developed yet. Pastor Ronald Hanko writes:

"It is especially important for our children, who are compared in Psalm 128 to young olive plants, to be protected from evil influences. No young plant can be immediately exposed to the elements

and to the full heat of the sun and be expected to live. Nurture (Ephesians 6:4) is not exposure" (Christian Education, <http://www.cprf.co.uk/pamphlets/christianeducation.htm>).

Nature itself teaches us this principle. No mother hen allows her young to wander around on their own. Turtles which hatch from the beaches are very quickly preyed upon as they make their way to sea on their own. Lambs are easiest prey for wolves in the sheepfold.

Christ would not allow His lambs to fight the fierce battles of faith until they have been properly trained and equipped with the necessary spiritual armoury. While the calling of the Christian is to reprove the world and to shine forth as a light in the midst of darkness, he must receive a thorough and solid training before he can perform his calling effectively. One must not only have strength, but also much training and practice in order to wield a sword effectively, along with the other weapons of war described in Ephesians 6:13-17.

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Desiring a Good Work

>> Prof. Dysktra



Prof. Russell Dykstra was ordained and installed as a minister of the Protestant Reformed Churches of America in 1986. Ten years later, he was appointed as Professor of Church History and New Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Seminary. He has been to Singapore and visited CERC numerous times.

1 Timothy 3:1 This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.

In 1 Timothy 3, the Apostle Paul begins his instruction on the special offices in the church, that is, the offices of Elder, Deacon, and Minister of the Word. This instruction is in keeping with Paul's purpose for writing to Timothy, Paul's former "seminary student" and currently the Pastor of the church in Ephesus. According to 1 Timothy 3:15, the Holy Spirit's theme in this inspired letter is: "Proper behaviour in the Church of God". Essential to this proper behaviour is the work of the office-bearers.

It is understandable that the Spirit gives this instruction, for the special offices are the means Christ uses to maintain and bless His church. This being the case, it is vitally important that these

offices function properly. Eventually all three offices are discussed: Elders in chapter 3 with some additional instruction in chapter 5; Deacons in chapters 3, and in chapter 5, the women who assist the Deacons; and Ministers of the Word in chapter 4.

In chapter three verse one, Paul turns to the office of Elder, called here a "Bishop." The office of Elder has lost much of its vigour and value in the church since the time of the Reformation. Even in many Reformed churches the office is not always appreciated. The duties of the office are neglected and the office itself continues to fade away, even ceasing to function in some churches.

The causes for this lamentable decline are many. Regrettably, much of the cause is encroachment on the office by Ministers who have broadened the scope of their duties, and taken some of the authority from the Elders. In many instances, perhaps, Elders have allowed this to happen by failing to perform the duties of the office, and they are accountable before God for their failure. But all too often, Ministers have grabbed for more and more, and robbed the Elders' seat of its function and authority.

But there are other causes for the decline. Some of it is simply the spirit of the age—independentism and the anti-authority attitude. The thinking is: "I can do as I please. No Elder in church will tell me what I must do or

may not do. Mind your own business." I recall, many years ago, the reaction of someone from a church not Reformed to my description of family visitation. The man was simply astonished that Elders and Ministers could come into our home, ask questions, and admonish us if they believed we were doing wrong!

Over the years, some of the decline is the result of men being elected into office who lack the qualifications, that is, men who are spiritually unfit to be Elders. Such men cannot, or will not perform the duties that the office requires. And finally, it also happens that Elders do not know what the duties of the Elder are. Much of what Scripture requires has been lost. Obviously if the men in the office do not know what their duties are, they will not be able to perform them.

This is terribly serious for the church. From a practical point of view, some of these trends affect us. To the extent that they do, the congregation suffers spiritually. The strength of the congregation can truly be measured by the strength of the Elders. For this reason, it is good that we consider and take to heart the instruction of 1 Timothy 3:1 on the office of Elder.

The goal of these articles is to draw out an important point of the Apostle—desiring the office of an Elder is a good desire. Obviously, it is important to understand what kind of desire this is, and why a believing man should desire to be an Elder. With our natural

sinfulness, it is easy to desire the office wrongfully, and to have evil motives and expectations. But God's Word tells us that Elder's work is a good work and something to be desired. That being the case, if men have that desire, they will prepare themselves for the office so that they are spiritually equipped in the event that God calls them to serve in the office.

The plan is to examine the office of Elder first of all. We need to understand the place and purpose of the office. Then we will consider why the Spirit calls it a good work. That in turn will make plain what makes the office a desirable thing. In the process we will discuss what preparations a man should seek who has the proper, biblical desire for the office of Elder, and really, any office in the church of God.

A Special Office

Notice that we speak of a special office in the church. We do that to distinguish these offices from the office of all believers. The great Reformation of the 1500s re-established this office of believer in the church. The Reformers emphasised the teaching of Scripture that every Christian has the Spirit of Christ and is a prophet, priest and king. The Heidelberg Catechism teaches this in Lord's Day 12, Q. & A. 32: But why art thou called a Christian? Thus while every Christian holds this office of believer, some in the congregation also hold the particular office of Elder, Minister, or Deacon.

That raises the question: What is an office in the church? First, it is a position to which one is appointed. No one takes an office to himself. This is true even of offices in the governments of the nations. In America and Singapore, a man does

not take an office by force; he runs for an office, seeking it and asking the voters to put him into office. But he must be voted in, or in some offices, be appointed by the President or some government official.

Likewise, with the offices in the church, men are appointed to them. But the unique thing here is, their appointment comes from God, through Christ. God must appoint because the church office is a position in which the office-bearer represents God Himself. God has a work that He determines to do through the office-bearer. The office-bearer stands as a representative of God with the authority to speak and act in His Name.

Church office cannot be understood separate from Christ, for He is the chief office-bearer of God. Christ is ordained by God from eternity to be *the* representative of God. While God is spirit, and thus cannot be seen, His chosen representative is visible and, in the office of Mediator of the Covenant, He represents God. Again, the Heidelberg Catechism (Lord's Day 12, Q. & A. 31) explains that the Mediator is called Christ, which means Anointed, because He has been ordained of God and anointed by the Spirit to be our chief prophet or teacher, our only high priest, and our eternal king. Christ's one office (Mediator) has those three aspects.

Christ was eternally chosen by God to fill this three-fold office of Mediator, officially *appointed* to this position, and *qualified* by the Spirit. The same is true of the men in the church who are selected to these offices. Recall that in these articles we focus especially on the office of Elder because 1 Timothy 3:1 speaks particularly of this office.

That Elders are appointed by God is

evident from history. First, in the Old Testament, Elders were found in Israel from the beginning of her history as a nation. These Elders were older men, who, because of their age and position, became leaders in their respective families and tribes. Already at the time of Israel's bondage in Egypt, God instructed Moses to "gather the Elders of Israel together" to tell them the Word God had spoken to him. And those Elders were to accompany Moses to the presence of Pharaoh (Exodus 3:16, 18).

In the wilderness, some of these men received an official appointment to the office of Elder. This came at the advice of Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, who witnessed Moses judging daily from morning to night, as the people came to him with matters requiring adjudication. At that time Moses selected the necessary men to assist in this work (Exodus 18). God called Moses and seventy of the Elders of Israel to draw near to Him at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19). And still later, God told Moses to choose seventy men to whom God gave the Spirit, that they might share Moses' burden of governing the people (Numbers 11).

Notice that the very term "Elder" points to one who is qualified by a certain amount of experience in the life of the church. Think of the kind of men that Moses would have sought to assist him as Elders—men of experience, men respected for their spirituality and wisdom. There is continuity between the Old and New Testament. That need for experience and wisdom is one reason why the Apostle later instructs Timothy not to place in the office a novice—someone who is a recent convert to the faith or has recently joined a Reformed church.



With our natural sinfulness, it is easy to desire the office wrongfully, and to have evil motives and expectations. But God's Word tells us that Elder's work is a good work and something to be desired.



The office of ruling was distinct from the other two offices. In the Old Testament the position of king was clearly distinct from the position of prophet and of priest. King David ruled in the Name of God and for His glory. He was commanded to maintain God's law and truth. As king, he also fought the Lord's battles, defended the land and the people, which was God's heritage. The New Testament office of Elder would one day replace the position of king.

Christ was pictured in these Old Testament types and therefore He is the fulfilment. The Old Testament prophecy pointed to Christ as ruler. Matthew (2:6) quotes the prophet Micah (5:2) that the Messiah will be "Governor, that shall rule my people Israel." Gabriel announced to Mary about her son that "the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:32, 33). After Jesus fought the powers of Satan to the death, and won, God exalted Jesus to be the head over all things to the church (Ephesians 1:21, 22). Jesus Christ is king of His Church!

However, Christ—God's visible representative—is now physically in heaven. Christ determined to have visible representatives of Him, men who will perform the work of Christ

as prophet, priest and king. He wills that there be Elders in the church who will perform the work of king. The Elder will be a clearer manifestation of Christ's kingly office than the Old Testament types.

The office of Elder developed naturally in the New Testament church. It was evident that the Apostles had authority to rule in the church. Yet their office was temporary. The history of the church recorded in Acts indicates that the office of Elder was found very early. When the church in Antioch heard of a great famine coming upon Jerusalem, "the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: Which also they did, and sent it to the Elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul" (Acts 11:29, 30). In harmony with this is the fact that in their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas did not return to Antioch until "they had ordained them Elders in every church" (Acts 14:23).

The point is that the history of the church clearly shows that God ordained the office of Elder. This history is important because it is the means by which God reveals His will for the church. We must remember that Christ did not give His church a finished church order. Nor does the Bible contain a verse that states: "In the church of Jesus Christ are to be

three offices, namely, Elder, Deacon, and Minister." Rather, just as with doctrines, so with church government, the church must search the Scriptures and draw out the will of Christ and the principles of church government.

One could demonstrate that the offices of Deacon and Minister replaced the OT priest and king, respectively, but we limit our discussion to the office of Elder. Still, since all three are part of the once office of Jesus Christ, all three offices involve a "good work."

This introduction to the office is needed to see why it is a good work, which we plan to consider in the next article, the Lord willing. It should be clear from what we have said thus far, that the "good" character of the work is due to the fact that the office is from God. It is His work.

Cancer

>> Koh Zong Jie



Zong Jie Koh is a confessing young adult in CERC.

It would not be an understatement to describe cancer as *the* disease of our time. In his thoroughly insightful book, author and physician Siddhartha Mukherjee had even gone to the extent of christening it as the “Emperor of All Maladies”. With an estimated 1 in 4 risk of a person developing cancer, it would be surprising to find an individual who has been spared from the reaches of cancer in some form or another; whether it be a relative or friend who is stricken, or oneself being a victim of the disease. In this exposition, we will explore the basis of cancer from a Christian perspective and examine what it means for a believer to live with cancer.

The term ‘cancer’ is derived from the Greek word ‘*karcinos*’ which in fact refers to a crab or crayfish. It was first coined by Hippocrates, having described the appearance of a cut tumour as appearing crab-like. In essence, all cancerous lesions begin with a single cell division that has gone awry, a result of genetic mutations which may be inherited

or induced by external agents such as cigarette smoke. Normal cell division is in fact a very tightly controlled and well-oiled process in our body. There are multiple checkpoints and safety mechanisms to prevent mutations from occurring. To put things in perspective, the development of a foetus also begins with the division of a single cell and these divisions continue till the day we die. Yet, what is frightening about cancer is its ability to mimic normal cells, dodge termination by our immunity’s gatekeepers and take over cellular mechanisms of division for its own survivability, and growing at exponential rates to quickly overwhelm the body.

As Christians, we believe that all diseases are a consequence of the fall of man into sin and it is no different for cancer. Romans 5:12 states, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” Yet what does set cancer apart from other diseases is the striking spiritual symbolism that can be found in its unique characteristics.

First, the development of cancer in an individual parallels the fall of man into sin. Like man, whom God had created in “His own image” (Genesis 1:27), cancer cells begin as copies of our very own cells, identical down to the molecule. Then, just as Adam and Eve fell into temptation by way of the serpent and desired to take God’s place, cancer cells mimic the functions of

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normal cells, rising in rebellion to war against and seek to overwhelm their origin.

Second, fallen man is obsessed with self—self-preservation, self-gratification, and self-fulfilment—and this is similarly a key feature in the behaviour of cancer cells. Cancer cells deprive neighbouring normal cells of their blood supply and oxygen by invading them with its own network of blood vessels, literally suffocating normal cells as they themselves grow, divide, and conquer.

Last, like sin, cancer cells are aggressive,



Even through the pain and suffering, an elect child of God may take great comfort in this truth that God is sovereign over all things and has a perfect plan for His people.



pervasive and devious. Just as sin and temptation have spread to the ends of the world, through the works of depraved man, cancer cells are able to pass through blood vessels and lymphatic fluid to settle in distant organs, forming satellite sites for further growth and devastation. Additionally, just as sin develops over time in order to appear acceptable and even beneficial to mankind (consider the sinfulness of modern media), cancer cells are able to mutate and adapt to evade our body's own immune system and develop resistance to medical drugs. Cancer cells are also able to lie dormant and undetectable for years, just as the seed of sin can be planted without suspicion.

In many ways, cancer as a disease appears to have a mind of its own, a sinister mind that parallels that of the devil, as he seeks to spread sin throughout the world and destroy God's people, much like a vile tumour that grows and spirals beyond control. It is this remarkable parallelism that draws one to believe that God's purpose in allowing cancer to exist in this world is not simply a punishment for our sinful nature but also a revelation to His people. Patients and their loved ones face immense sorrow and wrath upon knowing that they are stricken by cancer, as their own body-cells rise in rebellion, drawing away their strength and vitality day by day. With that in mind, consider how much deeper God's grief and sorrow

must be, having witnessed His own creation rise in rebellion, and spread and grow in unrighteousness, disobedience, and sin? Yet, God continues to love His people and desires for our salvation; a love with such limitless boundaries that it is beyond our understanding (Ephesians 3:18); a love so great that He had cast all His wrath upon Jesus Christ in order to spare us. Imagine a patient with advanced cancer looking upon his own disease and saying "I love you"—impossible, but that is exactly what God has done for us (Romans 5:8,10).

God's own elect are not spared from cancer, just as we each struggle with our old man of sin (Romans 7:15) and remain in our worldly and fallen bodies. It is a natural response for believers to question, "Why me?" upon knowledge of their diagnosis. Some may even feel angry with God for giving cancer as an affliction despite their faith and good works. As Reformed Christians, we are convicted by the words of Romans 8:28 that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." Even through the pain and suffering, an elect child of God may take great comfort in this truth that God is sovereign over all things and has a perfect plan for His people.

God is glorified in the life of an elect stricken with cancer, not because God assures a worldly cure for all believers,

but because a child of God looks forward to a heavenly home and has complete faith in Christ's power over sin and death. A child of God knows that faith cannot be kept in the medications of this world, but only in God; through which neither cancer nor any other guiles of the devil may follow us into our heavenly bodies. Such a constant and abiding faith even through times of suffering is like a shining light that bears testimony to others of God's glory and might. How encouraging it is to a young believer, to see a fellow believer bear a smile through his afflictions, having the hope of eternal life beyond this earth.

In conclusion, Siddhartha Mukherjee was not mistaken to name cancer as the "emperor of all maladies" for it is in God's sovereign will the fruit of the "prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2 , 2 Corinthians 4:4), being an almost perfect representation of the sin that wages war in this world, displayed within our human bodies. However, we can have complete faith in the conquering power of Christ who is the "King of kings, and Lord of lords" (Revelation 19:16).

Joseph's Strength of Youth

>> Pastor Rodney Kleyn



Pastor Rodney Kleyn is Minister of the Word at Covenant of Grace Protestant Reformed Church in Spokane, Washington and a regular speaker on the Reformed Witness Hour.

Joseph is not an Old Testament type of Jesus Christ, but there are many ways in which Joseph reflects the character of Jesus Christ in his life. When I read and think about Joseph's life, there are three things that stand out, three characteristics in Joseph that I, a follower of Christ, admire; three ways in which I pray that I may become more like Joseph and thus more like Christ.

Endurance

First, I admire Joseph's endurance. Led through many trials, confronted with great temptations, and called on to do some very difficult things, Joseph persevered in faith.

Joseph's life is a remarkable story of God's providence. In Genesis 50:20, after his father Jacob's death, and in response to the fear of his brothers that he would now repay them for the evil that they had committed against him, Joseph through tears confessed to his brothers, "But as for you, ye thought

evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive."

How different are these words to the words of his father Jacob in Genesis 42:36, who exclaimed, "Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me." The contrast is this: Jacob looked at man, whereas Joseph looked to God.

Yes, Joseph experienced pain because of the evil committed against him, but rather than reacting to his brothers, he responded before God. Note three things that he confessed to his brothers.

First, he confessed that God was sovereign over evil and evil men. Literally, Joseph says, "you planned evil, but God planned good." Even the evil purposes and deeds of his brothers were a part of God's purpose. God does not merely allow evil to happen, and then overturn it, but He includes evil in His plans and purposes. Evil men have one purpose by their wickedness, but God has another, and their evil purposes serve His good purpose.

Second, he confessed that God knew what he was doing when he brought these evils into his life. Joseph's confession is not made in the abstract, from an arm chair, but looking back on all the evils that had come on him—the hatred of his brothers when they sold him, the toil of being a slave, the unjust imprisonment, the years of loneliness in the land of his captivity; Joseph could

say, God always had a good purpose in view. Did he always see God's purpose? No, but he believed and trusted in the goodness, the love, and the sovereignty of God.

Third, his confession was one of faith in the promise of God to save His church and people in Jesus Christ. Joseph's explanation of God's purpose—"to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive"—meant more than just that he, his family, and Egypt were spared from starvation during the famine. What Joseph had in mind was the salvation of God's Covenant people and the promise of Jesus Christ. Hebrews 11 tells us that in faith Joseph "made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones." In faith, Joseph believed the promise of God, the promise being Christ, who would come. He saw Christ afar off, and he believed that God was working in everything, even the evils in his own life, to bring the promised Messiah and in this way, to save not just Joseph himself, but all the people of God.

How would you describe your life as a Christian? Is it difficult? Are there people who persecute and deride you for your faith? Is your way dark, so that you are enduring things without understanding what God is doing and why your life is as it is? Certainly it is very often this way for the young Christian.

Thus, understand that the strength of Joseph's endurance was his trust in



When someone has sinned against you, are you able to say,
“God sent this into my life, now how must I respond to God?”



God. He trusted, not merely in the providence of God, but in the God of providence. God was on the foreground of his thoughts. I recommend that you read and meditate on the truth of God’s Providence from the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 10, asking yourself, “What does this teach me about God?”

Forgiveness

The second characteristic that I see and admire in Joseph is forgiveness. Joseph’s forgiveness of his brothers is amazing. This kind of forgiveness is rare. Here is a man who not only forgives his brothers, but wants and implements the complete restoration of their relationship.

Think about what his brothers had done to him. They banded together, and breathing out cruelty, they sold their brother, who was of their own flesh and blood, as a slave. They deprived him of his freedom and made him the property of another man. They separated him from the family and father he loved. They fabricated a cover up story for years. All this, because they hated him for his godliness. Think about this today in a real life situation—someone you love, someone you pray with and care about, someone you help, turns on you, becomes your enemy, maligns your character, and deliberately hurts you. How is it possible to repay such evil with good—when naturally every fibre of our being wants to get back at that person, to hurt him?

Then look at Joseph’s response to his brothers: he was ruler in Egypt and had the power to pay them back. His father was dead and he had become the family patriarch. Yet there was not a hint of retribution. The very thought of it went against every fibre in his being—“Am I in the place of God?” (Genesis 50:19). Yes, for a period he pressured them in order to test them—with the returned money and the stolen cup. This, however, was not out of cruelty but in the interest of their repentance and salvation.

In Genesis 45:1-15 Joseph revealed himself to his brothers—I suggest you read it. In this passage, especially, we see the tender forgiveness of Joseph, and his explanation for it.

Notice, first, that Joseph did not want their sin to become a public shame, and did this by sending all the Egyptians out of the room.

Second, Joseph made great efforts to assure his brothers that he had forgiven them. When first he said, “I am Joseph,” his brothers were stunned and terrified, and so he called them close to him and asked them about their father, and he told them that they should not be sad or angry with themselves about what they had done. He was intimate and he affirmed forgiveness while they experienced guilt. He wanted them to experience forgiveness.

Third, he affirmed his love and forgiveness with tokens of kindness

that show he wanted a full restoration in their relationship, giving them gifts, a place to live, and promising to be their provider and protector.

Fourth, he explained his forgiveness in terms of God’s sovereignty. Five times within five verses, Joseph repeatedly told his brothers that it was “God” who sent him before them into Egypt (Genesis 45:5-9). He responded to God’s sovereign work, rather than reacting to their evil against him. When he looked at his life in view of God’s work and purposes, he saw that God had a purpose even in their sins against him, and he could forgive them. When someone has sinned against you, are you able to say, “God sent this into my life, now how must I respond to God?”

Fifth, we should see how selfless Joseph was in his forgiveness. It wasn’t about getting even, or portraying himself as a victim. Instead, as he looked at God’s purpose, Joseph saw that God was working things for the good, not first of himself, but of others. So often when we are afflicted we want to know, “What good does God have in this for me?” With Joseph it was different; “God sent me before **you** to preserve **you** a posterity in the earth, and to save **your** lives by a great deliverance” (Genesis 45:7). All this evil came on me for your sakes (2 Corinthians 1:6). When you have been wronged, do you want to see yourself as a victim, or do you look for ways that God uses this for the good of others, perhaps even those

who have hurt you?

Sixth, we see in Joseph's forgiveness an experience of God's grace and goodness that he wants to show to others. How can we forgive without bitterness? Where do we find the grace to reconcile to one who has hurt us? It is in the experience of God's grace towards us that we find the grace to forgive others. "Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32). In this passage Joseph is saying, "Even as God has blessed me, so I want to bless you" (Genesis 45:8, 9, 11, 13).

Godliness

The third characteristic I see and admire

in Joseph is godliness. By godliness I mean two things: 1) that he lived with a constant awareness of God, and 2) that, as a result, he lived a godly and holy life.

Joseph's godliness is a thread that runs through his life. Because of it, he was able to identify evil and keep himself separate from its influences even though this meant persecution (Genesis 37:2). Because of his godliness, he was able to work in a very difficult employment situation as a slave, still doing his work as unto the Lord (Genesis 39:1-6). Out of his godliness came the strength to resist and overcome deep temptation—"How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

(Genesis 39:9). His godliness gave him the wisdom, not only to answer dreams, but also to be a great economic leader in Egypt (Genesis 41:38-40).

In fact, as we have already seen, the other two characteristics of Joseph, his strength to endure and his grace to forgive, were born out of this deep godliness.

Godliness expresses itself in prayer and in constant dependence on God. It is in the awareness of who God is and what he has done for us, that we find the strength to endure, to forgive, and to have victory over sin.

May God make us more Joseph-like and so more Christ-like.

Soli Deo Gloria.

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How can we forgive without bitterness?

Where do we find the grace to reconcile to one who has hurt us?

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WORD OF THE ISSUE:

Posterity

DEFINITION:

All future generations of people/ The descendants of a person

ORIGIN:

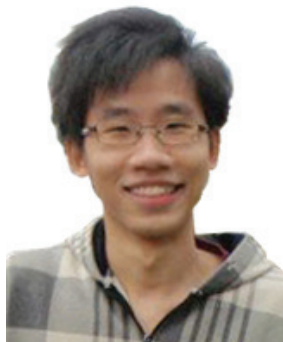
Late Middle English: from Old French *posterite*, from Latin *posteritas*, from *posterus* 'following'.

First known use was in the 14th century

Source: <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/posterity> & <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/posterity>

A Pilgrim's Path: Certainty in an Uncertain World

>> Matthias Wee



Matthias Wee is a confessing young adult in CERC.

We often hear about the “end times” and the “last days” through the preaching and our own study of God’s Word. We read about escalating conflicts in regions far and near, the rising threat of terrorism, increasing frequency and destructiveness of natural disasters, droughts and floods, and emergent diseases that threaten epidemics; these are but part of “the beginning of sorrows” (Matthew 24:8). We witness the increasing pervasiveness of immorality and idolatry in the world, and vicious attacks against the Church in the form of mockery, blasphemy, oppression or physical persecution. Even within the Church, we see the creeping influence of worldliness and materialism, the deception of false doctrines and the powerless, watered-down social gospel. Are we living in the end times? I think the answer is a clear and resounding “Yes”.

But, we may ask, “Surely these are not new to the Church of the past; how can we be sure these are manifestations of the end times?” Peter wrote to the churches in Asia Minor, who were suffering tremendous persecution,

that the “end of all things is at hand” (1 Peter 4:7); yet he reminded them that “one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Peter 3:8). Hence, our response should be, “How then do we as believers in the end times view and respond to the world around us?”

In this article, I hope to encourage us that though our way as pilgrims is wrought with difficulties and fears, we may be assured that both the journey and our end are in the hands of our Sovereign God, who through His Son has reserved for us an inheritance incorruptible that fades not away. The content of this article is drawn from 1 Peter, with a commentary written by Prof. Herman Hanko, aptly titled “A Pilgrim’s Manual,” as a valuable resource.

The Pilgrim’s Identity and Purpose

“A Pilgrim’s Manual” is indeed a very fitting title for 1 Peter. Peter himself states at the very beginning that he writes “to the strangers scattered throughout”. He goes on to describe the identity of the “stranger”, and briefly summarises in chapter one the difficulties faced (vs 6-7), the joy and glorious reward of the faithful pilgrim (vs 4-12), admonitions to be ready both individually (vs 13-16) and collectively as God’s people (vs 22), as well as the means of doing so (vs 23-25).

All these are written in the beautiful backdrop of the glorious inheritance the pilgrim has reserved in heaven, as a result of God’s great work of salvation

through the resurrection of Christ from the dead (vs 3-5, 8-12, 17-21). Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, goes on to elaborate more about each in the succeeding chapters, providing the child of God with a treasure trove of instructions, warnings, and hope. What a rich blessing for the weary pilgrim!

The word “strangers” in 1 Peter 1:1 is translated from the Greek word *parepidemois*, made up of the prepositions *para* (alongside of) and *epi* (at), and the word *demos* (a people, a state) (“A Pilgrim’s Manual” Hanko 2012, pp. 2-3). The same word is rendered “pilgrims” in 2:11. Being a pilgrim implies a temporal relationship, a dwelling with others while not being a part of them. By being born again, the child of God has a heavenly citizenship; he is not part of the world he journeys in. This means he speaks a different language, eats different food, and has different interests from the citizens of the world—spiritually! The spiritual meaning is evident, as in 1:2, the strangers are described as “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father”. The foreknowledge of God is causative, meaning that they are pilgrims because they are elect. That means that we, as God’s elect, are spiritual pilgrims.

To what end, then, are we to be pilgrims? 1:7 sums it up: the refining fire of trials in a pilgrim’s life is to “be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ”! 2:5 describes us as “lively stones” in the spiritual house of which Christ is

the chief corner stone, for the purpose of offering up “spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.” Indeed the process and end-result of our pilgrimage is first and foremost to the praise and glory of God, made possible only through Christ! Let us bear this in mind as we continue to explore what a pilgrim's life entails.

The Difficulties of a Pilgrim's Sojourn

There is no doubt that the pilgrim's life will be difficult. The assumption is laid out early in the first chapter in verses 6-7. After the opening doxology, Peter speaks about the pilgrims being “in heaviness through manifold temptations”, and “the trial of your faith...tried with fire.” He proceeds to give numerous examples in the following chapters. We may divide them into two main categories: temptations (internal), and persecutions (external).

Temptations are the result of the yearning of our old sinful nature within us for that which feeds it—sin! Though we may be regenerated, born again, such that we are freed from slavery to sin, there is a war within (Romans 7:22-23) that we will have to fight throughout this life. 1 Peter 1:14 warns us against “fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance.” Lusts are desires contrary to the will of God. It is an apt description, as it conveys through “former” the idea that our lusts no longer have dominion over us, yet the warning is clear, as our weak flesh seeks after the pleasures of this world.

How often do we make decisions seeking wealth and power, or man's approval? How often do we grumble about the difficulty of the callings God has placed us in? Do we seek our own pleasure on the Lord's Day? 1:16 admonishes us “Be ye holy; for I am holy.”

Persecutions are the result of living the

life of a pilgrim. A pilgrim is different, and his conduct and way of life is noticed by those around him. He does not aim to accumulate earthly wealth, and refuses to participate in gossip or blasphemy. He avoids the revelry and drunkenness of weekend parties, and condemns the lavish lifestyle and promiscuity of wicked celebrities. People around scratch their heads and wonder. Some avoid them, while others quickly turn hostile.

Hostility is an expected response! 1 Peter 2:12 states, “they speak against you as evildoers”. There is no wrong in the pilgrim's conduct, yet it offends because it points out and condemns the sins of the wicked through his conscience. The pilgrim is falsely accused of many things when evil is spoken of him. In Peter's day, he was accused of treason for serving Christ and not Caesar, and thrown to the lions. During the Reformation, this similar charge was levied. Even today, the pilgrim is accused of being narrow-minded, regressive, and bigoted. In 1 Peter 2, he speaks of suffering at the hand of magistrates and masters (employers). Indeed, the pilgrim can expect such.

We may ask, “Why do we need to suffer trials and persecutions?” First of all, they are a refining process whereby God sanctifies us (Isaiah 48:10, 1 Peter 1:7). That is something we are familiar with. But there is more to this! 1 Peter 2:21 explains, “For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps”. We are called to suffer! It is not just *inevitable* for a pilgrim to suffer by being different, but God has *ordained* it, and is *pleased* by it. That means suffering is a privilege and a reason for thanksgiving! No wonder 1 Peter 3:14 states, “But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye”.

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There is no wrong in the pilgrim's conduct, yet it offends because it points out and condemns the sins of the wicked through his conscience.

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Furthermore, we suffer because Christ has done so for us, leaving us an example. Christ's suffering has atoned for our sins; His suffering is the spiritual power by which we can walk in His footsteps, as we are now dead to sins, and alive unto righteousness (2:24)! This gives the embattled pilgrim much hope indeed!

The Characteristics of a Pilgrim

After looking at the difficulties of a pilgrim's sojourn, the question that might remain in our minds is “How?” We know that our end is certain and the victory is in Christ, but how do we face the myriad of trials and temptations before us, and the discouragements of succumbing to sin in the flesh? Peter exhorts the weary saints in Asia Minor with admonitions and encouragements. Let us briefly examine two major themes: firstly, to be sober (individual admonition), and secondly, to love one

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another (collective admonition).

The admonition to be sober is repeated in at least three instances in 1 Peter. 1:13 tells us to “gird up the loins of your mind, be sober and hope to the end...” This is required in order to avoid fashioning ourselves according to “former lusts” (1:14), as we have examined in the previous section. This call is repeated in 4:7 “be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer”, as well as in 5:8.

Just like a drunkard loses the ability to control his faculties, a spiritual drunkard is one who reels from pleasure to pleasure, unable to discern the true nature of things and repeatedly falling into former lusts, detailed in 4:3 as “lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banqueting, and abominable idolatries”. Sobriety is necessary for the pilgrim, as it is the spiritual state of heart and mind from which we discern all things in life in the light of God's Word, and enables us to be watchful for the return of Christ. Let us take heed to this admonition!

Love for one another is also a major theme in the epistle. In 1:22, Peter states “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently”. The meaning here is that since our souls are sanctified (purified) in obedience to the truth,

we can now love our brethren fervently and with a pure heart—that is the goal in this context. Note the pre-requisite is to be in a state of holiness! That means our thoughts, desires, choices and deeds must be holy, for only then can we love others instead of ourselves.

With this as a background, we examine what it means to love one another and why it is important for the pilgrim. Scripture is clear that love is the root of all other Christian virtues (Ephesians 4:2, 1 Corinthians 13). Peter reinforces this in 1 Peter 4:7-8. This comes in the context of completing his exhortation in chapters 2-4 regarding submission in our earthly relationships to magistrates, employers, in marriage and to one another, as well as practical implications of suffering with Christ. He then concludes “But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer. And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.” As pilgrims in the last days, above all things, we are to love one another fervently!

We love one another because we have first tasted the love of God for us. Love seeks the ultimate good of another—their salvation, as seen in God giving his Son for us. Love is compassionate, sympathetic, and humble (3:8). Love is forgiveness, hospitality, and ministering to one another (4:8-9). Love is bringing

the Word of God to a fellow pilgrim in the midst of a trial. Though we sojourn as pilgrims, we are not alone; what a great encouragement fellow brothers and sisters of Christ can be to one another!

The Pilgrim's Comfort

The thought of facing fiery trials is a daunting prospect for even the stoutest of heart. Were it left to the pilgrim's own strength, there would certainly be no hope. But the pilgrim's comfort is that both his journey and end are kept by the power of God. The end is secure because we are begotten unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, with an incorruptible inheritance reserved in heaven for us (1 Peter 1:3-5). The journey is familiar because it is a path trod by Christ who has won the victory over sin and death—whose footprints we walk in, and who guides us by His Spirit each step of the way. May we rejoice with this knowledge that “he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6).

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WHO ARE MY FRIENDS?

>> Lim Yang Zhi



Yang Zhi Lim is a confessing young adult in CERC.

Who are my friends?

May I say, “My unbelieving classmate is not my friend”? May you say, “My unbelieving schoolmate is not my friend”? May we say, “Only believers of the Lord Jesus Christ are our friends”?

Those are strong words to say.

But are they true? Are such classmates not our friends? Are unbelievers not our friends? Who are your friends? Who are mine? What truths from God’s Word make the above statements true?

Before we know *who* our friends are, we need to know *what* friends are. The friends that we speak of in this article are true brotherly and sisterly friends that Scripture describes in the following two ways.

First, such friends are people who share the same likes and dislikes. Under inspiration, the prophet Amos wrote: *Can two walk together, be friends with each other, except they be agreed (3:3)?*

Second, these friends are also people who help us when we need help. Solomon wrote, *a friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity (Proverbs 17:17)*. Out of love for us, a friend helps us in our adversities (that is, troubles).

We know such people are our friends, because God, our Covenant-Friend, is such a friend. As our Covenant-Friend, God has made us holy, so that we like

and dislike the same things He likes and dislikes. For example, we delight in obeying God’s Word, just as God is pleased with such obedience. Also, we hate taking God’s name in vain, just as God hates such a sin.

We know friends are those who help us also because, as our Covenant-Friend, God helps us when we need help. Do we not read and sing in the Psalms that God is our Help (see Psalm 40:17; 46:1; and 121:2 for some examples)? Let us recall just one Psalm versified in our Psalter:

*Hide not thy face from me,
In wrath turn not away,
My help and saviour be,
Forsake me not I pray;
Should father, mother both forsake,
The Lord on me will pity take.*

Only believers are our friends. Is that true? Test that with what we know about friends.

A friend is one with whom we share the same likes and dislikes. Believers are our friends, because we share with them the same *spiritual* likes and *spiritual* dislikes.

Note that I said *spiritual* likes and dislikes. You may enjoy studying history, while your friend likes biology. You may enjoy a game of soccer under

the sun, while your friend prefers a game of Rook under the air-con. You may like rice, but your friend would only have potatoes from the cradle to the grave. You and your friend may enjoy different earthly things.

Yet, you two can be friends, because the likes and dislikes you have in common with your friend are *spiritual*. Both of you enjoy of going to church on Sundays to hear the preaching of God's Word. Both of you share the same enjoyment studying the Scriptures together. On the flip-side, both of you share the same dislike of using the "OMGs" and vulgarities of the world. Both of you do not enjoy the world's music and movies.

This is what Amos meant when he wrote about two being agreed. To be agreed means to share the same spiritual likes and dislikes.

A friend is also one that helps us. Believers are our friends, also because they help us when we need help.

What kind of help do we mean? When we need a cup of water, they, whilst getting a drink for themselves, fill a cup for us. When we need help for our assignments and projects, they can provide, to the best of their abilities, tuition and advice. Certainly, believers can and are willing to give such physical, earthly help.

But the help we are talking about is, first of all, *spiritual* help. When we are not doing something that is right, they tell us (or, perhaps, show in their faces—see Proverbs 25:23) we are in the wrong. When we are absent from catechism or youth group activities, believers, concerned for us, ask why we were absent (not to mention share their notes with us). When we struggle with doubts and fears, they tell us to trust in the Lord in all of life's uncertainties.

Believers are our friends, because they help us *spiritually*. To help us in such way in all of life's adversities, a friend is born.

Can you see, now, how believers are our friends?

And then, can you see, now, that unbelievers can *never* be our friends?

We cannot share with unbelievers the same spiritual likes and dislikes. Just think of some things your unbelieving classmates may like. Perhaps some of them enjoy using vulgarities, if not, the "OMGs." Can we enjoy using our tongues that way? Perhaps they enjoy listening to Justin Bieber, Taylor Swift, Coldplay, and others. Can we enjoy the wicked lyrics and immodest choreography of their music and dance? Perhaps they enjoy the thrills of the latest blockbusters—in the most recent times, of Captain America and the X-Men. Can we enjoy such movies that subtly—but often, boldly—promote sin?

And then think of some things your unbelieving classmates would not enjoy. They would not enjoy the preaching in our church—they do not enjoy hearing the voice of the Lord that has saved us. They would not enjoy studying the Scriptures—they do not enjoy reading the words of the God we love. Can we share that lack of enjoyment with them?

Can we share the same spiritual likes and dislikes unbelievers have?

Furthermore, unbelievers cannot help us when we need help. Your unbelieving classmate can get you a glass of water. He (or she) can give you tuition and advice when you need those things. But

will he, in concern for us, ask why we have not gone for catechism and youth group activities? He does not go for catechism or CK. Can he point out our sin when we sin? He does not hate sin as we do. Can he point us to God when we doubt and fear? How can he, when he does not obey, believe in, and trust in the same Jehovah?

You and I know the answer too well. I knew it more keenly than ever in the army. During my time of basic military training (which has finished as this is published), I roomed with fifteen other soldiers. Most of them were unbelievers. I could not enjoy the songs they enjoy; neither could they enjoy the Psalms I sang. I could not find from them encouragement from God's Word; neither could they understand how I found strength from reading the Bible. They could fill my bottle for the day; they could spur me on during the tiring hours of physical training. But that was all, and nothing more.

Do you agree with those words at the beginning now?

If we still are in doubt, then listen to the very Word of God. God says, *What fellowship hath righteousness and unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness.... Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate* (2 Corinthians 6:14, 17). That is, unbelievers cannot be your friends. There is no fellowship, no communion, *no friendship*, between believer and unbeliever.

But there *is* fellowship, communion, and *friendship*, among believers. Two walk together, are friends with each other, because they agree. They believe in the same God. Fellow believers

obey the same God and trust in the same God. The delights they have in God and His Word are the delights you have. The dislikes they have in the world and sin are the dislikes you have. Where your only Help lies, there they point you.

But, where are such friends? Where shall we find these friends?

And what about our unbelieving classmates? How do we treat them, if they are not our friends?

To be continued...

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“But there is fellowship, communion, and friendship, among believers. Two walk together, are friends with each other, because they agree.”

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News from the Churches

SINGAPORE

Pastor Lanning is on a furlough with his family, who are now in Castlewellan Conference Centre in Northern Ireland for British Reformed Fellowship Family Conference from July 16 to July 23. Pastor Lanning, together with Professor David Engelsma will be lecturing on “Behold, I Come Quickly: The Reformed, Biblical Truth of the End”. We thank God that a few of our members from CERC are able to attend the conference as well.

With thanksgiving to God, synod approved the admission of Josiah Tan to the seminary next Fall.

PHILIPPINES

Pastor Daniel and Sharon Kleyn are in the midst of taking a 6 week furlough from June 14 through July 28. During their absence, Pastor Richard Smit is in the Philippines for 4 Sundays to cover for Pastor Kleyn.

With thanks to God, Pastor Daniel Holstege was installed as a missionary to the Philippines on Friday, July 1 in Calvary PRC. He also preached his inaugural sermon in Doon PRC on Sunday, July 3.

On Monday, June 13, the Classis of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines met to examine Pastor Leovy Trinidad according to Article 9 of the Church Order, with a view to him being a minister of the Word and sacraments within the Federation of the PRCP.

The Classis unanimously approved Pastor Trinidad’s examination. The Classis gave him a Classical Diploma and declared him a minister of the Word and sacraments within the PRCP.

We thank the Lord for adding another pastor to the PRCP denomination.



Prof. Dykstra gave four speeches on the theme "The Christian and the Church"



Group discussions after each speech



Team games: search the room for clues while traveling on newspaper!



Durian party on the last night of camp!

CERC Church Camp 2016





Playing "Group Untangle"



En route to Marina Barrage on a cycling trip!



Relay games

SNAPSHOTS FROM THE *Covenant Keepers Retreat 2016*



Prof. Dykstra giving a speech on the theme "Love Made Perfect" (1 John 4:17)



Group picture of the young people with the Dykstras, Kate Doezema and Calvin De Jong

Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church

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

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Singapore 368813

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

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