

A quick survey of mainstream music reveals that lyrics are getting increasingly brazen, glorifying ungodly living, hedonism, sexual immorality, fatalism and all kinds of worldly ideas.

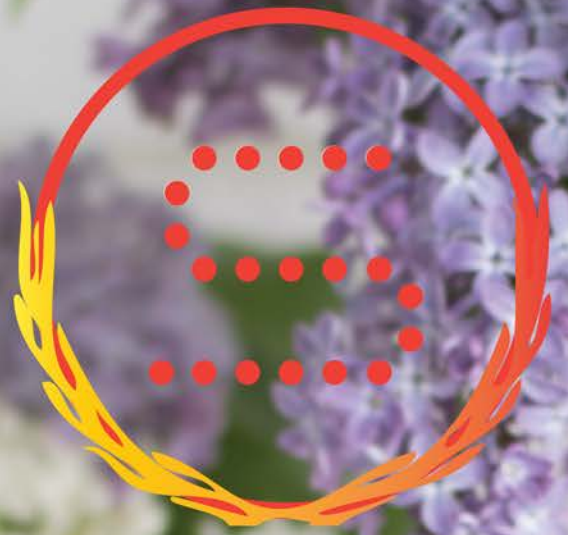
— *Lim Ruo Xi | The Music of the World*

The principles that govern and guide the covenant life in the family are the same ones that govern and guide the covenant life in the church, which is the family of God.

— *Elder Lee Kong Wee | Covenant People*

When we rejoice and weep with such saints, they will see the love of Christ as our High Priest who is touched by the feeling of our infirmities (Heb. 4:15).

— *Lim Yang Zhi | Rejoicing and Weeping Together*



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

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## WELCOME TO THE 51ST ISSUE OF SALT SHAKERS!

Dear Salt Shakers Readers,

Welcome to another issue of the Salt Shakers. We hope that you continue reading our magazine for your spiritual instruction and edification.

Since the last publication, Rev. Rodney Kleyn of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America was extended a call to serve as a minister-on-loan to CERC. On 9 September, Rev. Kleyn declined the call. We continue to wait on the Lord to supply a minister in His timing.

CERC plans to organise another Reformation Day Conference sometime in November this year. We hope that our readers, especially those from abroad, can take the opportunity to participate in this worthwhile conference.

Two new publications from the RFPA worthy of mention are Prof. David Engelsma's commentary on the Belgic Confession (Vol. 1) and Rev. Martyn McGeown's Grace and Assurance: The Message of the Canons of Dordt. They come highly recommended for the spiritual instruction of every Reformed believer.

Following the decisions of Synod 2018 of the PRC, Mr. Neil Meyer, a member of Hope PRC, has been restored as a member in good standing. We rejoice with him and his family in his restoration. We pray that the decisions of Synod 2018 will continue to serve the cause of God's truth concerning justification, the place of obedience, and the experience of fellowship in the covenant.

We apologise for the premature publication of Quit You Like Men (II) and Marriage is Not for Me (II) in our previous issue. The first instalment of each article should have been published first.

Blessings,  
Aaron



## A REFLECTION ON CHRISTIAN LIBERTY (II)

>>Chua Lee Yang



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

### Desiring Unity in the Church

*I was glad when they said unto me,  
Let us go into the house of the LORD.  
Our feet shall stand within thy gates,  
O Jerusalem.*

*Jerusalem is builded as a city  
that is compact together.*

*Whither the tribes go up,  
the tribes of the LORD,*

*unto the testimony of Israel, to give  
thanks unto the name of the LORD.*

*For there are set thrones of judgment,  
the thrones of the house of David.*

*Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:  
they shall prosper that love thee.*

*Peace be within thy walls,  
and prosperity within thy palaces.*

*For my brethren and  
companions' sakes,*

*I will now say, Peace be within thee.*

*Because of the house of the LORD  
our God I will seek thy good.*

*(Psalm 122)*

Beloved readers, do we desire the unity of our church? To what lengths shall we go for unity? In the psalm above, the deepest expressions of longing for the peace of the church are found. We would do well to meditate on them and make those words our own. *For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee!* Remember also that Jerusalem here

represents the Church, which is really the body of Christ. We are really saying and desiring, "Peace be within thy body, Lord Jesus!" How many rifts are healed, disagreements healed and friendships saved, if this is truly our desire!

Last article, we covered some of the "what" – basic principles of Christian liberty: that liberty is used not for ourselves, but for God and the neighbour. Our use of liberty, moreover, must not stumble the brethren. Third, Scripture's guidance is relevant even for activities not specifically listed. In this article, let us also consider the effect of our use (and abuse) of liberty on church unity, recognising also the closely related danger of legalism.

What does Christian liberty have to do with unity in the church? Properly used, the use of our liberty is edifying and powerful. The New Testament church is given the spiritual maturity to approach all areas of life in faith, no longer needing the Old Testament types and shadows to dictate every aspect of believers' lives. Areas of liberty are therefore often open topics for us to have spiritual conversations about, thereby encouraging and sharpening each other. As these conversations take place and members are encouraged to holy living, the unity of the church is greatly enriched.

The abuse of liberty on the other hand, cuts like a knife through the unity of the church. It is not hard to see how, and it can happen in several common ways. In the last article we have covered how liberty can be abused as a cover

for serving one's own lusts and for the covering up of worldliness. Under the guise of liberty, one may claim all manner of worldly activity as legitimate, while really serving one's own flesh. One who lives this way also often begins to accuse the other members of being "holier-than-thou" and legalistic. As the lives of church members are so closely entwined, others in the church are soon encouraged to do the same. Worldliness pours into the church, with controversy and strife following closely. But legalism does the same thing. Dead orthodoxy takes the place of worldliness – controversy and strife following also.

### The Danger of Legalism

The flip side of abusing liberty in the covering up of worldly living is the abolishing of liberty in legalism and the multiplication of laws. Last article, we used the example of sports and recreation – let us use another everyday example: money. How we use our money is clearly a matter of liberty, and there are ways of spending money today that will never appear in the language of Scripture. We are called to be good stewards of our resources, giving freely to the causes of the kingdom, and not to be covetous or lovers of money. But what exactly does this mean with reference to my travel bill or my taxi fare? There is clearly room for two different individuals in the church to arrive at two different conclusions, and that is a beautiful thing if one thinks about it. One brother might say to himself: "I could never spend such and such a night on a hotel room when I travel; that would be excessive. It would be against my

conscience to do so and I would not be exercising good stewardship". Yet to another brother with the same means of living who also gives generously to the causes of the church, the same bill could well be legitimate; that brother enjoying the good gifts of God to him without affecting his conscience. The Bible does not give any advisories on acceptable hotel rates.

The problem of legalism arises when one begins to say that \$x or \$y or \$z a night is a sinful use of one's money, and begins to make a rule about it in the church. Or, it is sinful to spend such and such amount at a restaurant, or to own a car costing this or that figure. Individuals or churches may well begin to have laws about what is allowed and what is not, laws which claim to have scriptural origin but are really man-made. To believers and churches horrified by the worldly excesses around them, the temptation to form such rules can be great. But soon the members begin to look sideways at each other, judging one another, and the unity of the church is broken (they also begin to believe that their righteousness is founded upon their keeping of those rules). But we must look closely at

ourselves. Do we unconsciously have such rules in our minds by which we pharisaically judge our brethren?

The word pharisaical is derived from the title of Pharisee, which was a sect of religious teachers held in honour among the Jews in Jesus' day. They are especially known today for their blasphemous treatment of Jesus, and their legalistic laws and practices around ritual purity. Today if one were to call someone else a Pharisee, the person on the receiving end would likely be very offended. In the time of Jesus' ministry however, if you were to walk up to a Pharisee and ask: "Sir, are you a Pharisee?" He might stand a little taller, look at you in the eye and say, "Why, yes I am", probably pleased that you noticed. The Pharisees had many rules that they claimed were derived from Old Testament Scripture, particularly the laws given to Moses.

Outwardly, the Pharisees kept the law to perfection. A vivid illustration is mentioned by Paul in 2 Corinthians 11:24 where he says that five times, he was whipped by the Jews "forty stripes save one". The Pharisees were so eager to show their adherence to Moses' law not to exceed more than forty stripes

in a judicial punishment (Deut. 25:3) that they took one off just to make sure it never happened. They added and extended other rules such as the washing of hands, cups and bowls to show that they were not just merely keeping the law but went even further, making them appear extra holy. But Jesus condemned their practice and teaching, declaring that their worship was vain in that they taught the commandments of men and not of God (Mk. 7:3-13). By so doing they led the people in an unholy way and divided Israel.

Beloved readers, let us mark the dangers – let us pray for the grace not to abuse liberty in the covering of our worldly lusts, nor abolish it in the multiplication of legalistic laws. When Christ's people desire to live holily unto Him in all that they do, encouraging one another with their Bibles opened, the church of is strong and the church is one. *Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee!*

Next article, Lord willing, we look at what it means in not stumbling one another in the exercise of our liberty.

## SCRIPTURE'S COVENANT YOUTH (XIII): JEREMIAH

>>>Prof. Herman Hanko



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### **Jeremiah, the Reluctant Prophet**

Whenever I read from the book of Jeremiah I become very sad. I know of no one in Scripture who found it more difficult to do the work of his office than Jeremiah. His whole life was filled with disappointment, even his death. He is a man appropriate for an article in this series for he began to preach at a very early age, when he was only a child (Jer. 1:6).

We must, therefore, start our discussion of this noble man of God with some words about his calling.

I do not think that anyone as young as him was called to begin the work of preaching. There have been some self-appointed preachers who were children when they began to preach, especially at revivals; but they are false prophets. In the days of Jeremiah and

in the sacred history recorded for us in Scripture, men who were called to be prophets normally had to wait until they were thirty years old. This was true, for example, with both John the Baptist and Jesus Himself.

But the times demanded preaching. They were the years prior to Judah's captivity (Jer. 1:1-4). In fact, Jeremiah was still prophesying when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonian army (Jer. 52).

It is mentioned twice in Jeremiah 1 that God called Jeremiah to be a prophet (Jer. 1:2, 4). The call was real; the call was urgent; the call was of such a kind that could not be refused. The trouble was that Jeremiah was, as he himself said, only a youth.

Before I make some remarks about that and its implications for the youth in the church today, I want to make a few remarks about Jeremiah's ministry.

Judah was in its last days. The country had become worse than Israel in its idolatry, its utter paganism and its rejection of God and His word. The sinfulness of the nation was from the king, down through the princes and into the lives of the people.

In addition to its terrible sinfulness, it also was in constant danger of being destroyed by foreign armies. (You can read of Judah's sins and the threat of conquest in the last chapters of 2 Chronicles.) Already much of Judah was in the hands of the Babylonians and only Jerusalem was not conquered. The heathen armies surrounded the city.

Jeremiah had to bring the Word of God to the people who remained. He had

to tell them to repent of their sins and turn again to God, or they would be destroyed. In fact, the end of Judah was so certain that God told Jeremiah to tell the people and the king and his princes that their only hope of escaping death was to surrender and give themselves over to the Babylonians. If they did not surrender, they would be killed by the Babylonian army, or by pestilence, or by starvation, for no food could be brought into the city because of the siege.

Judah would not repent and comforted itself with the false dream that Egypt would come to Jerusalem's aid. They openly rejected Jeremiah's preaching and hated him for calling them to repentance. His preaching that Judah should surrender was interpreted to mean that he wanted the Babylonians to win the war, and he was charged with treason.

At one point in Jeremiah's ministry, he was ordered by God to go outside the city and purchase a piece of land. This seemed to be the epitome of foolishness; the land, captured by the Babylonian army, was worthless. But God told Jeremiah to do that because it was a testimony to Judah that God would bring them back to Canaan, and therefore, they should surrender.

On his return to the city, Jeremiah was captured by the guards at the gate, charged with treason for secretly providing the enemy with useful information about the city and thrown into a well which was full of mud and into which Jeremiah sunk up to his waist. He was rescued by a few men who believed Jeremiah's prophecies and had repented of Judah's sin. God preserved a very small remnant of His people, but they had little or no influence on the

king and his counsellors.

To show how determined the king was to reject God's Word, we are told that when the book (that now appears in our Bible under the name "Jeremiah" and which Jeremiah had partially written, under divine inspiration) was read page by page, the king took each separate sheet and threw it into the fire. (It was actually a scroll that was written, and the king took a knife and cut off parts as they were read. God comforted Jeremiah by telling him that he would be infallibly inspired to rewrite what was burned.)

Jeremiah suffered so much that he even resigned from his ministry, for the suffering was so great that it was hard to endure. But he could not stop preaching for "his (God's) word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stop" (Jer. 20:9). It reminds us of Paul's words, "For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:16)! Jeremiah **had to preach**; so did Paul. They could not stop preaching – even if they wanted to stop.

Any minister who is faithful in his calling knows what that means!

Even after Jerusalem was burned to the ground and Jeremiah wrote the Book of Lamentations as he wept while sitting on a pile of rubble, he had at least the hope that he was spared captivity and that he could remain in the Holy City. But that too was denied him.

When wicked Ishmael murdered Gedaliah, whom Nebuchadnezzar had made ruler over a small remnant that

was left in the city, Ishmael, in direct defiance of the Lord's words to the remnant to remain in Canaan, forced them all to go with him to Egypt – Jeremiah as well; where, as far as we know, he died and was buried.

What a sad ministry when all Jeremiah knew was opposition and persecution.

We must now return to Jeremiah's call to the ministry.

He was different from Moses: he refused because he was young; Moses refused because he was old. Yet they both refused God's call (Jer. 1:6, Ex 5:10) And both appealed to their inability to speak properly. Moses was so adamant about his refusal that the Lord reminded him, "Who made your mouth (Ex. 5:11)?" And finally, God became angry with Moses (Ex. 5:14). Jeremiah's refusal was simply brushed aside without argument and God provided the assurance that He would be with Jeremiah whatever happened.

You may say that Jeremiah did not know how badly he would be hated, but God warned him ahead of time: "Be not afraid of their faces for I am with thee to deliver thee".

In a very general sense, God calls each of us to our place in His kingdom. He calls a father to care for his family, a mother to care for her husband and children, a clerk to work in a bank, an engineer to determine how a building must be done, etc. Every vocation is just that: a **vocation**, that is, a calling. We may never say of a calling that it is beneath our dignity or our talents. God puts a halo over every type of work – even sweeping streets or picking up garbage.

Sometimes God calls to special places in his kingdom where the one called has heavy responsibilities: elder, deacon, minister, Sunday School teacher, organist, Christian School teacher... Sometimes he calls us to do difficult work, or dangerous work, work that we do not particularly like to do. It makes no difference: God calls. He assigns everyone a position in His kingdom, the kingdom of Christ.

**The call of the church is a call we can never refuse, for it is the church through which God calls people to work in special offices in His kingdom.**

We may not refuse when God calls. We may not, out of some hypocritical piety and false humility, say, "No" while secretly hoping that the questioners will urge us to do it. But even when our refusal is genuinely rooted in a deep sense of our inadequacy when God calls, we may not refuse. God will not call inadequate people. The call of the church is a call we can never refuse, for it is the church through which God calls people to work in special offices in

His kingdom.

That Jeremiah was called when still a youth is explained in the text. Before Jeremiah was born, God was preparing him for his life's calling. God was working so that the gifts Jeremiah would need were given him – gifts for a very difficult task that would make Jeremiah's calling all but humanly impossible. Yet God was right and Jeremiah wrong.

Incidentally, this work of God qualifying Jeremiah before he was born was also proof that God regenerates elect children born in the line of God's covenant before they are born. Those who hold to a conditional covenant refuse to believe this clear Scriptural passage. They have various ways of getting around its unmistakable meaning. But the text is clear and serves covenant parents with incentive to teach their children (God's children) the way they should walk.

Yet the text means that God qualifies a person for his place in God's covenant and in the kingdom of Christ. The qualification is, of course, spiritual first of all. But it includes all a person needs to fulfil his calling, no matter how difficult the task. This is why a believing covenant man or woman always asks, "Lord, what wilt thou that I do?"

Paul speaks of every kind of work as worthy of our best in 1 Cor. 15:58. Paul calls it, whatever the situation, "the work of the Lord". And, even though sometimes it is done with weakness, God promises that it is "not in vain in the Lord".

This means that church must be the centre of our love and we must, by our work, labour in God's kingdom. May God grant us the grace to heed this.

## ARE UNBELIEVERS IN GOD'S IMAGE? (IX)

>>Rev. Angus Stewart



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

### False View Not Distinctively Reformed

We have seen that the popular claim that all men head for head, including unbelievers and the reprobate, are in the image of God is false. In the preceding eight articles, we proved this from Scripture (1-5), the Reformed confessions (6-7) and theologians (8). Both the order and the length of these three categories of argument were deliberate. This is the “hierarchy” of authority for Reformed Christians.

Some persist in claiming that it is truly Reformed to hold that unbelievers are in the image of God. However, the notion that all of humanity bears the *imago dei* is not only false but it is also not distinctively Reformed, unlike, say, double predestination or irresistible grace. The so-called “broader sense” of the divine image is not even specifically Christian, since it is the teaching of the various forms of Judaism. Nor is a universal divine likeness characteristically Protestant, for Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy and the cults all hold to it.

That everyone is in the divine image is

axiomatic in theological modernism and liberalism the world over. Pelagianism, semi-Pelagianism and Arminianism all delight in proclaiming that everybody bears the divine likeness. Anabaptism, Pentecostalism or Charismaticism unite in affirming that unbelievers are in the *imago dei*. How can a view held by Pelagius, Servetus, Arminius, Martin Luther King Jr., Benny Hinn and the Pope be distinctively Reformed?

### Importance of the True View

The importance of the issue as to who is in the image of God is, first of all, a matter of truth. Since God's Word teaches that the *imago dei* is particular, being borne by those sinners only who are elect, redeemed and regenerated in the Lord Jesus, Christian and Reformed theology must recognise and teach this. Here we maintain *sola scriptura*. The Bible alone is the written Word of God and, therefore, the supreme standard of doctrine and practice.

Second, this subject is vital in understanding man as to his lostness. Jehovah despises wicked man's image (Ps. 73:20), for unregenerate man is not the likeness of God. Instead, he is the image of both his satanic father, the devil (John 8:44), and his earthly father, Adam, who begat children in his own fallen likeness (Gen. 5:3). Thus mankind is totally depraved, “blinded” by “the god of this world” and so lacking free will, which is the ability to believe “the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God” without irresistible grace (2 Cor. 4:4).

Third, the correct view of the image

of God serves evangelism. Reformed witnessing and preaching calls the unconverted to repent and believe in Jesus Christ crucified and risen for the forgiveness of sins and the imputed righteousness of God, adding the sincere promise that all who come to the Saviour receive eternal life and rest (*Canons* II:5), and warning that those who stubbornly refuse will perish everlastingly (Luke 13:3). Proclaiming to unbelievers that they are already in the image of God (apart from Christ, *the* image of God) corrupts the preaching, confuses the hearers and weakens the urgency of the gospel call.

Fourth, that the image of God is particular to the regenerate reinforces and so preserves the gospel. Since totally depraved man is the *imago diaboli* (the image of the devil), with his will in bondage to sin, salvation must come entirely from God and be received by faith alone (*sola fide*) without works. It is only through the gospel of grace, sovereign grace, grace alone (*sola gratia*), rooted in unconditional predestination (Rom. 8:29), that man is restored to the image of God — all of the image and every sense of the image.

Fifth, our view of the divine likeness honours Jesus Christ. The eternal and incarnate Son is the perfect image of God (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3) and the only One in whom man recovers the divine glory. Surely, there is no such thing as a Christless likeness to God! We are renewed in the image of God through being “conformed to the image of his Son, that he might” have the preeminence as “the firstborn

among many brethren” (Rom. 8:29). Clearly, the *imago dei* is received only in union with our Saviour for it is in Christ alone (*solus Christus*).

Sixth, our position magnifies the Holy Spirit and His work. The Holy Spirit creates us in the image of God in regeneration (Col. 3:10). It is “the Spirit of the Lord” who transforms us into “the glory of the Lord” more and more in sanctification (2 Cor. 3:18). The Spirit of Christ perfects us in the image of God in the age to come (Ps. 17:15; 1 John 3:2).

Seventh, the doctrine of the *imago dei* as particular to those born of the Spirit glorifies the living God. It degrades Him that unbelievers are said to be His image, likeness and glory. Even demons, including Satan himself, are the image, likeness and glory of God, if the *imago dei* consists of rationality, personality, etc., as is the claim of those who advocate its so-called “broader sense”. The Triune God alone is glorified when we honour His Word, His gospel, His grace, His Son, His Spirit and His work of salvation regarding the divine likeness (*solī Deo gloria*).

In other words, the doctrine of the divine image as recreated in the regenerate alone is not only that of the inspired Word of God, in accordance with the Reformed confessions. It also fits perfectly with the Trinitarian faith of Christianity, the genius of Protestantism (summed in the five solas or five “alones”: salvation by faith alone, through grace alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone, according to Scripture alone) and the Reformed truth of sovereign grace.

### Our Calling

The truth of the image of God presents

us with a compelling Christian identity. In union with Christ, we do and must reflect the likeness and glory of our covenant God who has created, redeemed and saved us. We should live in this world, therefore, as Jehovah's faithful image-bearers as either male or female, according to our biological creation (Gen. 1:27; 1 Cor. 11:7). Yet, according to the advocates of the “broader sense” of the divine likeness, a man who tries to image a woman is really the divine likeness and glory!

Our sanctification is growth in the divine image and the beginning of our glorification, even our increased conformity to our Saviour's likeness — a very attractive and winsome perspective! Thus Paul explains, “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18). So let us look at Christ in the Scriptures and in the preaching!

As those recreated in the image of God (Eph. 4:24) and “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4), we must be “followers [i.e., imitators] of God, as dear children”, by walking “in love, as Christ also hath loved us” (Eph. 5:1-2). In the context, this includes being “kind” and “forgiving”, “even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you” (Eph. 4:32).

The church consists of divine image-bearers (1 Cor. 11:7), which should be borne in mind in connection with partaking of the Lord's supper (1 Cor. 11:17-34) and the exercise of spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12-14). Since all the saints have been “made after the similitude [or likeness] of God” by the Holy Spirit, we must not “curse” them (James 3:9), and wage “wars and fightings” in the

congregation (James 4:1).

The truth of the *imago dei* helps us as we seek to keep the Decalogue out of gratitude for our salvation in the cross of Christ. We can only keep the first commandment, that of having no other God than Jehovah, by knowing and worshipping Him through His “express image”, the Lord Jesus (Heb. 1:3). Similarly, by believing in Christ, the incarnate image of God, we keep ourselves from making or worshipping any images or likenesses of Jehovah, as per the second commandment. We must not hate or kill our neighbour (sixth commandment) because we know that the human race is different from the animals, for only man was created in the *imago dei* (Gen. 1:26-27; 5:1; 9:6). The seventh commandment rests upon God's creation of humanity as male or female (Gen. 1:27; 1 Cor. 11:7). Evil speech, which is prohibited by the ninth commandment, is especially guarded against in the church because God's people have been recreated in His “similitude” or likeness (James 3:9).

Jehovah's providence is even brighter to those who understand the truth of the *imago dei*, since the One who rules the universe for our salvation is the “express image” of God (Heb. 1:3). Moreover, believers are confident that the great “good” for which our heavenly Father governs “all things” is our increasing transformation into the image of Christ: “we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom. 8:28-29). Let us believe and experience



this victory (1 John 5:4-5)!

Not only our faith but also our hope is informed by the truth of the *imago*

*dei*. At our resurrection, we shall be God's perfect image-bearers (Ps. 17:15; 1 Cor. 15:49). Then, in Christ, we will exercise a far greater kingship over the

universe than ever Adam did before the fall (Gen. 1:26-27; Ps. 8). This is well worth waiting for!

## QUIT YOU LIKE MEN (I)

>>Woon Tian Loong

Woon Tian Loong is a member of CERC.

The *godly* man. The godly *man*. The *manly* man. The Lord delights in him. His wife leans on him. His children look up to him. The church looks for men like him. The brothers desire a friend like him. The young girls dream of a man like him. But shall he be found, and, what is he like?

“Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. Let all your things be done with charity” (1 Cor. 16:13-14).

In this text, we find the exhortation to “quit ye like men”. While this text could have a wider target, this text is targeted especially at, and comes first to, the men. “Quit you like men.” The term “quit” simply means to “behave in a specified way”.<sup>1</sup> Behave like men. It seems that terms like this are assumed to be understood — that we generally understand the concept of what a man is. However, does Scripture have anything to say about being a man? In this text, we find that connected with the idea of being a man is being strong. The chief characteristic of a young man is his strength<sup>2</sup>. When we examine other passages of scripture that uses a similar language as “quit ye like men”, we find that in exhorting men to be men, men are exhorted to be strong.

David charged Solomon — “...be thou

strong therefore, and shew thyself a man...” (1 King. 2:2). Even the ungodly Philistine soldiers, when they were sore afraid, encouraged each other to be men and be strong — “Be strong, and quit yourselves like men, O ye Philistines...” (1 Sam. 4:9).

What is strength then? It is the ability to perform the task or overcome the challenge that is before him. It is also the ability to bear up under a burden. Physically, a strong man has the ability to lift heavier objects than a weak man. More than physical strength however, the strength that scripture commands us to is spiritual strength which will also lead to emotional strength.

A man in himself is weak. He thinks himself strong. He thinks himself strong when he is able to perform a certain task or has accomplished (what the eyes of men consider) a difficult task. It may be that he is able to build an entire nation from the dust or attempt a tower that reaches the skies (if left unobstructed). Nevertheless, a spiritual man, when he scans God's wondrous heavens, knows how weak he is [paraphrase of Psalter 15]. Besides, whatever strength a man may be gifted with, he is not able to overcome the final enemy, death — he can neither do so for himself nor for the ones that he loves. (Likewise for sin, etc., and the list continues).

We who are men, however, who are called according to the election of God,

have true strength. We have strength that is outside of ourselves, yea, the strength of the almighty, omnipotent God. “I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one” (1 Jn. 2:14). Notice then, the present tense “are”. This means that right now, we have strength. Strength, because our almighty God fights our battles for us and works all things for our good. And if we have strength to overcome even sin, and the devil, then surely, we can say with the Apostle Paul, “I can do all (spiritual) things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phi. 4:13).

Yet, the text that we consider in 1 Corinthians says, “Be Strong” (and not “ye are strong”). This implies, then, that there is an inclination that we, as men, might not want to be strong or to manifest that strength that we have in the Lord. Furthermore, it implies that we have to manifest that strength which God gives to us in order to fulfill the callings that God gives to us and the battles which He fights through us.

The source of a man's strength is God alone, and he has it by faith. He believes in the Almighty Lord who out of nothing made the heavens and the

<sup>1</sup> New Oxford American Dictionary

<sup>2</sup> Lubbers George C, *Exposition of I Corinthians 16:13, 14*, The Standard Bearer, Volume 30/1954, Issue: 16, 5/15/1954

earth in six days. Greater yet, that the Almighty Lord will carry out His good pleasure and nothing can thwart His plan that serves His glory.

### Characteristics

Because a man has strength, he has these characteristics:

He does not give up but perseveres. Just as how a physically strong man does not give up the load that he is carrying easily, so a spiritually strong man does not give up the responsibilities laid upon him easily. Though his responsibilities are hard to bear, trusting in God, he seeks strength to endure the hardships that come with the responsibility.

He is not quick to complain. Of the many things that we complain about, how often do we complain because we perceive that the problem is too great or at the threshold of what we can handle? Likewise, when a task is easy and well within our abilities, then how much less do we complain? So also the strong man. It is not so much that he presumes that the tasks that he is given will be easy, but he understands

that God will preserve him and so he does not complain but prays even when he is feeling overwhelmed. He prays for strength of heart and skill to accomplish that seemingly impossible task before him.

He is not upset or feel offended easily. Spiritual strength includes the ability to take insults and offence. As a wall can easily withstand the punches of a child and not be damaged in any way, so can a strong man take insults and offence and not be hurt by the opinions and words of others. This does not mean that he does not care. He, being spiritual, does care. He cares when the insults of others are caused by his actions and sins and he wants to seek reconciliation. He cares when his loved ones are insulted. He cares if the name of God is blasphemed and in strength, defends the name of God. What he is not easily affected by though, is the negativity of others on him personally.

He has confidence. A strong man has confidence in the things that he is good in. Likewise, a spiritually strong man

has the confidence that God will work all things for his good to the glory of God.

He is bold to do that which is right. He knows that there might be unpleasant backlash and suffering from doing that which is right. However, he has strength of heart to endure the suffering and does what he needs to do.

He is steadfast in faith. He knows the word of God. He knows that if he were to live it out faithfully, he might suffer ridicule or even be persecuted. He knows that the truth of God is unpopular in this sinful world. Many will try to shake him, and question if what he holds on to is worth it. Nevertheless, he is strong to endure the mockings that come because of faithfulness to the word of God.

What other parts of scripture pertain to this topic, and what are the temptations that surround a man so that he is tempted to not want to be a man? Let us explore these in the next instalment.

## LET NO MAN DESPISE THY YOUTH!

>> Deuel Teo



Deuel Teo is a confessing young adult in CERC.

### Context

“Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12).

We read in 1 Timothy 1 that Paul had to leave for Macedonia; therefore, he left Timothy in charge of Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3). However, knowing that young Timothy had a difficult calling to carry out, Paul wrote this letter to equip and encourage Timothy.

### The Youth of Timothy

We all have been (or still are) at a point of time a youth. What exactly does youth mean? Here is a definition from Wikipedia: “Youth is the time of life when one is young, and often

means the time between childhood and adulthood (maturity).”<sup>[1]</sup> Does “youth” in 1 Timothy 4 refer to this youth?

Consider this quotation:

“The Greek term for “youth” is *neotes*. In this culture, someone could be called a “youth” until he was forty years old. According to Irenaeus, “Thirty is the first stage of a young man’s age, and extends to forty, as all will admit”.<sup>[2]</sup> Earle comments, “The word for ‘youth’ (KJV) is *neotēs*, used of grown-

up military age, extending to the 40th year”.<sup>[3]</sup>

In his second missionary journey, Paul met Timothy (Acts 16:1). Fourteen years later, Paul wrote his first epistle to Timothy. Supposing that Timothy was sixteen years old when Paul first worked with him, Timothy would be at least thirty at this point of time. From all these, we can infer that Paul exhorted Timothy because Paul was concerned that Timothy would not be respected by the older men in the congregation because of his age. With that concern, Paul gives Timothy the exhortation in our text.

### Paul’s Exhortation

In verse 12 we read, “Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity”. What does this mean? The verse is split into a pair of opposites. First, “let no man despise thy youth...” and second, “but be thou an example of the believers...”

Let us recall what Timothy’s calling was. His calling was to be a preacher of the gospel in Ephesus. Implied in that calling is that Timothy would be under the watchful scrutiny of his congregation. If Timothy erred in his preaching, he would fall under the criticism of his congregation and be deemed unsuited for the ministry due to his age. Worst of all, the ministry would be blemished severely! Rather than to err in this manner, young Timothy is to live a godly life that leaves no room for criticism in his youth. Fearlessly, he was to bring before the people in Ephesus the Word of God – not his opinions, but the infallible, inspired Word of God.

Looking now at the opposite exhortation, we notice that Timothy was to be an example in six aspects: word, conversation, charity, spirit, faith, and purity. These six aspects are what a pastor (really, every man) must embody to profess Christ as Saviour and Redeemer, showing evidence that Christ dwells in his heart.

We will group these six aspects into two groups to show the connection among them, word and conversation being the first: charity, spirit, faith, and purity being the second.

The first two aspects encompass the outward appearance of Timothy. He could not live out his calling as a minister if his actions did not show it. In word, Timothy was to be an example in the words he spoke (in his preaching, teachings, and exhortations; 1 Tim. 4:13). The words that a man speaks reveal what is in his heart (Matt. 15:18). Our calling is to be pure in heart (Matt. 5:8), for the heart is the spiritual centre of a man. God looks at the heart of a man (1 Sam. 16:7), so the words which Timothy spoke were to show that he was pure in heart. Our calling then is also to watch our words, to be a witness of the light that is within us, even in our speech.

In conversation, that is, in Timothy’s “manner of life”, he was also called to be an example in his conduct. He was to conduct himself so that he was not despised because of his youth, and more importantly, he was to conduct himself as a minister of Christ. What might that look like? A man after God’s own heart, David (1 Sam. 13:14). David looked to God in all things; he always sought God first. This should be our manner of life, always putting and seeking God first.

The next four aspects encompass the inward qualities Timothy ought to be an example of.

In charity, love, Timothy was to be an example of loving God with all his heart, soul, and mind and of loving his neighbour (Matt. 22:37-39). This charity is connected to faith and purity. Let us remember 1 Corinthians 13:2, that if we have faith that could move mountains but have no charity, we are nothing. This verse shows how charity (or the lack of it) can affect all aspects of our lives. Timothy carried out his ministry in his love for God, because he wanted to fulfil his calling for God. As a pastor he would have to put in numerous hours in preparing, meditating on God’s Word day and night. Timothy too was to love his neighbour in humility and longsuffering, forbearing in love (Eph. 4:2). As a shepherd cares for his flock, so must Timothy show such love to the church (Isa. 40:11). This love, for God and for our neighbour, is the love we must have.

In spirit, Timothy was to carry out his work in a pure and holy spirit – that is, in a life which evidenced his zeal for God, a life with a focus on putting God and His work first always. How do we emulate this behaviour? By putting God first in our lives, when we set the work of the church as a priority, and not as a mere thought (Matt. 6:33).

In faith, Timothy was to have faith that is unfeigned (1 Tim. 1:5, 2 Tim. 1:5). The Heidelberg Catechism explains in Q&A 21 that “true faith is not only a certain knowledge...but also an assured confidence”. A genuine faith starts from that inward knowledge and confidence and flows into the outward behaviour. Faith in Timothy would bring forth an

abundance of fruit – in his ministry, his love for others, his actions, and his words. In this too we see our calling to live out our faith, a faith which is sincere, out of love for God.

In purity, Timothy was to treat all those around him with purity (1 Tim. 5:1-2) and to keep himself pure in his spirituality (1 Tim. 5:22). Consider this quotation:

*Rev. George C. Lubbers, in the Standard Bearer, Volume 38, Issue 15, writes that this purity is not “to be taken in the sense that moralism would teach purity, leaving God out of the picture, but it must most emphatically refer to the spiritual ethical purity of the sanctification which is ours through the Spirit of Christ. It is the purity of heaven, of the spiritual man, of the new man in Christ, in true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. It is the purity of godliness, which is not merely a matter of form and convention, but a life which has the power of godliness. A minister must be a truly godly man” (Bylsma, 2013).*

This is how Timothy was to live and keep a life of purity, a life which continually sought after God to flee from sin, where God is the center. For example, Timothy knew the

temptations of a young minister of the gospel when he visits a woman; to give in to his youthful lusts would ruin his work and duty to preach the gospel. Therefore, he was to guard his heart and ensure that his sinful lusts did not affect his judgment. We too are in the same spiritual battle as Timothy was. We must always put on the armour of God, resist the devil, and constantly consecrate ourselves to God.

**The Possibility**

Timothy could be an example to believers only because God was with him.

God used Timothy’s mother (Eunice), grandmother (Lois), and Paul to prepare him for the ministry. What a marvelous work! Timothy had the instruction of his mother and grandmother from his childhood (2 Tim. 1:5). Maturing under their instruction, Timothy was taken under Paul’s wing, who groomed him to preach the Word of God.

God was present throughout Timothy’s life.

Without God, man can do nothing (Jn. 15:5). In His mercy, God neither leaves us nor forsakes us (Heb. 13:5) and will be with us wherever we go

(Josh. 1:9). What assurance we have knowing that, even in our youth, we can be good examples to others, even to the older ones!

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, let no man despise thy youth. Let us be an example of the believers. Let the Word of God be the basis of our lives and how we are to live, for God is our God – all to the glory of God the Highest.

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**REJOICING AND WEEPING TOGETHER (III): IN THE HOME**  
 >>Lim Yang Zhi



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To have empathy in the church, we must practice it in our covenant homes.

1 John 4:20, which we quoted earlier on, applies to our covenant home. We are called to love our spiritual brothers and sisters in the home — father, mother, and siblings. Not expressing that love in empathy taints our love

for God. Again, let us take heed to this stern warning from God’s Word and strive to deal with each other with empathy.

Children of covenant homes are called to have empathy. Our catechism brings out this calling, instructing children to “patiently bear with [their

parents'] weaknesses and infirmities" (Q&A 104). "To bear" starts with acknowledging our parents' struggle with sin. Remember that weeping with those that weep means we take the person's sorrow over anything — including the sorrow from struggling with sin — and put it on ourselves, so that keenly feel the burden of that sorrow.

Youth, God calls you to feel the struggles of father and mother over their sins. That consciousness will lead you to pray that the Lord would preserve and sanctify your parents through those struggles. Doing so may seem bizarre; but love for your parents will lead you to pray for your parents, even as our High Priest intercedes for us out of His love for us.

As youth, we show empathy also by showing an understanding for our parents' earthly struggles. Think of father as the employee — working in the day; coming home to help mother with the chores; preparing for a Bible study or a committee meeting. Think of mother as the manager of the home — laundry, dishes, ironing, and groceries are no small tasks. Think of the fatigue that sets in by the end of the week and the pressures they face at home or at work.

Our actions can be used to show our parents that we are aware of their struggles. Being aware of their struggles, you do your part at home — helping in the chores, controlling your time playing phone games on your own, and learning your catechism are some ways. When we want our parents' attention for things — phones, clothes, etc. — we do not demand these things from our parents. Rather than a disrespectful demand, we bring our request in a

respectful way: "*Ma, may I have a new phone? I know you and Pa are busy, so I'm not asking for it right now. But when you have time, could you and Pa think about it, please?*"

Children are also called to have empathy towards their siblings. One of the best opportunities is when we help our younger siblings. Di-Di (younger brother) needs help with homework. Ma is busy. You look at the question. Would this roll off our tongues: "*So easy, this one you don't know?*" Perhaps some teachers in school said such a thing to us: But is that empathy? Not quite. Something like this is more empathising: "*Let do this together. Don't be discouraged; you just need a little more practice.*"

Empathy is a high calling for children, and it is a calling to be nurtured by parents.

So we turn to husbands and fathers. Husbands are to empathise with their wives. 1 Peter 3:7 calls husbands to "dwell with [their wives] according to knowledge...as unto the weaker vessel". The knowledge a husband has of his wife is the knowledge that she is a weaker vessel. The husband must acknowledge her spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical needs. He must make it a point to talk to his wife, so that she pours her needs to him. When his wife does so, the husband must respond *with empathy*. There should be no "*Can you stop sighing? I am so tired from work; could you say something more encouraging instead?*" That is not empathy. As husbands, we must put away the day's fatigue to bring to our wives the Word that strengthens her. That is called "looking not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Phil. 2:4).

Husbands, as fathers, are to empathise with their children too. This is implied in Ephesians 6:2, when Paul calls fathers not to *provoke [their] children to wrath*. (The verse also applies to mothers, who are under the headship of the husband.) One way fathers provoke wrath is criticism. Think of the child does something wrong but not sinful — perhaps spilling a cup of water. The father does not understand the child if he merely lashes out, "Can't you be more careful with what you are doing?" In such impulsive anger, the father does not pause to empathise with the child—that the child most likely did not mean to make that mess! The empathising father does not ask, "Can't you be...," but considers, first, the reason behind his child's mistake and addresses it appropriately. Much of this is discussed in Tedd Tripp's *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, a great read for couples of all ages.

Empathy is a high calling for husbands and fathers...and for wives and mothers.

They are to empathise with their husbands. Going back to 1 Peter 3:7, we find two phrases that imply this calling. The first phrase is "heirs together of the grace of life". Husbands and wives live as such heirs only if they consciously rejoice *together* in the joy of their salvation. As the husband leads the wife in devotions daily, and the wife brings herself under his leadership and studies the Word with him; together, in this way, they live as heirs.

The second phrase is "that your prayers be not hindered". Husbands and wives pray together. As they live together, they face joys — the conception of a covenant child; discussions about the

Word of God and the causes of the kingdom; the provisions of God for their earthly lives. At the same time, there are many sorrows — having no children; sins committed against each other; financial struggles. What would the married couple do with these joys and sorrows? They bring it to the Lord — the joys, by thanking God; and the sorrows, by supplicating for patience, contentment, and help. Husbands ought to take the lead in these prayers; very clearly, Peter directs the phrase to husbands. But wives play a part in such prayers; when wives rejoice with husbands and weigh themselves with

the sorrows of the home, husbands will find it much easier to bring these matters to the Lord in prayer. If wives are indifferent to such joys and sorrows, husbands will find little reason to pray about such things; and soon, husbands cease to find reason even to pray with his wife.

Every member of the home is called to rejoice and weep with each other.

The covenant home is the classroom where God teaches us to have empathy for others.

God teaches us, so that we may teach others. There are saints who come from spiritually broken homes, homes that never showed empathy. When we rejoice and weep with such saints, they will see the love of Christ as our High Priest who is touched by the feeling of our infirmities (Heb. 4:15). What comfort that love would bring to their hearts!

To all that are given covenant parents; to all that *are* covenant parents; to all that brought into God's covenant and church — rejoice and weep with one another.

## THE MUSIC OF THE WORLD

>>Lim Ruo Xi



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The previous time we talked about the purpose of music, how it was used in the Bible and how it strayed greatly from its original purpose. I had received some feedback that music is a little mysterious in that it is hard to pinpoint exactly what about it feels wrong. For this reason, let us briefly discuss the effects and main danger of pop music.

Music is something that has existed alongside Man for a long time. In the book of Genesis, instruments were mentioned (Gen. 4:20-21), and we have in the inspired Word of God a songbook preserved for at least 2000 years. Adding to this, modern research

has shown not just how ubiquitous music is around the globe but also how deeply music is rooted in our biology. It is very humbling to see that God designed music not only as a means to worship Him but also for our enjoyment and use. When we hear music, many areas of the brain are activated, including the areas for memory, language and pleasure. Thus, a tune is able to jog a memory that has been long forgotten and bring nostalgia from ages past, even for a person with Alzheimer's (Napoletan, 2015). Music can also be used for memorisation of just about anything, from poems to quadratic formulas and world history facts. Also, since music is able to affect us physiologically, for example, by increasing or decreasing heart rate, deepening breathing, reducing cortisol levels, increasing blood flow to the brain, reducing pain perception and so on, it is often applied as therapy, leading to a new allied health profession, music therapy.

Knowing this, it is important to be aware of the spiritual effects of music on us, apart from its physical effects. In the Bible, music is used primarily to worship God and is a convenient educational tool for saints to learn about the truth of God in the same manner we teach children the alphabet today via the ABC song. Similarly, worldly music, especially mainstream pop, carries philosophies and ideas befitting of the world. A quick survey of mainstream music reveals that lyrics are getting increasingly brazen, glorifying ungodly living, hedonism, sexual immorality, fatalism and all kinds of worldly ideas.

We can avoid listening to music with such lyrics but even so, the temptation is great to say that one does not subscribe to the meaning behind a song and listens to it for its inherent musical attractiveness. We must realise that worldly music is designed to be addictive (Kim, 2015): melodies tend to be simple and repetitive, there is a

strong rhythmic emphasis and drums and guitars are typically featured, which are not wrong in themselves. These characteristics come together to form music that is upbeat and catchy, which is then the perfect medium through which the world's philosophies can enter into our minds. At this point, let us remember how music is used for learning and memorisation because it easily activates the regions of the brain for emotion and memory-processing. We become sitting ducks when we listen to pop music as our guards are lowered by the attractiveness of the music and the message is impressed on our minds, whether or not we are conscious of it.

In my experience, music that arouses positive emotions makes its listeners more tolerant and even agreeable to its content. The whole process is insidious and it is very common to hear people defending the lyrics to a song with "It's just a song". There is also the common

experience of having an earworm (involuntary musical imagery) – when you hear a piece of music in your head repeatedly and it refuses to end. We still do not know exactly why they occur frequently, but the fact is they can be disturbing for some (Brown, 2015), and in the case of songs with anti-Christian lyrics, they will either cause distress or desensitisation in the Christian. The latter is dangerous as it leads one down the slippery path of being tolerant and then accepting of the world.

As Reformed Christians, we must be vigilant about not endorsing worldliness through our leisure, and let the antithesis extend to every minute part of our lives. I understand that the struggle is great when you enjoy a piece of music for its inherent properties – the rhythm enlivens you and the general mood of the song is positive – but then realise that the lyrics are words you would not even utter in speech. However, learn to see the music

for what it is, a vehicle for the world's philosophies, and seek alternatives. Perhaps there is an instrumental version of that pop song you really like or there are similar instrumental music that are not set to lyrics at all. May the Lord give us grace and grant us perseverance in our fight.

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## THE NEED FOR AND URGENCY OF READING (II)

>> Rev. Arie den Hartog



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We need yet to answer the question, of course: what should we as Christians be reading regularly? The first and foremost answer should be the Bible itself. This might be a surprising answer to many Christians. All Christians should make it their life-long occupation to be constantly reading the Bible itself. We should read the Bible over and over from cover to cover. Every book and every chapter of it is the inspired Word of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness. God gave to us the whole of His Word and all of its mighty and glorious truths that

the man of God might be thoroughly furnished for a life of good works. See 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

Every Christian should have a Bible which clearly shows that it has been much used. These Bibles have tattered pages and covers because they have been read so many times. There should be times when we read long sections of the Bible in one sitting, whole chapters and even whole books in long periods of devoted and careful study. God did not give us His Word in the Bible to be read just one verse here and one verse there in a very superficial way. The Bible needs to be understood as a

whole in whole chapters and requires lengthy discussions of the truth. The great doctrines of the Bible must be carefully understood by studying these doctrines as they are taught in many places in the Bible. Strong Christians are usually those who have done a lot of reading of the Bible. Sometimes simple-minded Christians with little formal education far excel some learned and educated Christians simply because of the amount of reading of the Bible they have done over the years of their lives.

It should be obvious to all of us that the best book in the whole world to be reading is the Bible itself. The Bible should be read prayerfully and with a spiritual mind, and with great interest of learning and growing in the wisdom and knowledge that the Bible itself contains. The aged saint that has read the Bible from cover to cover more times than they can count will testify that through the constant faithful reading of the Bible they have learned new and amazing and wonderful truths of God and His salvation each time they have read the Bible.

The Christian should also be reading good books which carefully explain the meaning of the Bible and also the profound doctrines which the Bible teaches. We ought not to satisfy ourselves with mere fluff. We should not be satisfied with merely reading the so-called 'how-to books', how to do this and how to do that, how to be content and how to always be happy, how to love yourself and how to be rich, how to be a good leader, and on and on – often about superficial subjects. Many such books promote easy believism. There is no true Christianity that is so easy that it can be learned in four or five easy steps. There are way too many such books flowing continually

off the printing presses of the world and demanding our attention. There are always new popular authors coming on the scene and coming out with new approaches to understand, and these books are being recommended by the media. Now, of course, we are not denying that a few of these are good to read, and we should sometimes listen to recommendations and encouragements from fellow Christians to read new and helpful books.

But we also need to read solid books, meaty books, some of which were written even centuries ago, such as books by the great reformers Calvin and Luther, some of the Puritans, Herman Hoeksema and David Engelsma, and many more great men of God from church history. The bookstore at Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore has available many excellent books published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association and we encourage all to read them and not just buy them to put on the shelves in our homes to collect dust. The fact is that there is almost an endless number of excellent books that Christians could read with great profit, instruction, understanding, and edification. There are doctrinal books which not everyone

**The Bible should be read prayerfully and with a spiritual mind, and with great interest of learning and growing in the wisdom and knowledge that the Bible itself contains.**

can handle because they require deep thinking and careful study and attention to read. Those who feel called to be leaders in the church should be reading. A doctrinal and confessional foundation will stay in place in the church when there are members gifted by God who read and study so that they know and so that they can assure the church together that she is always built upon this foundation.

How does one discipline himself or herself to read? There is no magic formula to accomplish this. It takes a lot of constant effort and application of ourselves. It takes the same kind of study and hours and hours of pouring over books that it takes to equip oneself for a good career in life that will be able to be the source of income for ourselves and our families. The only way one will read consistently is when he himself regularly gives time and effort for such reading. Ordering and disciplining our time is necessary. We all are guilty of wasting way too much time God gives to us in our lives. We waste so much of the fleeting time in life on things which are quite useless and have no lasting value. We need to identify such activities and eliminate them. We need to begin using our God-given time wisely. Paul instructs us in Ephesians 5 to redeem the time, for the days in which we are living are evil. TV watching can be such a great waster of time; besides, it often corrupts our souls through the worldly philosophy it promotes and distracts us with. Internet viewing can be beneficial for learning many important things for our daily lives. It can even be searched for good online books, Bible commentaries, and thousands and thousands of sermons from some of the great preachers in the world. The internet also flows with filth and garbage.



Most of the time, however, we need to take the books in hand, hopefully in a quiet place where we can concentrate, exercising all the God-given gifts of our minds and hearts.

How urgent is the need for members of the church to be strong and for churches together to be strong, in these last days of great apostasy. Are you and I able to

stand on the truth in the evil days in which we are living and to instruct and encourage and support fellow members of our church to do so? Are there young men who are equipping themselves with the knowledge of the truth to be elders and deacons in the church and even ministers of the Word? For this to happen we must devote ourselves regularly to reading and study. There are

those who want to promote themselves as leaders, but who are unwilling to study to show themselves approved of God and to be true leaders in the church. Reading is one of the greatest ways to equip ourselves for our calling, whatever the Lord's will may be for us.

## COVENANT PEOPLE

>> Lee Kong Wee



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### Introduction

Dear young people, how many names can you think of that the Bible uses to describe a Christian? Child of God. Prophet, priest, and king. A servant. A lively stone. A soldier. A runner. A pilgrim and stranger. Citizen of the kingdom of heaven. These biblical metaphors help us understand and appreciate our multi-faceted and wonderful calling and identity as Christians. But perhaps the most beautiful description of a Christian that captures the heart of our entire Christian *life and walk* is that we are a *covenant* people.

### Taken into the Covenant

To understand and appreciate the beauty of our identity as covenant people, we must first understand

what the covenant is. The covenant is essentially God's relationship of perfect divine fellowship within the Trinity. The three Persons of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit enjoy blessed covenant fellowship one with another from all eternity. When we say we are God's covenant people, we are saying that God takes us *into* that trinitarian fellowship so that we enjoy the blessed communion with the three Persons of the Godhead. Pause... and *wonder!* God says, "*I give you the privilege of entering the circle of divine fellowship. Welcome to THE family!*" Amazing! Unbelievable! How is *that* possible? How can sinful man come anywhere near, let alone have fellowship with, the thrice holy God without being instantaneously consumed by His holiness? *Why* would the perfect God, exalted in the highest heavens, Almighty Creator of the heaven and earth, take into His closest fellowship imperfect, sinful creatures of the dust who deserve only to be cast away from His presence into everlasting punishment? The only answer we can give on this side of heaven is: sovereign, unconditional, eternal love. Read Ezekiel 16. That God should take us into His covenant is of *sheer* grace. When we consider how abominable we

are as sinners, and that God yet takes us into His fellowship, we can only bow our faces in confusion and shame (Ezek. 16:63). And instead of boasting about our goodness or complaining that we deserve better, we shut our mouths lest they spew forth more sinful pride and foolishness.

Such unfathomable love and amazing grace that enable the sinner to dwell with the Most High is not at the expense of His holiness and justice. We can draw near to Him, enjoy intimate fellowship with Him – because of Jesus Christ, Who bore the punishment for all our sins to the uttermost. As far as satisfaction for the sins of His elect people is concerned, it is fully accomplished at the cross. God did not wink at our sin. He punished every single one of them as they deserve. He meted out the punishment fully. He did not hold back the least bit, but unleashed His full, just fury against our sins – but all on Jesus Christ, our Substitute. It is in Christ that God establishes His covenant with us – Christ is the ground, the Surety, and the Head of the covenant. As covenant people, we are joined to Christ as members of the body to the Head. Hence the covenant

is unbreakable. The relationship is firm and sure. For God will not break His covenant with us any more than He would with Christ.

Are we covenant people? Then God has taken us into His very own covenantal life, through Jesus Christ, to enjoy blessed fellowship with Him. *Wonder of wonders!*

### Life in the Covenant

Having been taken into the covenant, we now live in the covenant. There is the individual aspect of this life as each child of God walks with the Lord. But there is also the corporate aspect of this life, which is life in the covenant family and covenant community or local church. For the purpose of this article, we will focus only on the corporate aspect. So what does this 'family' or 'community' life look like in God's covenant?

### Let's begin with the covenant family.

Because God is King and at the centre of the covenant family, the character and focus of the family is spiritual. The Word of God is the authority and rule that governs and directs all things in the home. The husband provides loving leadership, while the wife shows caring submission. The husband labours hard in the office and returns home in the evening to dwell with his wife. The wife labours diligently at home to build a warm, loving, and peaceful abode for her husband and children (if the Lord gives children). Parents raise their children in the fear of Jehovah with wisdom and patience, while the children obey their parents and honour them. Worship is a top priority for the family. Going to church on the Lord's Day is the family's chief delight, while family devotions are enjoyable times of fellowshiping with one another around the Word.

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Within the family, there is mutual love, trust, and respect between husband and wife and parents and children, and among the children. They delight in one another's company and friendship, and share their life together. They weep together and rejoice together. They carry one another's burdens. They build one another up in the faith. The bond that binds them together in such close, intimate fellowship is the covenant bond that God establishes with the believing parents and their children.

But of course, life in the covenant family is not perfect. Indeed, it is *far* from perfect. After all, the covenant family is composed *entirely of sinners*. Each family knows too well how imperfect they are. No doubt there are conflicts and disagreements. Tempers flare. Unkind words are said. Husband and wife give each other the cold shoulder. The children are no angels, and quite often bring distress and heartaches to the parents by their sinful behaviour. There can even be unfaithfulness on the part of spouses. Alas! The ugliness of sin! But the spiritual mark of a godly covenant family is not the absence of sin and conflict, but the presence of repentance, forgiveness, mercy, and love when dealing with sin and conflicts. The family takes heed to the Apostle Paul's exhortation to the

Colossians: "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness" (Col. 3:12-14). Yes, the covenant family is a sinful family. But in the covenant family, grace triumphs over sin, and love covers the multitude of sins (1 Pet. 4:8).

One more aspect of the covenant family – its extended family. When the children grow up and establish their own covenant families, some of us become covenant grandparents. God has blessed CERC with more of such members in recent years, as our second generation marries and brings forth covenant seed. Grandparents play an important role within the larger family context, not in directing or interfering with the family life of their married children, but by being godly examples and in providing wise, godly counsel to them, and by being always ready to lend a helping hand in times of need. It takes much wisdom and self-control on the part of grandparents to relate to their married children and grandchildren so that the husband and father can be and is encouraged to exercise his headship effectively. Married children too need grace to continue to honour their parents, include them in the fellowship of the family as part of the extended covenant family, and teach their children to honour their grandparents.

**What about covenant life in the church?** The principles that govern and guide the covenant life in the family are the same ones that govern and guide the covenant life in the church,

which is the family of God. Hence, life in the church resembles life in the covenant family in many respects. The two are not identical, of course, but both are characterised by fellowship among covenant members, love and care for one another, serving one another, repentance and forgiveness, faithful performance of various roles and callings, and submission to God-ordained authority, except in a different context.

One outstanding characteristic of the covenant community life is that it is *corporate*, not individualistic. There are many members, with great diversity of personalities and gifts, yet *one* body. The identity of this community is not a mish-mash of individual personalities who share a common interest or happen to participate in a common activity, but a unified, corporate identity of organic oneness. The church is an organism with the life of Jesus Christ flowing through it and animating it. Each covenant member is a building block of a magnificent spiritual house, fitly joined to one another, with Jesus Christ as the cornerstone; not loose stones and pebbles gathered in a jar. Hence, the concern and focus of a covenant member is not himself or herself, but his fellow members: “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others” (Phil. 2:4). Each covenant member desires to employ his gifts, readily and cheerfully, for the advantage and salvation of other members (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 55). Because each member is a sinner saved by grace alone, self-promotion and self-glory have no place in the community, but rather this: “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves” (Phil. 2:3). My sincere

desire is that Christ and my fellow brother and sister must increase, while I must decrease. This corporate aspect of the life of the covenant community is especially expressed when the covenant members gather on the Lord’s Day for worship. Throughout the entire worship service, from the call to worship to the benediction, every activity is a corporate activity. Conscious of this fact, and appreciating the beauty of their corporate identity as the body of Jesus Christ, covenant members desire to be present in church on the Lord’s Day so that they can take up their place in the body and worship God *together* with the rest of the body. Would not the beauty of the body be marred if there was a missing ear or finger or leg?

Covenant life in the church of Jesus Christ is ‘bodily’ life. “But now are they many members, yet but one body” (1 Cor. 12:20). It is knowing that God has made me a member of this body to serve the body, not myself. It is living with the consciousness that I am part of a larger reality and purpose that is far more important than me and my individual identity, needs, and desires.

### **Perfection of the Covenant**

Life in the covenant is a blessed life. Although on this earth it is tainted with much sin and often lined with pain, still it is the blessed life. For it is a foretaste of the perfect communion and fellowship we shall enjoy with the Triune God in heaven one day. There, we shall talk with Jehovah and walk with Him – without sin to spoil the communion! Right now, we have only a small beginning of the new obedience, and our experience of covenant life is marred by frequent and great struggles against sin from within and without. But though we are unfaithful, God remains faithful (2 Tim. 2:13). His

covenant stands sure. He will bring it to its perfection according to His unchangeable counsel. At the appointed time, Jesus Christ shall return and usher in the new heaven and new earth, when “the tabernacle of God (shall be) with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God” (Rev. 21:3). The Church will be presented to Christ at the end of history as a pure, holy, and spotless Bride, without any spot or wrinkle or blemish (Eph. 5:26-27, Rev. 21:2). She will dwell with Christ in the most intimate and perfect fellowship forever. You and I, living members of the church, shall then experience the most delightful fellowship with our covenant God in Jesus Christ, which “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1 Cor. 2:9).

*Covenant* Evangelical Reformed Church – do you not long for *that* day?

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# MARRIAGE IS NOT FOR ME (I)

>> Marcus Wee



Marcus Wee is a member of CERC.

No, I am not confessing my regret at being married, within a year of marriage. Instead, I hope to touch on an essential principle of marriage: selflessness. And yes, you should carry on reading, whether you are married, single, or dating. For though we consider the principle primarily in the sphere of marriage, this principle is generalizable to all the spheres of Christian life: all that we do is not for ourselves, but for others. We shall see, from Scripture, that marriage is for the sake of God and the neighbour, focusing especially on our spouse. Then, we shall examine our tendency for selfishness, and Scripture's commands to be selfless. Lord willing, in the next article, we shall apply this principle of selflessness to our marriages to see how such a principle is manifested practically.

## For Whom Marriage Is

Marriage is a lifelong union of mutual love and assistance which God establishes between a man and a woman, by making two into one. Two are better than one, thus with this assistance comes immense benefit (Ecc. 4:9-12). However, this benefit can only be realised according to God's plan for marriage, as stated in His Word.

In this article, rather than consider the

specific callings of husbands and wives, we focus on the attitude that both spouses must have as they fulfil these callings, an attitude which revolves around the purpose of marriage: for whom is marriage? While the answer may be obvious, it still needs to be said and explored, so that we may have a biblical foundation on which we build our practice.

### *Marriage is for the Sake of God*

Living in marriage must be for God's glory, as with everything we do (1 Cor. 10:31). God's glory must be the single guiding principle for our marriages, to which all other principles of marriage are aligned.<sup>1</sup> When our marriages give God the glory, then all other aspects of marriage will fall correctly into place. Or, to put it in another way, when we live in marriage according to God's Word, our marriages will give God the glory.

### *For the Sake of My Brothers and Sisters in Christ*

Our marriages must also be for the sake of our brothers and sisters in Christ in the church. A couple does not get married for their own sake, to the disregard of all others. The family is blessed "out of Zion" (Ps. 128:5), that is, out of the rich spiritual life of the church to which they are active contributors. The warning to oneself is not to forget the church, and to prefer her "above my chief joy" (Ps. 137:6) must also be the confession of the married person.

### *Marriage is for the Sake of My Spouse*

Our marriages must be for the sake of our spouse, in a unique, exclusive way.

It is to him/her that we are married, after all! In the Reformed Marriage Form, the first reason given for God instituting marriage is that "each faithfully assist the other". A striking line in a time-honoured wedding vow reads: "forsaking all others, I promise to be faithful to you", consonant with the biblical description of marriage as the definition of leaving father and mother (one's closest relationships) and cleaving to one's spouse. In marriage, we devote ourselves entirely to our spouse as the other half of our one flesh union, holding nothing back. The marriage relationship is to be prioritised and nurtured among all other human relationships.

## Selfishness in Marriage

If marriage is for God, my brethren in Christ, and my spouse, what's left for my own self? Isn't it true that I desired marriage because of companionship and assistance ("It is not good that the man should be alone") and also an attraction to the opposite sex ("to avoid fornication")? Isn't it true that if I had no such needs, and were given the gift of singlehood, I would never have sought out marriage? Surely, marriage must be for me myself! While there is some truth in these statements, the conclusion is essentially selfish.

### *Selfishness Examined*

Selfishness is a disproportionate love of self to the neglect of others. We must love ourselves, as good stewards of the bodies that God has given us, and as a reference for how to love our neighbour. However, our love for self becomes disproportionate (and thus, selfish) when it is for our own self's sake, and

not for God's glory. Selfishness is the fruit of pride, that sin which elevates oneself above others. With a sinfully inflated view of self (pride), one then loves oneself disproportionately (selfishness).

Pride was the sin which resulted in the fall of mankind, when Adam and Eve elevated themselves above God, thinking themselves wiser than Him. This pride manifested itself in selfishness, evident in a desire to obtain what was forbidden ("ye shall be as gods") and a blaming of someone else for their own sin ("the woman whom thou gavest..."). Pride is the sin that has so infected us, the descendants of Adam, which continues to bring forth the fruit of selfishness. Selfishness causes us to seek our own things, instead of the neighbour's (Phi. 2:4) and Christ's (Phi. 2:21). Instead of loving God with all our being, and our neighbour as ourselves, we love ourselves, period. Instead of sacrificing for the sake of the neighbour, we expect the neighbour to sacrifice for our sake.

### *Selfishness in Marriage*

Nowhere is our selfishness more apparent than in marriage, the closest possible human relationship. Due to the very nature of two sinners becoming one, there is an increased familiarity with one's spouse, and thus a greater opportunity for selfishness to rear its ugly head.

When two become one, there is a lesser need to put on our best behaviour, which we did so during dating, whether consciously or sub-consciously. Instead, our true colours begin to show more clearly. Due to increased familiarity with and proximity to our spouse, whatever sinful, selfish tendencies we have are magnified in marriage.

When two become one, there is also a greater exposure to the flaws of one's spouse. As a familiar saying goes, familiarity breeds contempt, and there is certainly a greater temptation to grow contemptuous of one's spouse due to his/her weaknesses. A character trait like indecisiveness or forgetfulness, which may have seemed tolerable and even endearing at first, can become a constant source of irritation which never fails to light one's fuse. Selfishness looks at the sum of the spouse's flaws and thinks, "I deserve better", causing one to grow bitter and disillusioned. Selfishness wants nothing to do with the hard work of nurturing a marriage and patiently bearing with the faults of the spouse; instead, it grabs at the benefits of marriage with its grubby hands.

### **Selflessness Commanded**

Against the selfish tendencies of our natural man of sin, Scripture commands us to be selfless. It is true that there are immense advantages to being married, as two are better than one (Ecc. 4:9-12), and one's needs for some of these benefits (e.g. companionship) may motivate one to seek marriage in the first place. However, be that as it may, one must not seek marriage with self-gratification as the primary goal. Instead, Scripture is replete with instruction on selfless love for others. *Love*, Scripture commands the husband, *in a giving, sacrificial manner*. *Submit*, Scripture enjoins the wife, as a help meet for your husband. Even when Scripture instructs one to marry to avoid fornication, this is immediately followed up with the direction for both spouses to render to each other "due benevolence", by not withholding intimacy and defrauding one another (1 Cor. 7:3-5). A couple's marriage is to be characterized by love, which "seeketh not her own" (1 Cor.

13:5), a love which essentially imitates Christ in giving oneself for the sake of one's spouse.

Selflessness is made possible because of Christ, who died for us, "that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again" (1 Cor. 5:15). From the new life of Christ infused into us, we are enabled to live for Him and empowered to obey His commands, esteeming each other above ourselves in lowliness of mind (Phi. 2:3). By God's grace, our chains of pride fall off, and we are freed from excessive self-love to fervent, sincere love of God and the neighbour. And what better way to channel that love than towards our spouse, our dearest friend and companion! What a privilege to give ourselves wholeheartedly to the other, in loving leadership as husband, and loving submission as wife!

### **Conclusion**

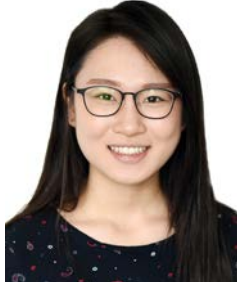
Marriage is not for us; it is ultimately for God's glory, and for the sake of our spouse. In this union, we are to be selfless, primarily seeking the good of our spouse, and not our own. We may know this principle theoretically, but struggle to apply it consistently in our marriages. In the next article, we shall consider how to do just that — live selflessly in marriage.

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# OF TREASURES HID IN SAND

>> Cassia Lee

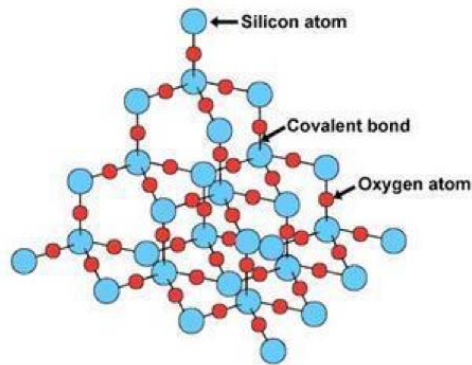


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Have you ever stopped and wondered about the sand under your feet when walking along a beach? Most of us would probably not even think twice about the marvelous creation of God right beneath our feet! In this article, we will discuss some scientific insights of sand, see the use of sand in Scripture, and show how it displays the wisdom of our mighty Creator.

## Sand

What makes sand such a unique creation of God? Sand, also known as silicon dioxide or silica, has the chemical formula of  $\text{SiO}_2$ . Each silicon atom is covalently bonded to four oxygen atoms. Each oxygen atom is covalently bonded to two silicon atoms. This gives the overall ratio of two oxygen atoms to one silicon atom; hence the formula is given as  $\text{SiO}_2$ . This molecule,  $\text{SiO}_2$ , is arranged in a tetrahedral form, similar to that of a diamond. Most of us should know the unique property of a diamond: it is extremely hard. In fact, diamond is the hardest mineral on earth! On the Mohs hardness scale of 1-10, diamond stands at a 10. Now, where does silicon dioxide stand? It stands at an astounding 7! Silicon dioxide is very hard due to its giant covalent



tetrahedral structure. The covalent bonds holding the atoms together are very strong, and they require massive amounts of energy to be overcome. To further prove this point, the melting and boiling points of silicon dioxide are  $1,610^\circ\text{C}$  and  $2,230^\circ\text{C}$  respectively. These physical properties of silicon dioxide apply to each and every single granule of sand that you see on the beach. Just as a diamond is a crystalline form of carbon, each granule of sand is a crystalline form of silicon dioxide. Is it not amazing how a tiny grain of sand requires so much energy to be overcome? Furthermore, no two grains of sand are the same. God created each and every individual grain of sand different. Look at the blown-up microscopic images of individual grains of sand, and you will be amazed that no two grains are the same. So the next time you are at a beach, remember that you are not just stepping on sand, but thousands of hard, different crystals of silicon dioxide!

## Sand and the Scriptures

In this section, we will solely look at Bible passages which mention sand. In Scripture, sand is mentioned 28 times. I will briefly mention three passages here. In Genesis 22:17, God gave Abraham the covenant promise that his

seed will be as many as the sand on the seashore. In Psalm 139:18, the psalmist marvels at the tremendous love God has for us. If we were to count God's thoughts, they would be more than the number of sand on the seashore. Jesus tells us about the parable of the wise and foolish builders in Matthew 7. The wise builder builds his house on rock, while the foolish builder builds his house on sand.

## Our Creator's Mighty Wisdom

For what purpose did God create sand? Not only was sand created to beautify the earth, but it was created as a symbol of God's everlasting covenant with His people. Through His creation, God reminds us of the covenant promise. Included in His covenant promise is the promise of salvation and eternal life. God sent His only begotten Son to die on the cross for our sins. Unashamedly, we can now stand in the presence of the Triune God, Creator of heaven and earth.

Oftentimes, many of us have questioned our salvation. Is our salvation even assured? Is my children's salvation assured? We are frail and needy creatures, prone to doubt and despair. God knows it all. Just as God recognises each and every single grain of sand He created, He knows each and every single one of His people. He knew us from before the foundations of the world and has called us out of darkness into His marvellous light! He knows that we need assurance, and He gives it to us through His creation that is everywhere before us. Even in His creation, we can see how He preserves

and takes care of His handiwork. God will preserve His people till the day He returns. Oh, what a comfort it is to know that God's thoughts are with us! We can now say with the Psalmist: "How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee."

A handful of sand — the promise of our God — believers and their seed — an innumerable host which no man "can number, singing the song of Moses and the Lamb forevermore!" (Joostens, 1979).

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## ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

>> Cornelius Boon



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### What is AI?

The term "artificial intelligence", otherwise known as "AI", was first introduced in 1956 at the Dartmouth Conference. This was the original definition: "every aspect of learning or any other feature of intelligence can in principle be so precisely described that a machine can be made to simulate it. An attempt will be made to find how to make machines use language, form abstractions and concepts, solve kinds of problems now reserved for humans, and improve themselves."<sup>1</sup>

Basically, what artificial intelligence

hopes to accomplish is to mimic what humans can do in the areas of speech, behaviour, learning, reasoning, and perception. Since 1956, great strides have been made in all areas. Sometimes we are not even aware of how pervasive this technology has become today. Below are some examples of artificial intelligence in our everyday lives.

Speech and behaviour: Siri, Amazon Echo, Google Translate, and all the various auto readers that read out loud the Bible on your phone at a click of a button.

Learning and reasoning: Machine learning is used by Facebook to auto-tag faces; by Amazon to show products based on the person's viewing history and interests; and by many other companies. Deep learning was used in the AlphaGo programme that was developed by Google for the board game Go.

Perception: Autonomous vehicles, self-flying drones, facial recognition (iPhone 10 and others), and even the small robot vacuum cleaner that some of us might have in our homes.

Living in the world today, we cannot escape the use of artificial intelligence in one form or another. We are not called to boycott all technology like the Amish do, but we must certainly look deeper and understand from the Word of God how we ought to view and use such technology.

### Made a Little Lower Than the Angels

We must first understand a little of how special God has made man. Psalm 8:5-8 beautifully describes this: "For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; The fowl of the air,

and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.” We often think of angels as powerful beings, and in Scripture they certainly are described as such. But Psalm 8 tells us that God has placed man just below the angels in terms of importance. If it was not clearly taught in Scripture, we would not have dared to place such importance on ourselves. God has given man power to rule the earth and all of her creatures. And to enable man to carry out this task, God made man a thinking and willing creature. Not only that, God has also given man a soul, so that when the child of God dies and his mortal body decays in the ground, his soul goes to be with Christ in heaven. All of these speak of the wonderful and incomprehensible work of God in creating creatures such as us.

### A Perfect AI?

Having seen how God has created man to be such a unique and special creature, we can only stand in awe at the power of God. We confess that we will never be able to create a creature the way God has created us. The question then is: why do people still try to create something that is impossible? Why do people strive to create the perfect AI, which mimics humans in all aspects? Is it just the “natural curiosity” of man to push the boundaries of human understanding?

First, we must understand that all the work of unregenerate men is vain and not pleasing in the sight of God. Before the fall, man was created with a position of honour and glory. Man was created in the image of God, in true righteousness, holiness, and knowledge. But after the fall, he lost that image of God and was no longer honourable or glorious. Man turned away from God to be the exact opposite of what God

**That means, like all other modern inventions, AI in itself is not inherently evil. It is how we use it that makes it sinful or God-glorifying.**

had created him to be.

Canons of Dort, Head 3/4, Article 1: “Man was originally formed after the image of God. His understanding was adorned with a true and saving knowledge of his Creator and of spiritual things; his heart and will were upright; all his affections pure; and the whole man was holy. But, revolting from God by the instigation of the devil and abusing the freedom of his own will, he forfeited these excellent gifts, and on the contrary entailed on himself blindness of mind, horrible darkness, vanity, and perverseness of judgment, became wicked, rebellious, and obdurate in heart and will, and impure in his affections.”

After the fall, man still retained his intellect and rule over the earthly creation. The earth and all earthly creatures still serve man and supply him with food, drink, shelter, and clothing. But now, instead of using his abilities for the glory of God, he employs his resources and power to oppose God and serve the devil, doing everything for his own glory and gain.

Genesis 11:4, “And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose

top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.” Man is always striving to make a name for himself. That was true in the days when the Tower of Babel was built, and that is true today as well. In his pride, man tries to be the creator, to gain mastery over life and death, and to create intelligence. Oh yes, man may create something that rivals and even far exceeds the intelligence of man. But he will never be able to create a person’s soul and his conscience. He will never be able to fully create a creature that is the same as man in all aspects. He will never accomplish what God did when God created man.

### How Do We View AI?

How then does the child of God view artificial intelligence? Can he make use of it? Or even programme and create different forms of artificial intelligence? Before answering those questions, we must first realise that for the child of God, Christ has restored the image of God in us. With reference to Psalm 8 again, the writer to the Hebrews points everything to Christ. Hebrews 2:9: “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.” Christ was made a little lower than the angels so that He could be our representative to suffer the punishment of sin on our behalf. By Christ’s death on the cross, He has restored the image of God to all whom God has given to Him. Though Christ, we are able to properly exercise

<sup>1</sup>McCarthy, J., Minsky, M., Rochester, N., Shannon, C.E., A Proposal for the Dartmouth Summer Research Project on Artificial Intelligence., <http://raysolomonoff.com/dartmouth/boxa/dart564props.pdf> August, 1955



our dominion over this creation for the glory of God.

That means, like all other modern inventions, AI in itself is not inherently evil. It is how we use it that makes it sinful or God-glorifying. Remember the auto-reader on your phone which reads out loud the Bible? A saint who is blind is able to use such technology to listen to the Bible being read. And this is only one example of how the

child of God is able to use AI for the glory of God. Likewise, a child of God can programme robots or create AI if he does so for the glory of God. A child of God understands that God has given him certain abilities and an understanding of how this world works, so that he is able to exercise dominion over the creation. He does not seek to become the creator or to feed his own pride by his creations. He understands that all his abilities come from God and

employs all his gifts for the advantage of his fellow saints and the church. By doing so, he gives glory to God. May God grant us wisdom as we live on this earth, always looking forward to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Bibliography**

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## **BOOK REVIEW: BOYHOOD AND BEYOND**

>> Jean Lim



Jean Lim is a member of CERC.

### **About the author<sup>1</sup>**

Bob Schultz was born in 1951 and raised in Washington and Oregon. At the age of 15, he was led to a Young Life meeting. Young Life is a Christian ministry that reaches out to middle school, high school and college-aged kids in all 50 states of United States, as well as more than 90 countries around the world. Their mission is to “introduce adolescents everywhere to Jesus Christ and helping them grow in their faith”. Schultz was married at 24 years old and thereafter the couple started their own Christian Fellowship, attracting about 100 believers. On June 13, 2008, he died unexpectedly of heart failure.

### **About this book**

This is a book that is easy to read and understand. The author uses short

stories which are familiar experiences in the lives of adolescents. Though this book is written about boys and for boys, it is beneficial to everyone and anyone, even young girls. There are wise and biblical principles which can be gleaned from every short chapter that covers topics such as authority, honesty, courage to admit mistakes, leadership, forgiveness, self-control, resilience, as well as overcoming things like fear, laziness and temptation.

The author begins by reminding the boys that God has a Grand Book for boys to learn. This Grand Book is His creation. This Grand Book can teach them to work — “Go to the ant, thou sluggard.” A careful study of insects reveals a world of hard workers. The honey bees have much to teach about sweet rewards of diligent work. If the boys remember what they see and apply it to their lives, they will grow to be wise men. This Grand Book also teaches about manners. The rooster is an example of a true gentleman. How does this farm animal which sometimes can be a nuisance be used to teach our boys about self-control and kindness?

Do boys have difficulty confessing their faults? Do their parents resort to entreating or threatening to ‘help’ them confess their faults? What are all these stumbling blocks in their hearts that stop them from abiding in the Spirit? The chapter titled “Admit it” encourages the boys to try an experiment: “The next time you make a mistake, go directly to the one you wronged, admit it, and watch what God will do. Pick up your courage; walk past your fears; speak the truth. It’s the man’s road to freedom.”

These are the first 2 chapters of the book. The readers may discover that the author’s way of teaching virtues for manhood is soul searching as they continue with the remaining 29 chapters. However, they may not simply regard these chapters as intriguing stories that can give them a good laugh or momentarily stir up their emotional senses. They are to constantly desire this wisdom and seek the Lord (just like Solomon, David and Timothy) to help them nurture these virtues in their boyhood and when they grow up,

<sup>1</sup><https://www.exodusbooks.com/bob-schultz/2473/>, accessed 23 January 2018.

they shall not depart from them (Pro. 22:6). These virtues are definitely great gifts from God to enable them to be godly members of the church and a spiritual head in their future covenant families. (In fact there are chapters on “Preparing for a wife” and “Preparing for your children”).

True strength in manhood comes from a heart that is renewed by God’s Word

and His Spirit. The Scripture is the true source of wisdom and children of God must not be deceived by the lies of the world concerning manliness (1 Cor. 14:20; Pro. 24:5; 1 Tim. 4:12 & 14; 1 Tim. 4:8-9; 1 Tim. 6:11).

#### About the discussion questions

There are discussion questions after every chapter. The book will be even more profitable if the questions

could lead the boys to meditate on God’s Word. This is because the Holy Scripture is able to make them wise unto salvation as it is inspired by God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness that they as men of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:15-17).

### RIDDLE OF THE ISSUE

THREE SONS OF JACOB ARE LIKENED TO ME, TWO RULERS OF ISRAEL MY KIND DID SLAY.  
 AN EATER OF MEAT, I’M SELDOM SWEET, AND WOE! IF YOU MEET ME ON MY WAY.  
 FOR WHEN I RUMBLE, YOU SHALL STUMBLE,  
 DEVoured CLEAN THROUGH, UNLESS CHRIST BE WITH YOU.  
 WITH MY MOUTH THE BEAST, NONE SHALL DARE RESIST;  
 TILL I LIE IN PEACE, THEN SHALL ALL WARS CEASE.

*Answer to the last issue’s riddle: Covenant children! (Psalm 127:4, 128:3, Matthew 19:14 etc.)*



# News from the Churches

## Singapore

We thank God for providing Prof. Russell Dykstra to fill the pulpit for five Sundays since his arrival in Singapore with his wife, Carol. Prof. and Mrs. Dykstra have since returned home safely on 22nd August, after encountering some delays.

For September's pulpit supply, we are very thankful to God for providing Rev. Daniel Kleyn and Rev. Audred Spriensma, along with their wives.

From 21st to 28th July, the British Reformed Fellowship (BRF) Conference was held at Hebron Hall, South Wales. The theme of the conference was "The Reformed Family – According to the Word of God" and was attended by 108 people, three of whom were from CERC, namely Cheryl Lim, Lisa Ong and Joshua Teo. There were six speeches given by Rev. Andy Lanning and Prof. David Engelsma.

Synod 2018 approved the request of CERC for a minister-on-loan, and appointed Grandville PRC the calling church. The Council of Grandville formed a trio consisting of Rev. Garry Eriks, Rev. Steven Key and Rev. Rodney Kleyn. On 5th August, Rev. Rodney Kleyn was voted to receive the call to serve as minister-on-loan. He declined this call on 9th September. We humbly thank the Lord for revealing His will to Rev. Kleyn and trust Him to provide for us, as He has continually done.

Marcus, Tze Yan and Asaph Wee arrived in Grand Rapids on 7th August, as Marcus will be beginning his studies in the PRC Seminary this upcoming semester. Josiah, Huiqi and Abigail Tan arrived about two weeks later. Josiah will be commencing his third year in seminary. We remember our students and their families in our prayers.

## India

On 2nd September, a large number of saints were received as members of CERC (Fellowship) Kolkata, ten by baptism and six by confession of faith. Elders Leong Fai Chong and Wee Gim Theng from Singapore were present during this occasion. We rejoice with our brethren there and continue to uphold them in our prayers as they stand, very much alone, for the Reformed faith in Kolkata.

## USA

This year's Synod confirmed the official sister church relationship of the PRCA and the PRC in the Philippines. We thank God for this and pray God's continued blessing on their relationship.

On 1st July, seminarians Matt Kortus and Jacob Maatman began their internships at Trinity and Hudsonville PRC respectively. Their internships will run till 31st December. Besides these two seniors and Josiah Tan and Marcus Wee from Singapore, there are four young men who will be taking pre-seminary Greek classes with Profs. Russell Dykstra and Barry Gritters.



Rev. Emmanuel Singh administering the sacrament of baptism to Sudip Halder



Baptism of three-year-old Ephraim Gayen



Snapshot of the CERC (Fellowship) Kolkata congregation



Kalpona Sardar, who made Confession of Faith, with Rev. Emmanuel Singh, Elder Leong and Elder Wee



Adult baptism of Arun Barun Nath



Little Ephraim Gayen with Julia and Joel Sirkar, who were also baptized, and whose parents made Confession of Faith

### 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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