

False doctrines maintained in the church will inevitably lead also to compromise in Christian living.” — *Rev. den Hartog in The Need and the Urgency of Reading for the Christian*

Association with and joining in the same cause as the wicked leads to God’s anger and the cutting off of our children from their being, even outwardly, from God’s covenant.” — *Prof. Herman Hanks in Scripture’s Covenant Youth (XII)*

For the next forty years, until his death in 1965, Herman Hoeksema — an indefatigable worker — was pastor of a huge congregation, preaching every Sunday; editor of the Standard Bearer magazine; professor of theology in the Protestant Reformed Seminary; author of many books; and frequent lecturer on many doctrinal subjects.” — *Prof. David Engelsma in Herman Hoeksema*



salt shakers
joel 3:16 matthew 5:16

Issue 50 | July 2018



Study

to shew thyself approved unto God,
a workman that needeth not to be ashamed,
rightly dividing the

word of truth.

2 TIMOTHY 2:15

A Reflection on Christian Liberty (I)	3	The Importance of Reading for Every Christian (I)	16
Scripture's Covenant Youth (XII): Joash	5	The Care of This World	18
Are Unbelievers in God's Image? (VIII)	7	The Christian in The World (I)	19
Holiness as Young Adults (III)	9	A Succourer of Many	20
Quit You Like Men (II)	11	The Life of Rev. Herman Hoeksema	22
Marriage is Not For Me (II)	12	The Deposition of Elders	24
Thy Might Sets Fast The Mountains	15		

WELCOME TO THE 50TH ISSUE OF SALT SHAKERS

Dear Readers,

Welcome to another edition of the Salt Shakers! We thank our writers for contributing to another worthwhile edition of this distinctively Reformed magazine, as well as the staff who have put the magazine together. The Salt Shakers maintains a good balance of younger and older writers, local and foreign. We believe that this practice uniquely expresses our diversity and unity in the Reformed faith, and manifests the catholicity of the church of Jesus Christ.

In this issue, Prof. David Engelsma pens an intriguing account of the PRC's founding father – Rev. Herman Hoeksema. Besides developing the truth of God's gracious and unconditional covenant with His people in Jesus Christ, Hoeksema was also instrumental in developing the truth of the unbreakable bond of marriage. Hoeksema saw the deeply erroneous view of divorce and remarriage, held in many Reformed and Presbyterian churches, that allowed the so-called "innocent party" of a divorce to remarry. Maintaining his conviction on Scripture's instruction, Hoeksema insisted that only physical death breaks the marriage bond because marriage is a picture of God's unbreakable covenant of grace with His people in Jesus Christ. The young people in CERC and her sister churches marry in the conviction of this truth today. We have much to be grateful for Rev. Hoeksema.

It may interest our readers to know that Rev. Hoeksema died in the same year that Singapore became an independent nation: 1965. Slightly over fifty years since the Lord's servant went to glory, not many people today would know about him. But every member of CERC ought to be familiar with his writings. His *Reformed Dogmatics*, for example, ought to be standard reading for every office-bearer of CERC.

Rev. den Hartog presses the necessity of reading for every Reformed believer in another article. Where smartphones, tablets and the mobile internet reign in everyday life today, it is imperative for the Reformed believer to make reading a vital habit in his life. Satan, the world, and our sinful flesh strive ferociously to extinguish this duty. Our enemies know that God's people will be destroyed for lack of knowledge. Let it never be said that it was because we rejected knowledge (Hos. 4:6).

Parents are instructed to read, and to pass on their reading habits to their children. Covenant children must know and see that their parents are readers of habit. There is every reason for joy when children know that their parents enjoy reading, and through reading, are knowledgeable parents. Only by habitual and disciplined reading can parents faithfully and effectively instruct their covenant children in the Reformed faith.

The Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFPA) is an excellent source of distinctively Reformed literature. Parents must be encouraged to be book club members so that they are an excellent source of reading material for themselves and their children.

Blessed reading!
Aaron

A REFLECTION ON CHRISTIAN LIBERTY (I)

>> Chua Lee Yang



Chua Lee Yang is a member of CERC and is the chairman of Salt Shakers.

Beloved youth, in recent months, particularly in the youth society and at church camp, we have been talking over many topics that come under the area of Christian liberty. But what does “Christian liberty” mean to you and to me? How do we rightly use our liberty to serve God? What are good uses and abuses of Christian liberty? How can we and our friends best approach topics of Christian liberty together? This editorial hopes to cover these areas briefly.

The Scope of Liberty

Christian liberty is a beautiful thing for us. With the coming of Christ, no longer must we worship through the Old Testament types and shadows: the ceremonial law and sacrifices. These collectively were the “schoolmaster” (Gal. 3:24) to point the church to Christ. But now as New Testament saints, we are free “in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free”. We are exhorted to “be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (Gal. 5:1). In Christ, we are not justified by the law. We are free from the bondage of sin. We are free to serve God in every aspect of life!

However, we also sense that the term “Christian liberty” is closely connected with dispute and disagreement. Why? In areas of Christian liberty, one brother says yes and another says no. Yet there is supposed to be a place for both in the church. Conflict arises when things without clear biblical directives must be morally evaluated. In the church of Corinth in the times of Paul and the apostles, it was in the form of meat offered to idols – whether to eat or not to eat. In Galatia, it was circumcision or non-circumcision. In our day it is about the music of the world, movies, sports, activities and so on. To partake or not to partake? “Liberty” is a difficult topic, for we face questions such, as how far does our liberty extend? How does the law of God bind our individual consciences? How does the child of God determine what is dictated by the bible and what is in the scope of Christian liberty?

We recognise that Scripture does indeed form concrete moral judgments about things, and its judgment must be obeyed. The concrete moral judgments of Scripture are summarised in the Ten Commandments and include specific directives that are found throughout Scripture. These must be upheld by every Christian without debate. Such things as drunkenness, fornication, revenge, stealing and profaning the Sabbath with work are clearly forbidden. We are exhorted meanwhile to purity, loving the neighbour, etc.

On the other hand, the Bible also indicates to us that certain things must be left to individual consciences where

each Christian must take the general principles of Scripture and apply them according to sanctified judgment. The examples given in Scripture are the circumcision and eating of meats offered to idols, to which there were both yes and no answers. Paul shows that it is his freedom to decide in harmony with God’s glory.

The Principles of Liberty

We see therefore, that Christian liberty is not merely a liberty to do anything we want regarding things not specifically mentioned in the Bible. Scripture gives the following guidance:

1. Our liberty is not for the service of ourselves, but for God and the neighbour (Gal. 5:13).
2. In 1 Corinthians 8 and 10, Paul gives further important instruction that our use of liberty must not stumble the neighbour. This is also related to the first statement.
3. Even if it is not mentioned specifically in Scripture, Scripture’s guidance on related areas and behaviours are relevant. For example, while “clubbing” is not specifically mentioned in the Bible, the volume of texts warning against empty revelry, drunkenness and friendship with the world makes this a particularly unwise choice of activity.

A correct exercise of Christian liberty is always God-glorifying in its motive. Indeed, everything we do, must be done in faith. “And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23). As is clear, doing

things in faith applies directly to things of Christian liberty.

“Is it Wrong?” — Asking the Wrong Question

We often forget this principle of doing things out of faith and the glory of God. Often when we discuss topics of Christian living that have to do with Christian liberty, the question almost inevitably comes up: “Is it wrong?” This is the wrong question to ask because the answer will be different for each person. The right question to ask is whether for me personally, am I doing it out of faith, or to please my flesh? Does my doing this glorify God or not? Because the answers to these questions are internal and unseen, they are in this sense between ourselves and God alone – and if one’s answer with firm conviction is “Yes, it is by faith, by God’s grace, and God is glorified”, one can and even should, proceed. He or she ought not be judged by another. However, we *are* able to, and should prompt each other to search ourselves on the question of faith and whether our motive is the glory of God, for we do frequently need such reminders. Often these questions never enter our minds or we knowingly suppress our introspection.

Asking “Is it wrong?” on the other hand, betrays our fleshly focus. We must see that Christian liberty is prone to abuse, and therefore there are so many warnings against the abuse of it in Scripture. We must recognise the truth that the carnal seed is always present in the church, as the Lord himself shows in the parable where the tares are left to grow with the wheat (Matt. 13:24-30). The carnal seed always seeks to abuse liberty as a cloak of maliciousness to cover their own lack of faith and lead the church into worldliness.

While we must be aware of this, we ought not look pharisaically around us, for this carnal element is within all of us, in our own old depraved man of sin. Our old man also seeks to abuse Christian liberty in the service of our flesh. We want to live outwardly holy lives and receive the approval of fellow believers; at the same time, we want the “easiest” way to heaven, squeezing out the maximum amount of pleasure from this earthly existence, while professing our Christian identity. Therefore, when our brethren give the faintest suggestion that we may not be walking in faith in a particular area of living, our defences come up. “Is it wrong?” we ask, knowing the answer is one of Christian liberty. “It is Christian liberty!” Our old man triumphantly replies. “Therefore you cannot tell me that this is wrong.” It is Christian liberty; therefore we can use it as we please. Wrong answers therefore accompany wrong questions. We are better off asking ourselves, “Am I doing this out of faith?” As friends, we are also better off prompting our friends gently in humility: “Is what you are doing God-glorifying? If yes, how do you see it so?” These questions are infinitely more helpful than asking “Is it wrong?”

Nothing Neutral

Christian liberty is furthermore, often used in connection with describing things that are supposedly “neutral”, that is, with nothing inherently good or sinful in them (hence the term *adiaphora*, or indifferent things). This is true, but must be understood correctly. While there are many things in this world that are *in themselves* indifferent, *our personal use of them* is anything but indifferent. Indeed, *nothing* we do in this world as Christians is indifferent, even our use of *adiaphora*. This the Holy Spirit makes clear when it is written

regarding things under Christian liberty: “And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23). Therefore, there are only two ways we use the things in the world,: either in faith, or in sin. There is no neutral ground.

But how can a matter of Christian liberty which is in itself indifferent, be approached in faith or sin? This example may help illustrate. Many of our young people, including myself, enjoy the occasional participation in sport. I personally enjoy playing a game of basketball with brothers in the church. Basketball has no mention in Scripture and comes under the category of Christian liberty. Yet one can approach this activity both in faith and in sin. To one, (and I hope this may be true of us), the ball game can be a means of refreshment, so that one is able to return to his or her calling re-energized and ready to serve God in them. It can be a way to care for our bodies physically and be a good steward of the gift of bodily health. It can also be an avenue for fellowship, Scripture reading and mutual encouragement with Christian brethren during the mid-week. These are all examples of uses of *adiaphora* in faith. On the other hand, one may thoughtlessly approach basketball in an altogether opposite way. The midweek game may be approached as an escape from important responsibilities, out of an unhealthy passion for the NBA and its worldliness, or for the simple rush and pleasure of winning. This illustrates to us how indifferent things are indifferent in themselves, but not indifferent *in their use* for each individual and certainly not “neutral”. Indeed, though the activity is “indifferent”, there is only the approach of faith and the approach of sin. We are clearly *not* at “liberty”

to decide which approach to take but must always choose the approach of faith.

Differences

Sometimes, one brother may come to the conclusion that in his case, an activity is so closely connected with sin that he cannot in good conscience partake of it in faith. The example in Scripture given to us is that one brother cannot in good conscience eat of meat offered to idols, for he will sin in his conscience if he does so. We often face this in our time as well. We see our brother or sister doing something that we cannot ourselves do in an attitude of faith. If it is a matter the Scripture clearly forbids, we have a calling to rebuke the

brethren in love. What if it is a matter of Christian liberty, however? Christian conversations among brethren are important, and we must not shy from them. If we have spiritual concerns about a particular activity, we should share with the brethren why we believe this activity is not God-glorifying, at least for ourselves, and share our personal concern. Perhaps the brother or sister has never thought about it that way and they have indeed been approaching an activity in a faithless manner. However, the approached brother or sister may be able to say that yes: they have considered it, and they are indeed able to glorify God through it and best, show you how they are able to do so. If the matter is indeed one of liberty and not of sin, and the brethren

have really considered it before God – even if we disagree, we can judge no further for the matter now lies between that person and God. And when we are the approached party, we should welcome these conversations and be willing to open up our lives and motives to one another, with the objective that we may grow together in our service of God.

In the following editorials Lord willing, we will turn to the other important areas of not stumbling one another, legalism and being pharisaical.

SCRIPTURE'S COVENANT YOUTH (XII): JOASH

>> Prof. Herman Hanko



Prof. Herman Hanko is a professor emeritus of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary. His present work consists of authoring new books for the RFP, writing for the Salt Shakers, and maintaining an online forum for the young people in Singapore. He has been to CERC many times and is dear to the people here.

This series of articles in *Salt Shakers* concerns the lives of covenant youths. Joash, king of Judah, qualifies as a covenant youth; and yet he doesn't. He qualifies as a covenant youth because he was born in the lines of the covenant and lived many years as a child of God's covenant. But he is disqualified from the role of covenant youth because he turned his back on God toward the end of his life and led Judah into idolatry. He did not belong to God's covenant in fact.

There are some interesting events in the history of Joash, however, that are of importance to understand Joash's life, and are also instruction for youth today.

It all began with Jehoshaphat, Judah's

God-fearing king. Although he did much to establish Judah as a nation that feared God, he had one fatal weakness: he was intent on forming an alliance with Ahab, wicked and godless king of the northern kingdom, composed of the ten tribes of Israel, now an independent nation. Ahab needed help to defend his land against the Syrians who had come to destroy Israel (2 Chron. 18). I am sure that Jehoshaphat could defend his actions of agreeing to form an alliance with Ahab with strong arguments. They might even have persuaded us. What are they? Syria was a threat to Judah as well as Israel, and Judah might be next on the list of conquests. Why not join in the battle against a common enemy?

Furthermore, the northern kingdom

was still part of the Old Testament church: it had 5,000 in it who had not bowed the knee to Baal; it had the pure preaching of the Word in it, for Elijah, a great prophet, still preached in the nation; and there was always the hope of the two nations being united once again as they had been under the reigns of David and Solomon. What could be a better bit of diplomacy?

But it was not God's will. Jehoshaphat learned that on his return. He found the prophet Jehu waiting for him. Jehu sharply reprimanded Jehoshaphat: "Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? Therefore is wrath upon thee from the Lord" (2 Chron. 19:2).

Jehoshaphat did not listen, but continued his efforts to form an alliance with Israel's king (2 Chron. 20:35-36), and again he was rebuked (2 Chron. 20:37).

What has all this to do with Joash?

Well, because of Jehoshaphat's insistence on an alliance with Israel's kings, his son, Jehoram, quite naturally, carried the alliance further and married the daughter of Israel's king, Ahaziah. But Ahaziah, king of Israel, was also wicked, and Jehoram followed in his wicked ways and in his granddaughter Athaliah's wicked ways. He was as wicked as Ahab's family. He killed six of his brothers and other princes in Judah, because he considered them threats to the throne (2 Chron. 21:4). When God killed him (2 Chron. 21:18-19), what was probably written on his gravestone (if they used gravestones in those days) would have read: "He reigned in Jerusalem eight years, and departed without being desired" (2 Chron. 21:20). That word summed up the fruit of his whole life. Nobody cared when he died. Maybe they breathed a sigh of

relief.

Many events, into which we cannot go, paved the way for Athaliah, Jehoram's wife and daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, to bring the nation of Judah to sin. She came to the throne of Judah as the Queen Mother and ruled the land. But she killed all the royal seed – except one, Joash. Cooperation between a God-fearing man and a wicked man led to marriage between the two families. It oftentimes does. And such a marriage was fatal.

Although this is not part of our story, you now also understand that Joash was now the only one left in the royal line that would bring forth Christ. If Joash would have been killed, Christ could not have come, born of Mary, from the line of Judah's kings. As far as Jehoshaphat was concerned, his conniving with Ahab, a great sin, nearly destroyed Christ! Only by God's intervention was the line preserved.

Association with and joining in the same cause as the wicked leads to God's anger and the cutting off of our children from their being, even outwardly, from God's covenant.

Joash escaped because, when still a baby, he was spirited away by his aunt Jehosheba, the wife of Jehoiada, who hid him in the temple for 7 years. She did this at the risk of her life. It was undoubtedly during this period that Joash was taught by his aunt and uncle the ways of Jehovah and the calling to walk as a covenant child. But he must also have been taught the responsibilities of being king over God's people, for he ruled well. At the age of seven he was considered ready to be anointed king of Judah.

It was a coup d'etat, led by Jehoiada and the temple guard that set Joash on

the throne and resulted in the death of Athaliah.

As long as Jehoiada lived and served as an advisor to Joash, all was well. Joash considered the priority in his reign to be the repair of the temple, for it had been stripped of its utensils and left a broken-down building by Athaliah. Further, when the Levites were lax in collecting money for the repair of the temple, Joash devised another way of collecting the necessary funds. He put a box at the entrance of the temple into which the people had to drop their money. This method of collecting money proved successful and was still used in Jesus' day.

But when Jehoiada died, the princes persuaded Joash to return to the worship of idols. Jehoiada had been so zealous for the cause of God that he was, so far as I know, the only non-king buried among the kings of Judah. Joash had, therefore, during all the years of Jehoiada, put on a show of being devoted to the cause of God. Only after Jehoiada died, Joash was revealed not to be a true son of the covenant that God established with Abraham.

It is unspeakably sad. The church has always had such people. God promises to save his covenant people in the line of generations, but not all children of believers are true children of Abraham. The sin of Joash was so great that Jesus incorporates him in those upon whom he pronounced his awful woes just before his death (Matt. 23:34-35). Zacharias, the son of Barachias, is the same as Zachariah, son of Jehoida, who was high priest in the place of his father, and who was stoned at the command of Joash (2 Chron. 24:20-22).

Some leave the church over doctrine or are cut out of the church for teaching false doctrine as were those who brought

about the split in our own churches. Some leave for falling into some gross sin such as immorality or divorce and remarriage. Some leave because their parents did not teach them the ways of God's covenant (Judg. 7:7-11).

I visited an aged saint who was near the end of his life. He wept as he told me, "All my children have left the church and it is my fault, for I never taught them God's word".

But those who leave the church of Christ are described in 1 John 2:19: "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us,

they no doubt would have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us".

All this confronts us with a very serious calling. In 2 Peter 1:10, we are admonished to make our calling and election sure, for "if ye do these things, ye shall never fall".

Paul calls steadfastness that gift of the Christian who in the face of all temptation and trouble is faithful. He concludes his glorious chapter on the resurrection of our bodies with the words: "Therefore, my beloved

brethren, be ye steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:48).

And, do not fail to teach your children, beginning at their birth, the ways of God's covenant. With the warnings and promises of the Scripture part of your instruction, be faithful, for these precious little ones are, if you are faithful, the church of tomorrow.

Our fathers would often pray (in Dutch), "Cut us not off in our generations". I still pray that often; God grant that you do the same.

ARE UNBELIEVERS IN GOD'S IMAGE? (VIII)

>> Rev. Angus Stewart



Rev. Angus Stewart is the minister of Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland.

Subordinate Authority of Theologians

The first five articles in this series used biblical and theological arguments to prove that only believers, and not unbelievers, are in the divine image. The last two articles considered the testimony of the Reformed confessions. Of the fifteen creeds that we looked at, including all the six documents in the *Three Forms of Unity* and the *Westminster*

Standards, none speak of the *imago dei* in the so-called broader sense; all define the divine likeness as we do and some specifically deny the image of God to the ungodly.

But our opponents will object, What about the teaching of individual theologians? Before we address this directly, it is important that everyone get straight the Reformed "hierarchy" as regards authority in spiritual and doctrinal truth. First, our supreme authority is the Word of God, divinely inspired and infallible. Our secondary authority is the Reformed confessions, especially, for us, the *Three Forms of Unity*. These are, of course, fallible but, after comparing them to the Holy Scriptures, as our "Formula of Subscription" puts it:

We ... sincerely and in good conscience before the Lord, declare ... that we heartily believe and are persuaded that

all the articles and points of doctrine, contained in the [Belgic] Confession and [Heidelberg] Catechism of the Reformed Churches, together with the explanation of some points of the aforesaid doctrine, made by the National Synod of Dordrecht, 1618-'19, do fully agree with the Word of God.

In our day, evangelicalism, knowing little and caring less for the Reformed confessions, grossly misunderstands the "hierarchy" of theological authority. In its well-nigh uniform practice (and so in its, largely unstated, theory), evangelicalism speaks as if the authority of theologians is higher than that of the Reformed creeds. This is wrong and not Reformed! Inspired Scripture first, then the Reformed confessions and, finally, individual theologians. However, not only is our position biblical and creedal, but God has not left Himself without

witness among the theologians either!

Quotes From Theologians

We begin with one of the greatest: Martin Luther. In his commentary on Genesis 1:26, the German Reformer correctly points out, “If these powers [i.e, memory, will, and mind] are the image of God, it will also follow that Satan was created according to the image of God, since he surely has these natural endowments, such as memory and a very superior intellect and a most determined will, to a far higher degree than we have them”. All admit that such statements are found throughout the writings of the ex-monk of Wittenberg.

Nor did all the Lutheran theologians, ministers and members decline from following this teaching of the man whom God used to start the great sixteenth-century Reformation. Indeed, despite the massive apostasy within worldwide Lutheranism, Martin Luther's views on the *imago dei* have not entirely died out. In the USA, the Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, in its 1991 *Explanation of the Small Catechism* of Martin Luther, gives the following questions and answers:

106. What was the image of God? The image of God was this: A. Adam and Eve truly knew God as He wishes to be known and were perfectly happy in Him (Col. 3:10). B. They were righteous and holy, doing God's will (Eph. 4:24).

107. Do people still have the image of God? No, this image was lost when our first parents disobeyed God and fell into sin. Their will and intellect lost the ability to know and please God. In Christians God has begun to rebuild His image, but only in heaven will it be fully restored (Gen. 3:8-10; 5:3; I Cor. 2:14; Ps. 17:15).

It is not correct to dismiss this teaching merely as “Lutheran” and not Reformed. Beside the Reformed creeds, Heinrich Heppe, a significant historian of the continental Reformed theological tradition, mentions several Dutch, German and Swiss theologians who denied that the wicked are the image of God in the “broader sense”, as it would later be called. Heppe asserts that Johannes Cocceius, Johannes Heinrich Heidegger, Johannes Braun, Herman Witsius, Leonhard Riisen and others “declared against” this notion.

Moving from continental Europeans, we come to the English Puritans. William Perkins, often called the father of the Puritans, declared, “man by creation was made a goodly creature in the blessed image of God: but by Adam's fall men lost the same, and are now become the deformed children of wrath”.¹ He was followed in this teaching by, amongst others, Paul Bayne (Perkins' successor at Cambridge University), Richard Sibbes (noted for his warm preaching), Joseph Caryl (author of the longest commentary on the book of Job), Thomas Vincent (who penned a fine explanation of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*) and Ralph Venning (who wrote *The Sinfulness of Sin*).

Moving north from England, we come to a nineteenth-century, Scottish Presbyterian, George Smeaton, who averred,

The image of God, in which Adam was created, was replaced by the entire corruption of man's nature (John 3:6). His understanding had been furnished with a true and saving knowledge of his Creator and of spiritual things; his heart and will had been upright; all his affections had been pure; and the whole man holy: but, revolting from

God by the temptation of the devil, the opposite of all that image of God became his doleful heritage; and his posterity derive corruption from their progenitor, not by imitation, but by the propagation of a vicious nature, which is incapable of any saving good. It is prone to evil, and dead in sin. It is not denied that there still linger in man since the Fall some glimmerings of natural light, some knowledge of God and of the difference between good and evil, and some regard for virtue and good order in society. But it is all too evident that, without the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit, men are neither able nor willing to return to God, or to reform their natural corruption.²

Crossing the Atlantic, we turn to American Presbyterian, R. L. Dabney:

This image [of God] has been lost, in the fall, and regained, in redemption. Hence, it could not have consisted in anything absolutely essential to man's essence, because the loss of such an attribute would have destroyed man's nature. The likeness which was lost and restored must consist, then, in some accidents.

A. W. Pink, a twentieth-century English Baptist, also rejects the popular error regarding the image of God:

Even among those preachers who desire to be regarded as orthodox, who do not deny the Fall as a historical fact, few among them perceive the dire effects and extent thereof. “Bruised by the fall,” as one popular hymn puts it, states the truth far too mildly; yea, entirely misstates it. Through the breach of the first covenant all men have lost the image of God, and now bear the image of the Devil (John 8:44). The whole of their faculties are so depraved that they can neither think (2 Cor. 3:5), speak, nor do anything truly good and

acceptable unto God. They are by birth, altogether unholy, unclean, loathsome and abominable in nature, heart, and life; and it is altogether beyond their power to change themselves.

It is in this biblical, creedal and theological tradition that we and the Protestant Reformed Churches stand. As Homer C. Hoeksema put it,

It is perhaps even well not to speak of the image of God in the “[f]ormal” and “material” sense, though this distinction is much safer [than that of the image of God in the so-called “broader” and “narrower” senses]. For after all, the “image of God in the formal sense” is, strictly speaking, not the image of God in man, but his capacity to be an

image bearer. And as such, he may bear either the image of God or the image of the devil. It is well, therefore, to limit ourselves to the language of our Canons and to include in the image of God only what this article [i.e., III/IV:1] included, namely, the excellent spiritual, ethical gift which man forfeited through his rebellion and fall.

HOLINESS AS YOUNG ADULTS (III)

>> Wee Gim Theng



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Financial independence and the power of money

The taste of financial independence is a sheer joy and pleasure to many young adults. Once they were strapped with limited financial resources and had to depend on their parents for sustenance. Now being able to work and gain financial freedom has empowered young adults to get what they have always wanted. As one literally experiences the power of money and what it can do, one can be affected by it in many ways.

First, the young adult’s calling as a good steward is challenged. They may be tempted to only spend what they have earned on themselves. It may affect their desire to give cheerfully to support the work of the Lord in the church as they realize the opportunity costs of

having to give up a certain lifestyle or to forgo buying a certain item that they crave for. The desire to contribute to the church’s needs is frequently challenged by one’s own desire for more earthly things, pleasures and pursuits. Unwittingly, young Christian adults can get caught up in the pursuits of material and worldly gains. The temptation to accumulate more wealth can cause the young Christian adult to work hard at the job in order to be able to afford the things that one desires after. This is particularly true in an age of materialism and self-gratification. It will start to blur one’s Christian’s perspective and calling as a pilgrim and stranger in this world. This is a great danger young Christian adults must be wary of and seek to avoid. “Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matt. 6:24, Luke 16:13).

As Singles

One aspect of holiness for the singles has to do with how one deals with loneliness. Loneliness can have a debilitating effect on young Christian adults who are trying to cope with singlehood. Loneliness can drive young adults to be involved in all sorts of activities to fill up the voids in

their lives. They can end up indulging in work or pleasures; or drowning their feeling of loneliness in unending activities, videos/TV/movies watching, attending courses, etc. The more sociable ones may seek companionships and find solace in their friends through clubbing, drinking, pleasures, fun, etc. However, if young single Christian adults could devote more of their life and time in the church and God’s work, they could divert their energies to the service of God’s people and be more involved in the life of the church.

One significant and constant challenge of young Christian adults is to know the Lord’s will regarding their calling to be single. As one sees more of their peers getting married and having covenant children, one becomes more and more concerned of being ‘unmarriageable’. The temptation to compromise grows stronger as one pines for companionship or longs to be married. One has to remain steadfast, be very prayerful, constantly seek the Lord’s will and wait upon the Lord to provide; and not to ‘take things into our own hands’ and be unequally yoked (2 Cor. 6:14).

One other challenge of young single Christians is the tendency to have wrong motivations to remain as singles. One possible reason could be that to stay single, one could have more free time for oneself without having to think about the spouse's or child's needs. Furthermore, one could use all the monies earned entirely on one's wants and needs without reservation or inhibition.

Young single Christians need to be reminded that as the bride of Christ, married to the Lord, they are to be wholly consecrated to Him too. They also have a role to play in the church as they are more likely to have more time to participate in church activities or to serve the church. Like what Paul says in 1 Cor. 7:32-34, singles need not be cumbered with the affairs of married life and upbringing of children. They have more time to engage in the Lord's work. They can also spend a good part of their time growing in the faith and knowledge of God's word through reading good Christian books, listening to good sermons online, attending Bible studies, etc.

As a Married Couple

Young married Christian couples also have their fair share of challenges in their marriages. They have to struggle to fulfil their new roles in their marriage: the young husband learns to exercise his headship responsibly and lovingly, loves his wife, provides for the family, leads in family devotions, etc., while the young wife learns willing and loving submission to her husband, loves her husband, be a keeper at home, cares for the family's needs, etc.

When the first child arrives, besides adjusting to the new arrival, the challenge is to learn how not to allow the baby to dictate the couple's lives. While

it is true that in the initial months after birth, the disorientated baby will soon follow a certain schedule, do not be afraid to upset the schedule some of the time so that as young couples you are not cut off from fellowship with others. The addition of a newborn should not prevent you from serving in the church either.

One of the challenges faced by young Christian couples is managing time for one another and yet be able to maintain their own personal space. They have to be careful that their earthly cares do not take precedence over the spiritual demands of the family and yet be able balance their time to be involved in the church. They have to prioritise their time so that they do not forego spending personal time with one another as well as spending time together learning God's word and encouraging one another as couples.

Another challenge faced by young Christian couples is in the area of finances. The couple has to agree on how the finances are managed and what they spend on. The husband ought to consult his wife on their expenditures especially on big ticket items before making any decisions. Decisions should be properly made after having discussed them thoroughly with his wife. The young husband will soon learn that it is better to have the blessings of his wife than to deal with a fallout.

'Keeping up with the Joneses' can be a temptation to young Christian couples. Relying only on one breadwinner will take its toll inevitably on what kind of house one stays in, whether to buy a car, whether to eat in some fancy restaurant, or where to go for holidays, etc. One has to learn to be content (Phi. 4:11; 1 Tim. 6:8; Heb 13:5a) with what God has provided and not

compare themselves with what other families have or can do. One has to learn to live within the means God has provided the family.

What we have seen above are challenges and temptations that constantly affect you as young Christian adults as you struggle to live a holy life. Whether as singles or as married couples, you realise that it is an uphill battle you have to fight each day with the three-fold enemy of self, Satan and the world. It is not easy. You are constantly reminded of your depravity and weaknesses each time you fall into temptations. However, do not be discouraged. The path you are taking is one trodden by many fellow Christians before you. The circumstances may be different, but the challenges and temptations remain very much the same. Seek the older brothers and sisters for their godly advice and encouragement. One has to be constantly reminded that our Christian life is that of a pilgrim and stranger on this earth. We have no abiding place here. We are to "lay up treasures in heaven, where neither moth and rust doth corrupt ... for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:20-21). God, through our pilgrimage, is preparing us for the life above. By the power of His grace, cleave unto the LORD your God (Josh. 23:8) and turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left (Josh. 23:6). He will surely bring you through your life's journey till you reach the heavenly shores.

QUIT YOU LIKE MEN (II)

>> Woon Tian Loong

Previously, we have looked at the strength of man, the source of his strength, and some characteristics that he should have. We will continue with what other parts of Scripture have to say about manliness and the temptations a man faces.

Other Parts of Scripture

In the beginning, when God created Adam, it is implied that God created Adam a man with all his characteristics manly – spiritually, emotionally, and physically. He did not merely create Adam to be a genderless person, nor did his gender as a man come about only when Eve was created so that there was merely a distinction between a man and a woman. In this regard, we note that manliness, as a gift of God to the man, flows out of God's design and wisdom, and that manliness pleases God. Furthermore, the man was created with all of his characteristics in view that at the appointed time, the Lord Jesus Christ, the second Adam, would personally take on the nature of a man.

Not only does manliness please God, but Scripture also teaches us that the opposite displeases God. “The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord thy God” (Deut. 22:5). This underscores that there are differences between a man and woman, and that a man ought not try to be a woman as symbolized by the wearing of her clothes. For a man to desire to be a woman, and thus not a man – that is an abomination to God.

In reality, every teaching of the Bible teaches a man what a man is to be like, for a manly man must also be a godly man. It is therefore beyond this article to examine every command in the Bible. At this point, it may be beneficial to note that the Scriptures do go against false notions of manliness. For example, gentleness belongs to a man as it is one of the aspects of the fruits of the Spirit. Likewise, even weeping, where appropriate and for no small matter (for we understand that he ought to be emotionally stronger than a woman), is fitting for a man. We sing in Psalter 337, “Because Thy statutes are despised, with overwhelming grief I weep”.

Temptations

What prevents us men from being men? To begin, manliness – even earthly manliness – is not natural. To be a boy is natural – he is born thus. To have male body parts and the male anatomy is natural – he is born with it. Manliness? Not so much. In some cultures of the world, there is the idea of a “rite of passage” which often includes a test where a boy would need to pass beforehand. He would need training and honing of his skills. Therefore, even in an earthly sense, to be a man is generally understood to be unnatural. Besides, understanding that sin corrupts our very nature and that the sinful heart desires to turn everything good upside down, how can a good gift such as manliness be natural? If being an earthly man is unnatural, then being a godly man is even more unnatural.

Furthermore, temptations surround us for men to not be manly both in form and substance.

First, being a man is difficult. From what has been written thus far, we feel the enormous difficulty of being a man. To be a man is a weighty and glorious calling after all.

Second, given the weighty calling of a man, there is much for the man to do and there can be fear of not meeting expectations as well. There is work to be done and strength is required for that work. There are opposing forces to be faced and the courage of a man is needed to deal with it. A man, thus, fearing that he might not meet expectations, or be exploited, or be worn out, might be tempted to not be manly, and wish that he will not stand out so as to be tasked with certain (less than pleasant) tasks.

Third, in connection with the point above, when men do not meet expectations or behave inappropriately, men tend to get harsher rebukes or punishments in contrast to girls, it seems. And who likes to be at the receiving end of rebukes and punishments? Perhaps, we might be thinking: if I show myself to be weaker, then those who come down hard on us might be gentler or avoid confronting us altogether.

Fourth, manliness is often scorned and jested at today. Popular ideas would have us believe that to be a man is to be a “chauvinist pig”, a “woman hater”, or an overbearing and obnoxious fool. While it is true that men in society have

caused serious hurt to those around them throughout history – unloving and harsh husbands, oppressive bosses, and irresponsible leaders, etc. – to dismiss and undermine men's place in society is contrary to the design and purpose of God. The solution then, is not to dismiss men so that it is the women who take charge, but to have men be truly manly – to be godly, responsible, loving, and strong.

Fifth, popular media exalts the very opposite notion – influencing men to become like women. The idea of “pretty boys” and the like is being promoted through the media, especially, from my observation, some Asian dramas, singers (boy bands), and the like. The media tries either to glorify being effeminate or get a humoured audience by having males act effeminate. Is it not easy to get a laughing audience by having a male act effeminate? While

it is true that the audience may be mocking towards the actor in laughter, there is also the temptation on the part of the audience that if they behaved in the same way, they can get the kind of (wrong) attention that the actor is getting. And by nature we crave attention.

Moving on, we will look into the idea of the *form* of a man – in the next instalment.

MARRIAGE IS NOT FOR ME (II)

>> Marcus and Tze Yan Wee



Marcus and Tze Yan Wee are members of CERC.

No, this article is not our expression of regret of being married. Rather, if you recall the previous article, we touched on an important principle of marriage – selflessness. Marriage is not for me – not for my own advantage and gratification. As with all things we do and have, our marriages ultimately ought to glorify God through living as one flesh in accordance to His Word.

Within the sphere of human relationships, our marriages are for the sake of the brethren in the church. God blesses the family through the rich spiritual life as they actively serve in church (Ps. 128:5). But chiefly, marriage is for the sake of the spouse.

God instituted marriage for the reason that both husband and wife may “faithfully assist one another”¹, living a life of giving in their marriage. If marriage is for the sake of our spouse, the calling of selflessness in marriage is implied – we are to give ourselves for the sake of our spouse.

We must bear in mind that marriage is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. By nature, we are prideful, self-seeking creatures, and God uses marriage in this life to sanctify and prepare us for our eternal life in glory. We are called to put away all pride and selfishness, giving ourselves for one another (1 Cor. 7:3-5; 13:5). Recognising our inability to do so, we rely on God's grace, which empowers us more and more to walk in the Spirit and not in the selfish lusts of our flesh (Gal. 5:16, 24).

In this article, we shall apply the principle of selflessness in our marriages. We feel a little like 15-year-olds attempting to provide “life advice”; our combined ages barely reach half a century, and

our time as a married couple is still shy of its first anniversary. Nevertheless, with Scripture as our guiding lamp, we are confident that its wisdom will transcend our feeble words and ground our idealistic youthfulness. We shall see that living selflessly in marriage involves a willingness to sacrifice, even during the most difficult of times, and that such selfless living begins now, whether we are single, dating, or married.

Living Selflessly in Marriage

Elizabeth Elliot illustrates living selflessly in marriage with a picture of a waltz:

You can't talk about the idea of equality and the idea of self-giving in the same breath... If two people agree to dance together they agree to give and take, one to lead and one to follow. This is what a dance is. Insistence that both lead means there won't be any dance.

The waltz is unlike other genres of dances, beautifully choreographed with specific dance steps that both dancers have to follow. Imagine if both dancers

insisted on their own dance steps – would such a dance be called a waltz? Would there be unity in the dance? Such striking similarities between the waltz and marriage! Imagine if both depart from their God-ordained roles – the husband leads with an iron fist and the wife refuses to submit – that would be no reflection of the love between Christ and His church! Within the God-ordained roles of husband and wife, both are called to self-denial.

Selflessness as Willingness to Sacrifice

When two enter into the state of marriage, both are joined as one flesh. The lives of both husband and wife are intertwined – they do not live for themselves. They do not act on their own terms. Rather, each has the other to consider – how would my actions affect my spouse? What is best for him/her? Answering these questions properly requires sacrifice, giving up what is dear to oneself for the sake of the other.

The husband is called to dwell with his wife, which applies even after he comes back tired from a long day at work. This may require him to sacrifice a game of basketball or have less “me” time. The wife is called to be a keeper at home, caring for its needs, which may require her to give up time from her sewing or baking projects, or other interests she may have. Each does not make decisions based on “What do *I* feel like doing?” or, “What’s best for *me*?” but “How does this affect *my spouse*?” and “Is this best for *us*?”

Even with this motivation, selfishness can still creep in unawares. A husband may be thinking, “What’s best for my wife?” with the answer ready-made in his head, “I know what’s best”. And

“What do I feel like doing?” or, “What’s best for me?” but “How does this affect my spouse?” and “Is this best for us?””

then he proceeds to (wrongly) apply his solution to his wife’s issue. Yet, many times our spouses simply need a listening ear or a shoulder to cry on instead of a Mr. Fix-It or a Mrs. Know-It-All; a word of comfort and assurance rather than a word of judgment and rebuke. What is best for our spouses in their various afflictions? God’s Word must be our guide, but we improve on how and when to apply it as we communicate openly with our spouses and learn humbly from our mistakes.

Each is also called to “esteem [the] other better than themselves” (Phi. 2:3) – how do I view my husband or wife? His or her point of view? Both husband and wife attentively listen to and carefully consider the opinion of the other before they make a decision together. The husband does not quickly dismiss his wife, thinking, “What does she know anyway?” The wife does not brush off her husband, thinking, “He does not understand”. This does not mean we must always be agreeing and going with what our spouses say – there are times when both may have different views. Rather, esteeming the other better than ourselves means truly valuing the opinion of our spouse. It means sincerely using words and body language that show “I am listening to you because what you say matters to me”. In all that a husband or wife does, it is “he/she first” instead of “me first”.

Selflessness Especially during Difficult Moments

There are great joys and blessings to be experienced in marriage. During such times, selfless giving can seem easy. It is easy for a husband to give himself for his wife when he considers the great sacrifices she has made for him – her education, career, family name, and so on. It is easy for a wife to continue in her faithful service when the husband slogs hard at work all day and comes back with a listening ear or a helping hand. It is easy for a young married couple, fresh from their honeymoon and bursting with youthful exuberance, to imagine a lifetime of joyful, selfless living in marriage. Yet, selflessness is required not merely during those times, but also during the most difficult of times. In a time-honoured wedding vow, the bride and groom promise to be wedded “for better, for worse; for richer, for poorer; in sickness and in health; to love and to cherish”. The calling to love sacrificially clearly applies even during the not-so-good, difficult times.

Difficult times include those when our spouse is difficult to love. Selflessness is required, not merely as a response to the spouse’s selflessness, but also in response to his/her rank selfishness. Selflessness is required, not merely when facing a soft, humble countenance, but also when dealing with a hard, obstinate character. Selflessness is required, even when the spouse is as unreasonable as can be.

Difficult times also include those when we are not in the best of moods. We can be extremely patient and long-suffering on the best of days. Yet, more often than not, we may find ourselves irritable and easily triggered to anger, especially after a long day of stressful work with difficult colleagues or of crying babies and sleep deprivation.

**"What can I give
in this relationship
that will spiritually
profit this young
man (or woman)
whom I'm dating?"**

During these times, our patience is sustained by a razor-thin thread. Yet, consider: is there any circumstance in which we may be impatient? That is, is our impatience ever justified? Oftentimes, we act like it is. My spouse ought to know better than to do/say that at this time! He/she *deserved* that sharp tone, that annoyed grunt, or that cold shoulder! Yet, consider what Scripture has to say: "charity suffereth long" (1 Cor. 13:4). Love, which we as husbands and wives are called to, is patient, bearing with one another's faults! Just as how love is never to be *unkind* ("charity... is kind"), so to love is never to be impatient! Yes, there are times when our spouses may need a rebuke, but even this is to be done in love, patient love which suffers long.

Selflessness as a Human Impossibility

From all that has been said thus far, living selflessly in marriage seems like an impossibility. If that is the conclusion reached, that is exactly the right one! Even if we have a kind, sacrificial, patient nature, we will still stumble. Our patience has a finite threshold which will be breached, over and over again. Even within our (the writers') short marriage experience, we are painfully aware of our imperfections, and all we write above is borne from our selfish failings.

Yet, as with all aspects of our Christian life, when we are made aware of our

limitations and sinfulness, we do not despair, but run to the cross of Christ, where we find forgiveness of sins, receive new life, and grow in our ability to imitate our selfless Saviour. Prayer, then, is an absolute necessity in the life of a married couple, as we recognize our limitations and find grace to help in time of need. And we are assured that God promises His "certain assistance" and "aid and [protection]... even when [we] are least deserving of it".² What a great comfort!

Selflessness Begins Now

Selflessness is certainly not something exclusive to marriage, but is a requirement of Christian living, whatever our calling may be. Yet, due to the increased proximity and familiarity in marriage, the temptation and opportunity to be selfish is greater, and the consequences of selfishness more keenly felt. Those of us young people who are considering marriage should practice living selflessly in our current circumstances, whether in singlehood or in courtship.

In Singlehood

As single youths, the closest neighbours whom God has placed in our lives right now are our parents and siblings. Our home is a classroom where God is pleased to teach us self-denial, a training ground for us to apply the commands He issues us: to love our siblings (Pro. 17:17) and obey our parents (Ex. 20:12; Eph. 6:1-2). Daily we interact with fellow sinners, with countless opportunities to deny ourselves for their sakes. Are we calculative with those whose turn it is to do the dishes or sweep the floor? Do we show no honour to our parents, and despise their weaknesses? Then we can expect to bring such selfish attitudes into

marriage, to the sorrow of our spouses and ourselves. On the contrary, as we humbly learn to live selflessly, going the extra mile to help and bearing with the weaknesses of our neighbours, we cultivate a selfless attitude which God will use to prosper our marriages.

In Courtship

The principle of selflessness in marriage applies to courtship/dating too, the transition phase between singlehood and marriage. While we seek to date, or are currently dating, we must be constantly living out this principle, "Dating is not for me!" We do not enter into courtship for the thrill of it, seeking to extract good feelings out of the relationship and being unwilling to sacrifice. We may be able to maintain this practice for a time, before the realities of marriage bring everything crashing down. Rather, selflessness in courtship asks, "What can I give in this relationship that will spiritually profit this young man (or woman) whom I'm dating?" Essentially, selflessness in courtship seeks the spiritual good of the brother or sister in Christ, and is willing to sacrifice for his/her sake.

Conclusion

Living selflessly in marriage is a humanly impossible calling which is made possible by grace. By grace, we are able to sacrifice for our spouse, even during the most difficult of times. Wherever we find selfishness in our lives, let us seek to root it out, living for the Lord who saved us, and giving for the spouse He gave us.

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THY MIGHT SETS FAST THE MOUNTAINS

>> Jemima Joy Boon



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This title is taken from Psalter 171, a versification of Psalm 65. This psalter talks to us about God in Nature. In Psalm 65 verse 6, “Which by his strength setteth fast the mountains; being girded with power”. In this article we cover two aspects. First, God’s power in creation. Second, we will consider its spiritual meaning: how God’s power in creation relates to God’s power in the lives of His people.

God’s power in creation

1) God’s might sets fast the mountains.

What does God’s might mean? God’s strength, His power and His sovereignty in creation.

This is shown in 1 Chronicles 29:11, “Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all”.

2) What does “sets fast” mean? God in His providence ensures that the mountains stand firm and are not moved. This is shown in Psalm 104:9, “Who laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be removed for ever”.

Through God’s sovereign power and control, He ensures that those majestic mountains are fixed. They cannot be moved. This brings glory to God.

The spiritual meaning – God’s power in those that trust in Him

We will consider three questions: 1) What are these mountains? 2) How are these mountains “set fast”? 3) What is this “might” that sets fast the mountains?

1) What are these mountains?

These mountains refer to the church of God, those who trust in the Lord. As Psalm 125:1 clearly states, “They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever”. Though it refers to the church of God, it can definitely apply to His people individually. We who are the children of God can claim this promise. We shall be fixed, firm as mountains, unmoveable, that abideth for ever. Those who depend on God, trusting in His word, He comforts and strengthens their faith. He causes their minds to be stayed on Him. Here, the church of God and those who trust in the Lord, shall be as Mount Zion, which is built on a rock. They are protected from the force of the enemy, because their faith is fixed on God’s word.

2) How are these mountains “set fast”?

These mountains as we read above are those who trust in the Lord. They are set fast:

- in God’s everlasting love, by which they stand strong;

- in eternal election, which is the foundation of God that stands sure;

- in the covenant of grace, which is more immovable than the hills and mountains;

- and on Christ the Rock, against whom the gates of hell can never prevail.

Here, God promises us again that as He has kept the mountains firm, more so will He maintain His covenant with His people, ensuring that it stands sure and firm and cannot be broken. As in Isaiah 54:10 puts it, “For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee”.

"They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever."

Q3. What is this “might” that sets fast the mountains?

As God’s might holds the mountains firm, so also He giveth us faith and strengthens it. This is faith which is so established, settled, and kept by the power of God, that it cannot be removed by the most raging storms and winds of the world’s persecutions, Satan’s temptations, or the believer’s own sins and corruptions.

Application:

Though the waters may rage, and the storms billow, threatening terror, our trust in the might of God's power stands firm. He keeps us from the changes in the world, just as He keeps the mountains from the changing environment and weather.

We see how our Lord Jesus commanded the winds and the waves, and they obeyed him. So also, we see how He stills the confusion and unrest among the people of the world.

This brings us comfort. We know our Lord's strength and power. We are

reminded time and time again from His word. We trust in Him who has *set fast the mountains*, that amidst our unworthiness, His kindness will not depart from us, neither the covenant of His peace be removed from us.

THE IMPORTANCE OF READING FOR EVERY CHRISTIAN (I)

>> Rev. Arie Den Hartog



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You have probably heard it said before that we are living in the age of the explosion of knowledge. The meaning of this statement is that never before in the history of the world has the average person been able to access an almost unlimited amount of knowledge on almost any subject of interest and significance in life. Access to the world-wide internet makes this possible. New devices are appearing continually. There is the constant need for updating your devices if you want to stay abreast of all this. Tragically, however, for many Christians, at a

time when so much knowledge is available to them, they are so shallow and superficial in their knowledge of the truth of the Word of God.

Because of the accessibility of knowledge, there are some who imagine that personal reading and study is unnecessary today. There are those who think this way also about the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ and the doctrines of salvation. All one has to do is look it up on the internet. Whatever question you want an answer for, just look it up on the internet. There is no need of retaining a lot of knowledge in your head as long as you have a computer.

There are some very serious fallacies of reasoning in the above thinking, however. The modern day world wants to have knowledge in little bite-sized formats. We imagine that knowledge can come quickly and almost without any effort. The knowledge that we seek has to have immediate and obvious practical value for Christian living. The fallacy of this reasoning is that the truth of the Christian faith cannot always be learned with little effort in such bite-sized formats.

The Word of God is deep and wide and profound. The knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ is so high that it is always greater and more wonderful than human understanding. As Christians we need to be willing to ascend higher and higher and search deeper and deeper to learn the amazing, wonderful truth of God and the doctrines of our salvation. Appropriating the truth of God and the Christian faith requires the activity both of the mind and the heart. Truth that will remain in our hearts usually comes through careful study, prayer, and meditation. Sad to say, many Christians do not realise this.

A Christian can never hope to be strong in the knowledge of God and sound in the doctrines of salvation unless he or she is ready to do a great deal of reading and careful study. We are called as Christians to know and confess and love and defend the truth. This requires devoted and careful study of the Word of God. "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). Paul wrote these words to admonish Timothy as a minister of the Word of God in the church. Not all of us are called of God to be ministers.

"As Christians we need to be willing to ascend higher and higher and search deeper and deeper to learn the amazing, wonderful truth of God."

There is nevertheless application for this admonition to every believer, the more gifted especially, and those who are called to be leaders and teachers in the church especially. There are Christians who should be ashamed because even after many years of being a Christian they have so little knowledge and understanding of the truth of God.

The inspired writer of the book of Hebrews admonishes Christians who after many years of being Christians are still like little babes. They are still in need of being fed with the milk of the Word and are not able to endure the strong meat of the Word of God (sound doctrine) that is so necessary for the Christian to be strong. A profound knowledge of the truth is necessary for enduring the trials of the Christian life. Without this knowledge, many are easily led astray, because they are unable to discern the truth from the lie. They cannot resist the temptation of sin confronting us from all different sources. They do not know how to judge right from wrong. Their life is directed much more by feeling and experience rather than by God's truth. "Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have

need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Heb. 5:11-14). How many of those who are reading this article are mature Christians, having a good understanding of the truth? Most of the time, those who have become such are those who have done a considerable amount of regular reading in their lives.

In Ephesians 4, the inspired apostle warns against those who have not, after many years as Christians, arrived at years of maturity in the fullness of the knowledge of Christ. These, he warns, are in grave danger of being "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive" (Eph. 4:14). There are many deceivers in the world that lead many astray. This can have very serious consequences for Christians themselves and for their families.

One of the evidences of the above discussed situations is Christians who belong for a time to good Reformed churches in the providence of God. But they wrongly become offended with something or someone in the church they belong to. They then go "shopping" for another church to belong to and after a time join themselves to a church holding to many and serious false teachings. Sometimes they return to a church which they once left because of false teachings, with little concern that these churches continue to maintain those wrong teachings.

They should be ashamed of themselves. One of the urgent reasons why we need to be mature in the faith and in the knowledge of the truth is because we need to be able to defend the truth of God against many false teachers in the world. God's Word repeatedly warns us that such false teachers arise even in the church itself. Paul told the elders of Ephesus that "grievous wolves" would arise from the midst of the church, not sparing the members of the flock of God. Christians need to be able to defend the truth for themselves and for the welfare of their dear families. If they love their children at all and are truly concerned about them, they will be concerned about their future. False doctrines maintained in the church will inevitably lead also to compromise in Christian living. Also the members of the church must stand together to know and defend the truth, for the love and glory of God. Holding to the truth is not merely an individual matter. We have a corporate responsibility, together with the true church where we are members by the grace of God. We need to do a great deal of reading to be able to be faithful members of the church and active in our calling and fulfilling our God-given responsibility as church members.

To be continued...

THE CARE OF THIS WORLD

>> Jean Lim



Jean Lim is a member of CERC.

A parable, when used in the gospel, is a method of instruction to illustrate things concerning the kingdom of God. In the parable of the sower, our Lord Jesus illustrates the reaction to the preaching of the Word in the hearts and lives of those who hear. We know that the preaching of the Word is a savour of life unto life for God's elect, and a savour of death unto death for the reprobate. This truth explains the different reactions in the hearts and lives of those who hear the Word of God preached. Henceforth the good soil represents the hearts of the elect, whom God has prepared to receive His Word and to have their lives bear fruits (Mark 4:20). The other three kinds of soil (hard, rocky, and thorny) represent the hearts of reprobates, who reject the gospel and have lives which are not bearing fruit (Mark 4:4-7).

However, the parable can also be applied to the children of God when their hearts manifest as bad soil hearers. The three spiritual enemies of the children of God, which are the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh (old man), can sow evil seeds, which produce thorns that choke the growth of God's good seeds. One of these evil seeds is the care of this

world (Matt. 13:22), which is the focus of this article.

What is "the care of this world"?

"The care of this world" is an attitude of constantly letting your mind and heart be filled with earthly concerns. Such an attitude can also be escalated to anxiety, worry, and even depression. Like other young people, your earthly concerns can be the school homework, tests and exams, relationship issues with your family and friends, your physical appearance, or your personal image. For those who are working, you can be burdened with the demands of your job.

As children of God, you are to be a good testimony in your earthly callings as students and employees, but how do you not let these earthly concerns become the cares of your life on earth? Sometimes we ignore the wisdom and power of God's Word. Instead, we find relief from the cares by seeking worldly devices. For example, you may be constantly at your computer and handphone games or other forms of entertainment to find relief from these cares. A young person who cares about his or her physical appearance and personal image may look up to worldly stars and learn their lifestyles and their fashion to make himself or herself "look good". These ways can only lead you to greater bondage and invite more cares into your life.

Why must you not harbour the cares of the world?

Luke 21:34 says, "And take heed to

yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares". The Word of God here warns you to be watchful of letting your heart be overburdened with the cares of the world, lest you become unprepared for the Lord's return. All the children of God are to be prepared for the Lord's return. We are to be faithful servants to bear good fruits while waiting for His return. We are eager to show forth our fruits to Him, not to merit rewards, but to show our thankfulness to Him for the salvation He has purchased for us.

"God will and can establish my thoughts (not a mind that is tossed to and fro) when I "roll my burden over" to Him."

How shall you overcome the care of the world?

The way to overcome the care of the world is to imbibe the Word of God. This is done by meditating on the Word and asking God for His wisdom to help you deal with your earthly concerns so that they will not become thorns that prevent the seed of His Word from bearing fruits.

Here are some applications of God's truth that help me deal with the various kinds of cares in my personal life.

Rejoice in the Lord

Philippians 4:4: “Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, Rejoice”. The keyword is ‘alway’. It means that no matter what the circumstances are, I can rejoice. For my greatest trouble (the wrath of God) in life has been taken away. There can be nothing worse than this trouble because if God is for me, what else can be against me? All other things are but servants of my salvation (Rom. 8:28). If I find it hard to rejoice in the Lord in the midst of much cares, I ask myself if I am expecting things to be the way I want. And this truth in Romans 8:28 reminds me that I am saved for His glory (purpose), and not for my glory (purpose). So I have to, by His grace, deny my sinful self and submit to His will, because He is the God of all goodness and I have to put my trust in Him.

Pray and commit your cares to the Lord

Philippians 4:6-7: “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer

and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus”. God promises me peace when I bring my cares to Him in prayer. I thank God for all these difficult circumstances in my life and confess that I am unable to handle them on my own. But He can, so I have to leave them with Him to handle. God will and can **establish my thoughts** (not a mind that is tossed to and fro) when I “roll my burden over” to Him (Prov. 16:3).

Delight in the assembling of the saints

Hebrews 10:25: “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching”.

I believe, as a Christian, a sign of being prepared for the Lord’s coming is a love to be with God’s people and to have sincere care for them. Our heavenly

Father calls us to commit our cares to Him and focus our time and strength to diligently study and meditate on the Word of God and to serve the saints in the church. We can encourage each other with the Word of God on the Lord’s Day, during the Bible studies, and when we help the saints in church who are in need.

Beloved children, take heed to God’s Word, and you will experience His grace and power in taking away your cares of this world.

“The Word of God here warns you to be watchful of letting your heart be overburdened with the cares of the world, lest you become unprepared for the Lord’s return.”

THE CHRISTIAN IN THIS WORLD (I)

>> Beverly Tan



Beverly Tan is a member of CERC.

By God’s grace, the desire to help people was a start to my journey to becoming a counselling psychologist and helping people with struggles such as depression and anxiety. My journey continues as I help people within the church and counsel from a scriptural perspective. I am grateful to God and to the people such as my beloved husband, my dearly missed late father, and various mentors whom God has used to provide me with guidance

in my vocation (Pro. 11:14 says, “in the multitude of counsellors there is safety”).

I faced several challenges as a Christian in my vocation when people challenge me with questions such as those below. These questions, in turn, made me dig deeper into God’s Word in order to determine the most important perspective for me (Ps. 119:105, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light

unto my path”).

“Do you learn about evolution in psychology?”

Yes. During my studies I learned to put on scriptural lenses and Reformed antennas, and rely on the Holy Spirit to remind me of God’s truths. By God’s grace, the study of psychology was a constant evidence of the depravity of man, which reaffirmed in me the need for God’s irresistible grace.

“Why study a Master’s Degree when the woman’s primary calling is to be a mother?”

A master’s degree was a prerequisite to be a qualified psychologist in Singapore. For both my husband and I, we are prepared to become parents in God’s perfect will and timing. Thus while waiting, I am thankful to God for the opportunity to become a psychologist, and in so doing, be a good steward in my vocation (Matt. 25:14-30).

“Why not study for a PhD?”

It is clear to me not to pursue further studies as it is not my imminent calling. I have other colleagues who intend to pursue further studies, but personally for me I think I find it extremely hard to pursue a PhD, as well as have my family as my main priority.

I am thankful to God for allowing me to be a testimony to many people whom I have crossed paths within my journey (Matt. 5:14-16, “Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven”).

Christian girls’ home

During my attachment here, I provided the residents with psychological therapy and counselling in order to enable them to work through their trauma and problems arising mainly from child abuse concerns. I was able to pray with a teenager who acknowledged that her perception of not being loved by her

family contributed to her association with negative peers from where she derived a sense of self-worth.

Singapore boys’ home

During this attachment, I conducted violence prevention and anger management programmes and therapies for the residents who committed crimes. One of the residents in the programme observed that certain things which I discussed with him seemed to have come true. By God’s wisdom, I replied him by saying that I do not have such powers to prophesy, but I know that the God I believe in is the only powerful one (Rev. 22:13).

Christian classmates & lecturers

I am thankful for my Christian classmates and lecturers whom I had edifying conversations with about trusting God in our studies and lives. We continue to give all the praise and glory to our Lord most high.

A SUCCOURER OF MANY
 >> Daisy Lim



Daisy Lim is a member of CERC.

Hebrews 2:18 – “For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted”.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is a succourer of many, and we believers are exhorted to walk in His steps.

The word “succourer” means one who provides help, relief, assistance, and support to those in need.

In what ways has our Lord Jesus Christ

been a “succourer”?

We are all born totally depraved sinners. We are by nature inclined to wickedness, pride, and self-centredness. We are poor and needy, yet the Lord thinks upon us (Ps. 40:17). God is always our help and our deliverer.

The salvation we have received by grace through faith is a great salvation. Our Lord Jesus Christ delivers us from the curse and condemnation of God. He

"As our Lord blesses and enriches us, we ought to learn to share and comfort our brethren ... always provoking one another unto love and good works."

delivers us from the power of the devil, sin, and the world. We are forgiven of all our sins, and we can draw near to the true and living God. We have union and communion with God, now and forever. We begin to experience eternal life, which is life abundant indeed.

Our Lord Jesus Christ promises that He is with us always (Matt. 28:20). He is our great High Priest, our Good Shepherd, our Advocate, our Intercessor, our Living Bread, our Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, Redemption, etc. Indeed, this list is inexhaustive. He is our Everything, our All in All.

When we trust Him, He fills us with His peace, joy, and righteousness. We can commit all our cares to Him, for He cares for us and will sustain us. He will supply all our needs with the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:19).

He experienced great temptations in His earthly life – the temptations of the devil, mockeries of the people, and above all, the cruel cross. He taught us to endure all temptations. We have not sinned if we yield not to temptations. We will be spiritually stronger and victorious when we overcome temptations. We must fight the good

fight of faith. Faith is the victory that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4).

Definitely, His grace is sufficient to meet all our needs (2 Cor. 12:9).

Romans 16:1-2 – “I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchræa: That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also (Apostle Paul)”.

Phebe has been highlighted as an example of godly behaviour in the church. We believers in Christ are also to be “succourers of many” and of the ministers of God.

God has provided us faithful ministers of God to nourish our souls and to build us up in the faith. For the elders and ministers who rule the church well, they are worthy of double honour (1 Tim. 5:17).

We are exhorted to do good to all men, especially to those who are of the household of faith (Gal. 6:10). In obedience to the law of Christ, we ought to bear one another’s burdens (Gal. 6:2).

Whether married or single, we all have a fair share of needs and burdens. The married may be concerned with burdens such as financial difficulties, the discipline of challenging children, spousal or parent-child relationships, conflicts with in-laws, etc. The singles may be struggling with loneliness, depression, anxieties of the future, etc.

As our Lord blesses and enriches us, we ought to learn to share and comfort our brethren (Phil. 2:1), especially those with specific and peculiar needs, always

provoking one another unto love and good works. To ensure that the needs are genuine, our Lord has appointed the deacons to examine the situations and to minister works of mercy on behalf of the church.

When we practise God’s law of liberty diligently to love one another, indeed all our needs will be met. Our God shall supply all our needs because of His everlasting grace and love upon us. Look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, and all our cares, burdens, and needs will become strangely dim. We lack nothing. Worry not! If God clothes the grass of the field, shall He not much more clothe us? (Matt. 6:30). So cast all our cares and burdens upon Him. He shall also direct His people to love one another in word and in deed.

His people are His beloved bride. He will hide us under the shadow of His wings. He dwells in us and with us. We should all look forward to the day of our glorification – at the time of our death or the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ – when there will be no more tears and sorrows, but we will live in eternal bliss with our gracious God.

"We can commit all our cares to Him, for He cares for us and will sustain us. He will supply all our needs with the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus."

THE LIFE OF REV. HERMAN HOEKSEMA

>> Prof. David J. Engelsma



Prof. David Engelsma is a professor emeritus of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary. He was Professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament Studies from 1988 to 2008, and has been an ordained minister since 1963.

Herman Hoeksema (HH), the minister of the gospel whom Jesus Christ used to found the Protestant Reformed Churches in America (PRC), is little recognized by the Reformed and Presbyterian community of churches or, with the rare exception, by prominent Reformed or Presbyterian theologians.

Indeed, there is a conspiracy of silence, to keep him hidden from view. He is the buried Reformer.

There are reasons. Churches and theologians are unwilling to acknowledge the gross injustice of the prestigious Christian Reformed Church of North America (CRC) in its condemnation and discipline of this sound minister. In addition, they are determined to consign to oblivion the gospel truths that HH confessed and defended. Also, these churches and theologians desire to ignore in their own fellowships the presence of the grievous theological and ethical errors

that are the consequences of rejecting the fundamental biblical, Reformed truths that HH proclaimed.

The deliberate burying of HH by the Reformed community is indication both of its embrace of false doctrine and of its bad conscience.

Briefly told, the history of HH is the following. The son of an immigrant Dutch mother, reared in the poverty and other hardships of a broken home (his father was an ungodly deserter of wife and family), HH became an extraordinarily able minister in the CRC. He soon became pastor of the largest congregation of the denomination. No doubt, his ability and prominence occasioned the envy of many of his colleagues, ministers being as guilty of the “green eyed monster” as others. But the cause of the controversy that resulted in the expulsion of HH from the CRC was doctrinal — HH’s confession of the gospel of grace.

In reaction to HH’s uncompromising proclamation of salvation by sovereign, particular grace, including vehement, uncompromising condemnation of the Arminian heresy of universal grace dependent upon the will of the sinner, the CRC adopted a novel, unbiblical, anti-creedal doctrine of “common grace”. In three “points”, this doctrine denies the gospel of grace as authoritatively confessed especially in the Canons of Dordt. It teaches that God has a saving grace, not for the elect alone, but for all humans: universal (ineffectual) saving grace. In this grace, God offers salvation to all with the sincere desire that all accept the offer

and be saved (the “well meant offer”, which is the CRC’s own description of the preaching of the gospel). This first point is the denial of election; of particular, or limited, atonement; and of irresistible, or efficacious, grace.

Second, fallen, unsaved sinners retain some good and ability for good after the fall of Adam, by virtue of God’s alleged common grace. This is the denial of total depravity. This remaining goodness permits, if it does not require, fellowship of Christians with the ungodly, especially in the form of cooperation to create a good, Christian society and culture. Thus, the vitally important reality of the antithesis is compromised. The antithesis is the spiritual separation and warfare between the church and the world.

Third, God’s common grace enables unbelievers to perform works that are good — good in the estimation of God. The CRC and all other churches that hold to common grace deny that all the works of the unregenerate are sinful. This plainly is the repudiation of the Reformed doctrine of total depravity. Invariably, the denial of total depravity, especially in connection with the “well-meant offer”, takes form as the teaching of “free will”, the ability of the sinner to accept the “well-meant” offer of God and thus save himself. And this is the full-blown heresy of Arminianism and Pelagianism.

For his refusal to subscribe to the doctrine of common grace, in these “three points”, HH was disciplined by the CRC in 1924. It stripped him

of his office in the CRC and expelled him from the fellowship of this denomination. For rejecting the “three points of common grace”! For defending the gospel of grace as confessed by the Canons of Dordt! In various ways, the other reputedly conservative Reformed and Presbyterian churches honoured this ecclesiastical murder of HH and treated this orthodox, godly man as a pariah. And they do still!

Thereupon, HH was used of Jesus Christ to form a new denomination of Reformed churches — the Protestant Reformed Churches in America (PRC).

For the next forty years, until his death in 1965, the man — an indefatigable worker — was pastor of a huge congregation, preaching every Sunday; editor of the *Standard Bearer* magazine; professor of theology in the Protestant Reformed Seminary; author of many books; and frequent lecturer on many doctrinal subjects.

He was my professor for the three years of my seminary training, from 1960-1963. Stories of my experiences with this remarkable man of God, I have related in a series of articles in *Beacon Lights* under the heading, “I Remember Herman Hoeksema” (October 2008 – December 2009). The articles are available from the *Beacon Lights*.

Through HH, Jesus Christ, who is the Truth, gave the PRC especially two magnificent doctrines of the Reformed faith and a vitally important ethical truth (a doctrine concerning the Reformed, Christian life). The doctrines are particular, sovereign grace and the truth of the covenant of grace as intimate fellowship of God and His elect people, including the children of believing parents. Fundamental to this doctrine of the covenant is that the covenant and its salvation have their

source and governance in election. In the covenant as in missions, “as many as were ordained to salvation believed” (Act. 13:48). God has made His covenant, not with all humans and not with individuals apart from Jesus Christ, but with the Seed of the woman, who is Jesus, and all those who believe in Him by divine election (Galatians 3). Covenant (saving) grace is unconditional, as is saving grace in missions and evangelism. *Grace* is unconditional. For it is *grace*. A grace that is conditional, that is, dependent upon the will and works of the sinner, simply is not grace. A conditional grace is a new form of works.

The ethical teaching that Jesus has entrusted to the PRC is marriage as the lifelong, unbreakable bond between one man and one woman (Matt. 5 & 19; Mark 10; Luke 16; Rom. 7; 1 Cor. 7). It is one of church history’s surprises that the son of a broken home powerfully sounded and developed the truth of the unbreakable bond of marriage. Perhaps this is no surprise at all. Who more than a child raised in a broken home realizes experientially the blessedness of marriage?

The importance of these truths is writ large on the pages of Holy Scripture.

How these truths expose prevalent errors of theology and life in Reformed Christianity today, and preserve the PRC in the truth and holy life of the gospel, are evident to all.

I mention only two instances. First, much of supposedly conservative Reformed and Presbyterian Christianity in North America today is bedevilled by the heresy of the federal vision (FV). The FV blatantly denies all the “five points of Calvinism”, as well as justification by faith alone (see my *Federal Vision: Heresy at the Root*). The

source of the heresy is the theory of a conditional covenant, conceived as a conditional contract between God and all who come under the preaching of the Word, especially all the baptized children. This theory reigns in the churches in which the FV now appears. The churches cannot resist the heresy because of this erroneous doctrine of a conditional covenant, which they share with the FV.

One implication of this doctrine of the covenant is the rejection of the Reformed doctrine of the perseverance of saints. According to the theology of a conditional covenant, many with whom God originally established His covenant and thus in whom He began the work of salvation fail to keep the conditions of the covenant and go lost. Some sheep do not hear and heed the Shepherd’s voice, wander off, lose their salvation, and perish eternally! (see, to the contrary, John 10).

Second, the Presbyterian and Reformed churches in North America are plagued with a veritable flood of divorces and remarriages. Openly, these churches now excuse, permit, and justify even the remarriages of the guilty parties (those who committed adultery) in the preceding divorces. There is no stemming of the flood. There is no effort to stem the flood. The cause is the refusal to accept the teaching of the Bible that marriage is an unbreakable bond for life. The result is indescribable misery for many godly husbands and wives, to say nothing of deserted baptized, covenant children. The worst is the shame that it brings upon God. His name as “Faithful One” is etched upon the marriages of those who confess Him as their God.

HH’s teachings and warnings are validated today by Jesus Christ in the

evils that result from the rejection of them. And the evils are great. They are devastating, divine judgments upon the disobedient, who condemned and executed a faithful prophet of God and servant of Jesus Christ, or who connive at the condemnation. Reformed theologians and churches cannot but notice the evils in their own communions. One cannot but notice a destructive plague. But they remain silent. Having killed the prophet (ecclesiastically), and his prophecies, in 1924, they bury him, and his teachings, today.

Some Reformed theologians are burying HH today in another way, which is also shameful. They have come to realise that the covenant is not a cold contract, but a warm bond of fellowship between God and His believing people, symbolised by marriage. They burst on the scene with this truth as though they themselves discovered it, without so much as a word acknowledging that HH taught this one hundred years ago, as they well know. It is as though a contemporary scientist announced to the scientific world that he had recently discovered that the earth rotates

about the sun, without any mention of Copernicus. They too bury HH in their own scandalous way.

The PRC and the churches with whom they are in fellowship honour the prophet — and benefit from his prophesying.

Not because of him, but because of his Master!

Not because they were his doctrines, but because they are the gospel of his Lord!

THE DEPOSITION OF ELDERS

>> Rev. Nathan Langerak



Rev. Nathan Langerak is the minister of Crete Protestant Reformed Church in Crete, Illinois.

The editorial staff of the *Salt Shakers* asked me to address the subject of the deposition of an elder. They asked me to address specifically the following: the circumstances under which an elder may be deposed, the attitude of the congregation toward a deposed elder, and the restoration of an elder who has been wrongfully deposed.

The deposition of an elder is the

official action of the church to remove an elected and ordained man from the office of elder because of some sin. The church may also depose ministers and deacons. The deposition of officebearers is treated in articles 79 and 80 of the Reformed Church Order of Dordt. These articles are part of the larger section of the Church Order on church discipline. The deposition of an elder is part of the power of the church to exercise spiritual discipline among its members. Deposition is an application of the power of discipline to the officebearer. Deposition applies only to his office. Once removed from office, he is also still subject to the regular discipline of the church that applies to all the members. An officebearer of the church is not exempt from the discipline that applies to all the members generally. However, before that discipline can be applied, the church must deal with his office.

Article 79 mentions both deposition and suspension from office. Suspension is a temporary measure that relieves an officebearer of the active duties of his office because of some sin. This suspension can be followed with either restoration to his function in office or with deposition, that is, removal from office. By “be suspended or expelled”¹, the article implies that suspension of an elder does not automatically lead to deposition. The nature of the sin that required suspension might not require deposition. The question of whether to suspend only or to suspend *and* depose from office can only be determined in each individual case. By his sin an officebearer forfeits his influence and moral authority. Thus the question of his future effectiveness in the office must be taken into consideration in the decision whether merely to suspend or to suspend and depose.

The suspension or deposition of an elder may only take place with the advice of a neighbouring consistory. This is somewhat different from the minister, who may be suspended by judgment of the consistory and that of a neighbouring consistory, but who cannot be deposed without the advice of classis. The reason is that the classis had a say in his ordination into office and logically also has a say in his deposition from office. While discipline of the officebearer is the work of the consistory alone, Reformed consistories freely bind themselves by this provision as a safeguard against abuse of the office.

The sin for which an elder may be deposed from office is defined in article 79 as “any public, gross sin which is a disgrace to the church or worthy of punishment by the authorities”. Article 80 lists some of these sins. The article also makes plain that the listed sins are only examples of the principle sins worthy of suspension or deposition. Others not listed may be grounds for deposition. The following principle sins are given: “false doctrine or heresy, public schism, public blasphemy, simony, faithless desertion of office or intrusion upon that of another, perjury, adultery, fornication, theft, acts of violence, habitual drunkenness, brawling, filthy lucre [dirty or unjustly gotten money]”. Similar to article 79, article 80 also summarises the sins that are worthy of deposition as “all sins and gross offenses as render the perpetrators infamous before the world, and which in any private member of the church would be considered worthy of excommunication”.

All the care that the Reformed faith demonstrates in the articles of the Church Order on the discipline of church members is multiplied in the case

of the discipline of officebearers. The discipline of officebearers is governed by the biblical dictum of 1 Timothy 5:19: “Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses”. The English commentators on the Church Order, Van Dellen and Monsma, rightly point out that “this passage does teach by implication that discipline regarding office-bearers has a rightful place in the Church”, but they are weak on the warning of the passage about the discipline of an officebearer. Better is the Dutch commentator, Harm Bouwman, in his *Reformed Church Polity*:

Paul here warns Timothy not to accept accusations against the leaders of the congregation other than those based on lawful testimony. The law of Moses required that the judge pronounce judgment only in the presence of two or three witnesses (Deut. 17:6; 19:15). Also in the church one should not lightly take up an accusation brought against an elder. The word “receive” [in 1 Tim. 5:19] means to take up in order to deal with the accusation. No one is more at risk of slander than the leaders of the congregation. The prince of darkness tries to frustrate their work, to render their word impotent, to destroy their influence, either by tempting them to evil or by destroying their good name. There is an appalling amount of slander of the officebearers of Christ with the purpose to oppose the Lord’s cause. For that reason the elders of the congregation must not receive an accusation against an elder any other way than by two witnesses. The marginal notes of our translation explain [the passage] very correctly: “not only condemn him without sufficient witnesses, which should not be done to anyone, according to the law of Moses (Deut. 19: 15), but do not even accept an accusation to judge it.”

The apostle does not simply say here that witnesses must be present,...but Paul means that the witnesses must confirm the charge. Therefore, the consistory is cautioned about taking up rumours and unfounded accusations.

Only in the case of an accusation that is confirmed by two or more witnesses does the consistory take up the charge in order to investigate its merits and whether the officebearer is worthy of suspension or deposition. In the case of public, gross sin, the consistory must take it up and discipline the officebearer. If the charges are substantiated, the man must be either suspended or suspended and deposed.

The attitude of the congregation toward a deposed elder must be the same as toward any sinner in the church who is disciplined. If the man is sincerely sorry for his sin, the congregation must restore him in “the spirit of meekness” that the apostle commands in Galatians 6:1. He is to be received graciously into the fellowship of the church as a restored sinner. If he is not sorry for his sin, discipline must proceed as it would with any other member of the church, if necessary including his excommunication.

The question of the restoration to office of an elder who has been unlawfully or unjustly deposed is not addressed, to my knowledge, by either Dutch or English commentators. In answering this question, I am assuming that the wrongful deposition is not of the kind suffered by the founders of the Protestant Reformed Churches, in which cases classes deposed officebearers. In that case the ministers and consistories involved simply ignored the illegal deposition and continued to function in their offices, since a classis cannot depose officebearers. The question I am

answering is a case of deposition that is legal in its procedure, but in which the charges end up being false.

While this kind of case is not addressed by the commentators on the Church Order, the matter is addressed indirectly by all of them. It is addressed indirectly when they comment on the matter of the restoration to office of an officebearer who is rightly deposed for his sin. Can he hold office again? The answer is a yes, provided that he has sufficiently demonstrated his repentance and commitment to a new and godly life. All the commentators caution that such a decision should not be taken lightly, and all of them bring up certain wise precautions. However, as to the general question of whether a deposed officebearer can serve again, they all answer that it is technically possible. Bouwman points out that in the early editions of the Church Order before the Synod of Dordt this subject was specifically addressed:

The question of the rehabilitation or restoration of the deposed officebearer to office is very important. Our Church Order says nothing about this,

although Reformed church assemblies have made pronouncements about it. The Synod of Emden [one of the earliest Reformed synods] said, “But whether the ministers of the word, the elders, and deacons who have been deposed, after having satisfied the church by their penance, should once again be admitted to office if they were again chosen: as far as the elders and deacons are concerned, it is up to the judgment of the consistory; but as far as the ministers are concerned, the classis shall judge.

Bouwman relates that this article was included in the Church Order later by the Reformed synods of 1578 and 1581, but was dropped from the Church Order in 1586 “not because they disagreed with its provisions... but perhaps because it was forgotten or they judged that this was understood. Later history reveals that more than once a deposed preacher was restored to office”.

This certainly is applicable to an elder who is unjustly deposed from office. The simple answer is that he must be restored to his office, if possible. The case is complicated by the fact that,

unlike ministers, elders hold their office only for a term of a specified number of years. In the case of a minister who is wrongfully deposed, his name would be cleared of all wrongdoing, his faithfulness commended to the churches, and he would take up his work in his office again. If for some reason the church where he had been labouring already has another minister, he would be declared eligible for call in the churches. For the elder, if his term had expired by the time the mistake is discovered, then, while he is not restored to his office, the false charges against him must be confessed, his name cleared of any suspicion, and he must be recommended to the church for his faithfulness in the office. I suppose that there could even be a consistory decision to include his name in the next round of nominations.

Such confusion would be a cause for great grief in the churches and perhaps to avoid such a terrible situation and such an abuse of the holy office, the Church Order lays out a careful procedure for the discipline of an officebearer, and consistories freely bind themselves to mutual oversight in this matter from another consistory.

RIDDLE OF THE ISSUE

A SPECIAL PLANT I AM, WITH A VERY SPECIAL NEED -
 NOT ON RAIN AND ON SUNSHINE, BUT ON GOD'S WORD I FEED.
 A DIVINE GIFT TO BE NURTURED AND CHERISHED,
 SPARE ME NOT IN YOUR PITY, LEST I SHOULD PERISH.
 OF ME SOME HAVE MANY, OTHERS, FEW;
 WHICHEVER YOURS MAY BE, YOUR CASE IS FULL.
 KEEP ME NOT AWAY FROM YOU,
 FOR GOD'S PLEDGE IS TO ME TOO.
 OF MY KIND ALL ARE PRECIOUS, EACH TO BE LOVED,
 YET ONE BE GIVEN, WHICH IS THE FIRST.

*Hint: With whose attitude and disposition must we enter the kingdom of God?
 Answer to last issue's riddle: fear (Matt 8:23-27, Prov. 29:25, etc)*



News from the Churches

Singapore

We thank God for the willingness of Rev. Arie Den Hartog to supply our pulpit since early 2018. Besides preaching for CERC for the past twenty-five Lord's days and speaking at our annual church camp in June, Rev. Den Hartog was also busy leading various Bible studies and ministering personally to our members, among other labours. He and his wife Sherry returned to the U.S. on 16th July, while Prof. and Mrs. Russell Dykstra arrived in Singapore three days later. The Dykstras will be here for about five weeks, Lord willing.

Synod 2018 approved the calling of a minister-on-loan to provide a minister for CERC. Grandville PRC was again appointed the calling church, and a trio consisting of Rev. Garry Eriks, Rev. Steven Key and Rev. Rodney Kleyn has been formed. The congregation of Grandville will meet on 5th August to vote for one of these men to receive the call.

CERC's annual congregational meeting (ACM) was held on 30th June. During this ACM, an election of office-bearers was conducted as the terms of Elder Leong Fai Chong, Elder Chan Chee Seng and Deacon Tang Yoon Chuan came to an end in June. Elder Leong and Brother Wee Gim Theng were voted in as elders, and Brother Paul Liu was voted in as deacon.

India

On 23rd June, the Kolkata Fellowship organised an outreach program titled "Behold He cometh" based on 1 Thessalonians 4:16. Rev. Emmanuel Singh gave three speeches catered to listeners in Kolkata who have little knowledge of the end times.

Northern Ireland

From 21st July to 28th July, The British Reformed Fellowship Conference will be held at Hebron Hall in South Wales. Prof. David Engelsma, who has preached in CERC before, as well as Rev. Andy Lanning who was CERC's pastor from 2012 to 2017, will both be speaking at the conference, on the theme "The Reformed Family - According to the Word of God."



The Lord blessed CERC last month with the addition of baby Asaph, son of Marcus & Tze Yan Wee



Church camp games - an armoured "soldier" makes her way down a path fraught with fiery darts!



The primary schoolers hard at work during the camp



CERC camp fun shot! We thank God for this yearly opportunity for spiritual refreshment & fellowship



The Covenant Keepers held their mid-year retreat from June 21-23, with the theme being "Blessed are the pure in heart (Matthew 5:8)"



The Glowing Candles Bible Study group had a farewell lunch for the Den Hartogs

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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