

God's people are sanctified and as the fruit of that they do good works on the ground of Christ's cross alone and because of His righteousness alone. — Rev. Nathan Langerak in *Fellowship with God (2): The Believer's Good Works*

Especially in the context of life in Singapore, the emphasis on higher education and the tremendous efforts required to achieve very high standards of success in life can cause us to lose focus. — Rev. Arie den Hartog in *Godly Zeal in the Second Generation*

Wisdom is the spiritual ability to choose in life the best goal for our lives and the best possible way to attain that goal. — Prof. Herman Hanko in *Wisdom*



salt shakers
joel 3:16 matthew 5:16

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Who is a wise man and
endued with knowledge
among you?

Let him shew out of a good
conversation his works with
meekness of wisdom.

James 3:13

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WELCOME TO THE 53RD ISSUE OF SALT SHAKERS!

Dear readers,

2019 marks a significant change to **Salt Shakers**. Having passed the salt for more than four years, Lee Yang will be stepping down as chairman in March. That doesn't mean, of course, that his "passing the salt" stops there; the committee will be sure to have him write in the near future.

Neither does this change mean **we** will stop passing the salt. The salt must always be passed. But to do that, we need to know what you think. Tell us: What's great about the magazine? What's lacking in our articles? What has edified others? What has stumbled others? Let us know. With your feedback, the committee hopes to keep passing the salt, to the glory of the LORD.

In Christ,
Yang Zhi

A THREAT TO UNITY

>> Aaron Lim



Aaron Lim is a member of CERC and is the editor of *Salt Shakers*.

“Churches whose practices differ from ours merely in non-essentials shall not be rejected.”

— Article 85, CERC Church Order

Unity is a precious gift to the church. Jesus, through His reconciling work on the cross, united believers to God and to one another. Whereas sin formerly separated believers from God and from one another, now they enjoy unity with God and with the saints. Believers are united with Jesus Christ as their Head, and to one another as members of His body.

A Threat to Unity

There is a serious threat to that precious unity today. This threat is the philosophy that Reformed churches may establish ecclesiastical relationships with those who are not fully united with them in the truth. The thinking behind this philosophy is that the Reformed church may not be so exclusive. She must not give to others outside her denomination the impression that she is the only true church. She must not be so sharp in her condemnation of false doctrines taught by those outside her denomination. She must therefore be friends or be friendly with those who are outside her denomination. This philosophy assaults Scripture’s

instruction on unity. It says, contrary to Scripture, that there are broader and narrower levels of unity. There is a narrower unity that believers in the same denomination or church share with one another. And then there is a broader unity that believers may share with those outside the denomination who are not fully united with her in the truth. Despite the clear doctrinal differences that these denominations share, they may still be united under a broad umbrella of unity.

This thinking manifests itself in the cooperation of Reformed denominations with other Reformed and Presbyterian denominations which are not fully united with them in the truth. Operating under a notion of a broader unity, these Reformed churches and denominations are willing to overlook their doctrinal differences in the name of broad and meaningful relationships. They embark on inter-denominational projects; they organise conferences together — inviting ministers and professors of theology to come together to deliver speeches; and they allow members from other denominations into their fellowship and to the Lord’s Supper. All these they do under the notion of a broader unity.

Scripture on Unity

The idea of a broader and narrower view of unity is foreign to Scripture. Scripture never speaks of unity this way. Scripture prescribes only one unity — a full and complete unity in the truth of God.

Witnessing the divided Corinthian church, the apostle Paul instructed them: “Now I beseech you, brethren,

by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor. 1:10). Unity exists when believers are joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment according to God’s Word. The apostle did not allow believers to maintain differences over minor points of doctrine. He did not advocate a looser and stricter unity among believers. He commanded them to be united in all things according to Scripture.

Further, Paul instructed the Ephesian church that the Lord had given to them pastors and teachers to edify the church, “till we all come in the unity of the faith” (Eph. 4:13). Unity is unity in the

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faith, which the Heidelberg Catechism defines as “a certain knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word” (L.D. 7, Q&A 21). A central element of faith is knowledge — knowledge of ALL that God has revealed in His Word. If we are united in faith, it means that we are united in the knowledge of all that God has revealed in His Word. It means, negatively, that we are not united with those who are not in agreement with us in all that God has revealed to us in His Word. But it means, positively, that we are one with those who confess the same truths that God has revealed in His Word.

The reason why there is only one unity is because there is only one Head and one body. There are not many heads and many bodies. There is only one Head, Jesus Christ, and believers are members of His body. “For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ” (1 Cor. 12:12).

There is only one Spirit who unites believers. Scripture commands believers that they must be “endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3). The unity that believers enjoy belongs to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit as the Spirit of the risen Lord Jesus unites believers to one another by working faith in them, so that they are united to the Lord and to one another. Since there is only one Spirit who unites believers together, there is only one unity.

To be one in Jesus Christ is to be one in His truth. It is to be united in all points of doctrine according to His Word, since doctrine is the systematic teaching of God’s Word. That only is

true unity. If believers are not united in all points of doctrine, there is no true unity. To claim unity while overlooking doctrinal differences is to maintain a false unity. It is to claim a unity under the devil’s blessing.

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Expressions of Unity

The unity that believers enjoy comes to expression in the proclamation of the psalmist: “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” (Ps. 133:1). There is not one narrower notion of unity that believers share with those in their church or denomination, and a broader unity that believers enjoy with those outside their denomination. There is only one unity. It is good and pleasant for brethren to dwell together because they are united in the one truth of God’s Word.

Believers also express their unity by a common meal at the Lord’s Supper. They declare that “we by this same Spirit may also be united as members of one body in true brotherly love... so shall we all, who by a true faith are ingrafted into Christ, be altogether one body, through brotherly love, for

Christ’s sake, our beloved Saviour, who hath so exceeding loved us, and not only show this in word, but also in very deed towards one another” (Form for the Administration of the Lord’s Supper). By coming together at the Lord’s Table, believers express their common love for God and for their fellow believers. They love Him and their fellow believers in the truth that the Lord has graciously revealed to them.

The godly lives that believers lead according to the truth of God are evidence of their unity. They walk according to the truth that they profess. They walk by the same rule; they mind the same thing (Phil. 3:16). Their lives manifest their unity in the truth.

The Fruit of a False Unity

The inevitable result of establishing a broader ecclesiastical relationship with another church or denomination is silence on their doctrinal differences — deafening silence. Whereas Reformed churches were once bold to preach against false doctrines, and repudiate these false doctrines in their periodicals and theological journals, now they are silent. They prefer to maintain a friendly relationship with these churches or denominations with whom they have established a broader relationship, rather than to spoil that relationship by pointing out the false doctrines of these denominations and repudiating them sharply on the basis of God’s Word and the Reformed confessions.

If CERC were to establish an ecclesiastical relationship with another church or denomination which is not fully united with her in the truth, for example, the indisputable result will be that she will compromise the truth that she confesses. She will not preach the truth as boldly and distinctively as

she should out of fear of offending the other church or denomination which is not in agreement with her. She will be silent on her doctrinal distinctives. The damning result is that her generations will not be bold to stand for the truth, and will be destroyed for lack of knowledge.

CERC is not immune from this threat. At the time of the split between First Evangelical Reformed Church and Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in 2007 over the doctrine of divorce and remarriage, unity in the truth was at stake. Many were willing to overlook differences over the doctrine, preferring a broader unity. The argument was, "There are so many other areas of agreement that we share. Why split over one minor doctrine?" Others were bold to add, "Divorce and remarriage is a non-salvific issue. Why fight over the matter?" The same notion of a broader unity was underlying this thinking. We can enjoy a broader unity by overlooking narrower points of doctrine.

The Remedy

The faithful Reformed believer

compromises not an inch with false doctrine. Because he has faith, he holds for truth ALL that God has revealed in His Word. In His high priestly prayer, Jesus prayed for His people to be "sanctified through the truth" (Jn. 17:19). Following this, He prayed that His people "may be one" (Jn. 17:21). In a beautiful description of this oneness in the truth, Mrs. Connie Meyer explains:

Where is the oneness that Jesus spoke of? Note again John 17:11, for it is "through thine own name." "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (v. 17). To know His holy name is to know His truth. Indeed, there is unity. Real unity. True unity. Lasting unity. It is found in the sanctified holiness of His truth. It is found in the hearts of all His people — where the Spirit of truth abides. It is found in Him whose name is Holy One and True¹.

The wise church fathers penned Article 85 of the Church Order, to which CERC also subscribes, in order to guard against a false unity. It guards against a false ecumenicity which establishes

relationships with other denominations which are not fully united with us in the truth. The positive implication of the Article is that churches whose practices differ from must in essentials must be rejected. They must be rejected where they have departed from the Word of God and the Reformed confessions. They must be called back to the truth and to the unity of the truth. This is essential for the unity of the church and the preservation of God's truth in her generations.

The remedy, ultimately, in the hearts and lives of God's people against a false teaching of unity is to insist without compromise that there is only one unity in the truth. It requires a willingness to stand alone for the truth. It requires a willingness to be scorned by the world, including those who profess to be believers, for the sake of the truth. It requires courage to repudiate false doctrines at the cost of offending those who hold to them. The faithful believer stands alone. He and all of Israel shall dwell in safety alone (Deut. 33:28).

¹ True Unity (1), in *The Standard Bearer*, Issue 6, Volume 80/2004.

SCRIPTURE'S COVENANT YOUTH (XV): JOHN THE BAPTIST

>>Prof. Herman Hanko



Prof. Herman Hanko is a professor emeritus of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary.

Those who read the *Salt Shakers* and have been following these articles will perhaps wonder why I end this series of articles with John the Baptist. He was, after all, a prophet sent by God whose chief mention in Scripture is in connection with his ministry at the Jordan River. He did not actually begin his ministry until he was thirty years old, as was customary in those days,

and it lasted only about six months.

We are told of the strange announcement of his birth to his father, Zacharias, in the Holy Place of the temple; and we are told of his birth and the excitement that arose when he was born and named (Luke 1:5-23. 59-80).

But the passage I am interested in

is Luke 1:39-56. I do not recall that anything like this happened to a pregnant woman in all the history of God's covenant. The closest to it was the incident of the birth of Jacob and Esau (Gen. 25:19-26). The Scriptures provide us with a commentary on Esau and Jacob's strange birth in Hosea 12:3-5 and in Romans 9:13-14, which passage quotes Malachi 1:2-3.

But the narrative in Luke is the passage with which we are concerned. The history is this - the angel Gabriel went to Nazareth in Galilee to announce to Mary that she would be the mother of Christ. Mary immediately travelled to Hebron where Elizabeth, her cousin, lived. Elizabeth was the wife of Zacharias who had been told in the temple that his wife would have a baby in their old age.

When Elizabeth opened the door to see who was there and saw her cousin Mary, the baby, with whom she was six months pregnant, leaped in her womb. And that leap of her baby announced to her that Mary was pregnant with Christ. What a strange thing. John was destined to fulfil the last verse of the Old Testament Scriptures as the forerunner of the promised Messiah and announce His coming.

He began this work even before either he or Christ had been born. That leap was the announcement that indeed the Messiah had come into the world in the womb of Mary. John began his work in

his mother's womb.

It was all, of course, a miracle. It was a miracle that John, through Elizabeth, recognised Christ who was now in the world. It was a miracle because neither John nor Elizabeth nor Mary herself knew that Christ had been conceived in Mary's womb. Yet John was a prophet and he was, in his mother's womb, made aware of the fact that He for whom the saints had longed over the span of 4,000 years had now been born. And it was the Holy Spirit who told Elizabeth that her son had begun his work while yet unborn and by announcing, with his leap of joy in her womb, that she stood in the presence of the "long-expected" Christ! Both Elizabeth and Mary now knew that the promised Messiah had come to Israel.

This was a wonderful series of miracles. The Lord's forerunner, John, was born to Zacharias and Elizabeth when they were past the time of child-bearing; and Mary was the mother of the great miracle — having a child when she was still a virgin.

While hundreds of books have been written on these two events, I am interested in another aspect of the miracle: John began his work of announcing Jesus' coming before he was born!

That means, first of all, that God not only gives to each of his children a place in His church, but prepares them for

this place already before they are born.

But what is of particular interest to me is the proof for covenant parents that, as a general rule, their children are regenerated and saved before they are born. John could not have fulfilled his prophetic call in his mother's womb without being regenerated by the same Spirit that enabled him to recognise that Mary was the mother of Christ.

This all-important truth is of great importance to a covenant mother: she carries in her a member of Christ's church for whom Christ died. That child belongs to God, for God has elected him from all eternity, Christ died for the child, and the child is destined to live with the church of all ages in heaven in covenant fellowship with God in Christ.

This truth is denied by those who believe in a conditional covenant. They argue that an unborn babe cannot fulfil any conditions and so is not actually saved until the child has come to years of discretion and fulfilled the conditions of faith and obedience. But they are tragically mistaken and lose part of the joy of motherhood.

The covenant is unconditional; that unborn baby is conceived under God's sovereign control, regenerated before he is born, prepared for his place and calling in God's church and is prepared for that place every step of the way.

**If an unborn baby can recognise its mother's voice,
why is it considered impossible that he also recognizes his
heavenly Father's powerful, creative voice?**

Doctors tell us that an unborn child is influenced by what he is able to hear and sense before he is born. Recent experiments, we are told, show that a new-born baby can recognise his mother's voice a few hours after he is born and distinguish his mother's voice from that of the nurse.

If an unborn baby can recognise his mother's voice, why is it considered impossible that he also recognizes his heavenly Father's powerful, creative voice?

Unborn babies are sensitive to outside noise and inner moods of his mother. It is calmed by the singing of Psalms; he is at peace when his mother talks lovingly to it; it rests easily when he is in a home where there is love and happiness. He is influenced by what is going on in church during worship and is already spiritually affected by baptism and religious worship.

In all of this, God is preparing the child for his calling in life and his place in heaven.

But he is restless and agitated by raucous and dissonant music, by quarrelling and bickering, by shouting loudly in anger, and by the cursing and swearing of blasphemous mothers.

The proof of regeneration and sanctification is also found in Jeremiah. In Jeremiah 1:5, we read that God said to Jeremiah: "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet among the nations". Before Jeremiah's birth, God already worked His salvation in Jeremiah, a work that prepared him for his calling.

Another example of God's work in an elect child prior to birth is the effort of Jacob and Esau. Their presence in the womb of Rebekah and their struggle

was interpreted by God as a struggle between two nations that would last throughout history. This struggle is interpreted by Hosea in chapter 12:3. Malachi 1:3 informs us of the fact that Esau and Jacob represent the elect and the reprobate, both conceived and born in the line of the covenant (see also Romans 9). But Hosea tells us that already in Rebekah's womb, Jacob showed his love and concern for the birthright. He took his brother by the heel to try to pull Esau back so that he might be born first. The firstborn was the heir to the birthright, and the birthright included being in the line that would carry Christ in it until He was born of a poor virgin. But God showed his right to determine true covenant heirs by His sovereign decree of election and reprobation.

So remember: your children are not your children but God's children. Be careful with them!

WISDOM (I): THE MEANING OF WISDOM

>>Prof. Herman Hanko

Several months ago, I was in a near-by drug store. Upon paying for the items I bought and turning to the door to leave, the clerk, a young girl in her late teens, said to me what all clerks seem to say when they have collected from their customers, "Have a good day". Being a bit weary of this kind of farewell, I turned to the girl and asked her: "What do you consider to be a good day?" Her answer came as a complete surprise: "When I know the Lord's presence with me and walk in obedience to his commandments". That response came very close to a definition of wisdom.

If one would want a very short but accurate definition of wisdom, one could define it in this way: Wisdom is the spiritual ability to choose in life the best goal for our lives and the best possible way to attain that goal. Remember this definition, for we will be coming back to it again and again.

There is a kind of worldly wisdom of which James speaks in James 3:13-15. A man, for example, may set as his goal in life to be the world's best neurosurgeon. If he is wise in this worldly sense, he will literally do whatever it

takes to attain his goal, and forbear doing those things that will not serve his purpose. But James also tells us what that wisdom is like: earthly, sensual, devilish. (James 3:5).

Wisdom is, however, a spiritual virtue, which only the people of God possess; the wicked have no true wisdom. When Scripture speaks of wicked men in the context of the search for wisdom, it more than once calls worldly and wicked people "fools". This is proper, for foolishness is the lack of wisdom. It is the fool that says in his heart, "There

is no God” (Ps. 14:1).

This is an interesting passage in Scripture, though there be many like it. A fool is not one who is ignorant of God and, in his ignorance, fails to do God’s will for his life. No man in the world really and truly does not know whether there is a God or not. He knows there is a God. Everyone does. There are no exceptions. Man’s problem is not ignorance; his problem is sin.

Every wicked man knows that God exists. Paul, In Romans 1:18ff. speaks of pagans in darkest paganism. Even they know that God exists, for they change the glory of the invisible God into an image of a fish, or snake or some other creature. To change something means to be aware of something but to change it in dislike or hatred. The idol worship of men is not ignorance. It is their wickedness and attempt to destroy God by changing Him into the likeness of the creature.

I had a very striking example of this in my own life. I was visiting a parishioner in the hospital. He was in a semi-private room. The man in the other bed was a relatively young man, perhaps in his forties, but very heavy. He had had a massive heart attack and had been told

that he was now living on a powder keg. In the course of ministering to the saint from my church, this younger man was shouting blasphemies of the worst kind. He poured out a string of oaths that made it impossible to continue ministering to my parishioner. I was quite startled that a young man, hovering on the brink of the grave, could be so blasphemous. I went to his bed and began to talk in a quiet voice of God’s righteousness, holiness, anger against sin and determination to punish the sinner.

Suddenly, he began to weep, uncontrollably, so that his whole body shook. I was frightened and fearful he would have another heart attack. I was just ready to fetch a nurse when he got hold of himself and said to me in a low voice, “You got what you wanted, didn’t you. Now get out of here”.

That was revealing. He knew there was a righteous God who hated sin. He knew that the day was coming and was, perhaps, near that he would have to give an account of his life to God. But he loved his sin and tried to still his conscience with curses and blasphemies. In that way he drowned out in his consciousness the thought of God.

The man was a fool. He knew the truth, but hated it and was frightened to death by it.

Paul speaks on the fact that the wicked “hold the truth in unrighteousness: (Rom. 1:18). The word “hold” means “to hold down”, or “suppress”. One cannot hold down something he does not know. He may succeed in suppressing it so that he does not think about it anymore. But any suggestion of it will trigger his memory of what he has suppressed. Romans 1 explains why this is so: God reveals it unto him in creation so that in the judgment day he will be without excuse, but he suppresses what he knows to be true. And, by the way, this is true of all evolutionists. They know full well that God created all things, but they hate God and so change the truth of creation into evolutionism.

So, the opposite of wisdom is foolishness, and the opposite of a wise man is a fool.

Next time, DV, we will discuss more positively what the Bible calls true wisdom. It is good for us to know this truth of biblical wisdom, for in it lies our salvation.

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Man’s problem is not ignorance; his problem is sin.**

HOMOSEXUALITY: WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH? (I)

>>Rev. Angus Stewart



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Introduction

Jesus Christ our Saviour taught us that our duty to God and man is, first, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind; and, second, to love our neighbour as ourselves (Matt. 22:37-39). Loving the Triune God with heart, soul and mind includes knowing His truth — the whole truth as set forth in the Scriptures, including regarding homosexuality — believing it, witnessing to it and, where necessary, suffering for it.

Loving our neighbours, and especially in this instance our homosexual neighbours, obviously includes not assaulting them or stalking them or making nasty phone calls to them or sending hateful mail to them or destroying their property or such like. Instead, we are called to do good to them, to pray for them and, especially, to bring them the gospel of the forgiveness of sins in the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith in Him results not only in the pardon of all transgressions but also deliverance from the dominion of sin, including homosexuality. The cross is the only good news for sinners, including those ensnared in this wicked vice.

Homosexual Propaganda

In our day, there is widespread rejection of and/or confusion about the Bible's teaching on homosexuality. On the one hand, there are some homosexuals who openly declare their hatred for the Scriptures because they know God's Word is opposed to their sin. Thus we hear of homosexuals ripping out pages from the Bibles in their hotel rooms or pressing for the prosecution of those who pay for space in the press to quote Scriptures opposing this sin. On the other hand, there are some homosexuals who claim that God's Word has little or nothing to say about homosexuality, or even that the Bible affirms and supports it. Some even claim that it is only relatively recently that the Christian church has spoken against homosexuality. But this too is palpably false.

Homosexuals refer to themselves as "gays", as if their sexual inclinations and activities are especially happy and blessed, just good clean fun. Much of the media is on a pro-homosexual crusade. They teach that homosexuality is an attractive and wholesome lifestyle. They promote the idea that any and all opposition to homosexuality is "homophobia", which is, according to them, a particularly heinous offence. This propaganda is churned out, for example, in films, books, magazines, newspapers, soap operas and the news, as well as on-line. It is even taught to children in state schools in the decadent West.

The civil governments of most Western countries are more and more pro-

homosexual. They are passing and increasingly enforcing so-called "hate laws". Civil partnerships between homosexuals have been brought in and sexual orientation regulations adopted. "Homosexual marriage" is now legal in a few dozen countries. Some civil governments see their task as that of defending "minority rights" and "freedom of choice", even if this means mothers murdering their unborn babies or men "marrying" men.

Propaganda and pressure from the homosexuals, the politically-correct media and ungodly legislation — part of what the Bible calls the ungodly "world" — has led to a change in the thinking of some sections of the professing church and those who claim to be Christians. Many believe that impenitent homosexuals can be Christians and church members. Indeed, such people must be appointed as the church's office-bearers. The church, they maintain, ought to bless same sex unions. The church should preach the full liberation of homosexuals — so that they are free to indulge in their sins without any guilt — as a vital part of the gospel of God. The church, so it is said, should take the front line in the battle against the gross wickedness of "homophobia" because, it is argued, Jesus Christ loves absolutely everybody, and embraces the homosexuals just the way they are and without their conversion. The church should pursue "diversity" which, to them, means that everyone should be included in the church, irrespective of "sexual orientation" or impenitence.

What are *we* to believe regarding homosexuality? For the child of God, this is the same question as, What does the Bible — not the world! — teach regarding homosexuality? Here, of course, right at the start, we need to be aware of the crippling fear of man. Intimidation, brow beating, harassment, threats, sanctions and ostracism are the lot of those who stand for the scriptural teaching regarding homosexuality. The leftist intelligentsia, which supposedly prides itself on tolerance, is very intolerant of the Word of God and the God of the Word, especially on this subject. Those who stand with Scripture and say that homosexuality is sinful are “bigoted”, “narrow-minded” and “hateful” individuals, if not worse. That is sad, because the gospel of the crucified and risen Christ is the only message of hope, salvation and deliverance for those who are enslaved by this degrading sin (as well as all other iniquities).

We may soon suffer greater persecution because we maintain the Bible’s teaching regarding homosexuality. We must remember that Jesus commanded, “Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul”. Instead, we must “fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28). Galatians 1:10 declares that we must seek to please God and not men, because if we seek to please men, we are not the servants of Christ.

Archery Target

The Bible’s teaching on homosexuality can be likened to an archery target. First, there is the inmost circle, the bull’s-eye, which consists of those passages which specifically address this subject, such as Genesis 19 on the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and later commentary on that event which also refers to the

abomination of sodomy: Ezekiel 16:49-50, 2 Peter 2:6-8 and Jude 7¹. Then there is the outrage at Gibeah with all of its terrible consequences (Judg. 19-21), which began with the attempted homosexual gang rape of the Levite, and turned into the heterosexual gang rape and murder of his concubine by these bisexuals (Judg. 19:22-26)². There are the various laws against sodomy in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. There are references to homosexual cult prostitution, which arose in Israel when it apostatised: Deuteronomy 23:17-18; 1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:46; 2 Kings 23:7; Job 36:14. Sodomy, under various names, is included in the sin lists of 1 Corinthians 6:9, 1 Timothy 1:10 and Revelation 22:15. Plus there is the *locus classicus*, Romans 1:26-27, about which we will have a lot to say later, DV. All these passages constitute the bull’s-eye.

Second, the ring around this inmost circle consists of Scripture’s teaching on human sexuality. God created mankind male and female (Gen. 1:27; 5:2; Matt. 19:4; Mark 10:6). Marriage is a one-flesh union between one man and one woman for life, in which loving relationship alone sexual intercourse is to be enjoyed (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:5-6; Mark 10:7-9; 1 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 5:31). Then, of course, there is the whole range of sins against the seventh commandment, including pornography, lasciviousness, fornication, adultery, polygamy, prostitution, rape, paedophilia, incest, bestiality, etc., that is, any and all sexual lusts and activity outside the lifelong bond of marriage between one man and one woman (cf. *Westminster Larger Catechism*, Q. & A. 139).

Third, the next circle deals with sin in general within the biblical framework of the fall of the human race, and original

sin and total depravity. Sin is man’s “want [or lack] of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God”, as summed in the Ten Commandments (*Westminster Shorter Catechism*, A. 14).

Fourth and finally, the outer ring on our archery target includes all scriptural doctrines, because homosexuality must be seen within the whole biblical framework. This includes the inspiration, inerrancy, sufficiency and clarity of sacred Scripture; the absolute sovereignty and perfect righteousness of God; the creation of all things in six days; the upholding and governing of the entire universe by Jehovah’s providential power and wisdom, the incarnation and cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of the righteousness of God by faith alone; the regeneration and sanctification of God’s elect by the gracious Holy Spirit; the apostolicity and holiness of Christ’s church, including ecclesiastical discipline and the qualifications for special offices; and the final judgment, the new heavens and the new earth, and the lake of fire — all of which truths are historic, creedal, Christian teaching.

¹ Besides the earlier references to the wickedness of Sodom in Genesis 13, 14 and 18, there are a lot of verses in the Old Testament and the New Testament that explicitly mention “Sodom” in connection with its sin and/or judgment. These texts are to be understood in the light of Genesis 19, Scripture’s first reference to homosexuality (Deut. 29:23; 32:32; Isa. 1:9, 10; 3:9; 13:19; Jer. 23:14; 49:18; 50:40; Lam. 4:6; Eze. 16:46, 48, 49, 53, 55, 56; Amos 4:11; Zeph. 2:9; Matt. 10:15; 11:23, 24; Mark 6:11; Luke 10:12; 17:29; Rom. 9:29; Rev. 11:8).

² Hosea refers to Gibeah’s wickedness twice (9:9; 10:9).

GOD LAUGHS

>> Daisy Lim



Daisy Lim is a member of CERC.

Laughter is said to be the best medicine. We should often keep our hearts rejoicing in the Lord. The exceedingly great and precious promises of our Lord will make us partakers of His divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). Thus we can rejoice in Him always (Phil. 4:4).

In this article, laughter is cast in a different light. We know that God judges the righteous and hates the wicked every day (Ps. 7:11). When the wicked boast of their own achievements and seek their own glory, God actually laughs at them with scorn and indignation.

Let us meditate on some Bible verses.

Psalm 2:4 He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh, the Lord shall have them in derision.

The heathen often rage against Christ our Lord. They imagine vain things. They take counsel together against our Lord and against His churches. When Christians reveal that they have walked in sin and darkness, they are greatly offended and seek ways to destroy and silence Christians. Thus we see terrorists burning churches (true and apostate

ones) from time to time. This is no surprise, for our Lord had said. They hated Jesus for declaring He is God and that He is the Light of the world, they will hate true believers in Christ. The whole world lies in wickedness (1 Jn. 5:19).

God sees and knows all the wickedness that are being planned and committed by the people, and especially by the princes of the earth. He simply laughs at them. He definitely has just judgements reserved for them, which He metes out bit by bit, increasing with greater intensity, as the days of His coming draw nearer.

God will have them in derision. Though the wicked take pride in their wicked designs now, God will make them objects of ridicule. Though God allows the Antichrist to triumph for a short time to work miracles to control the whole world and at the same time, to persecute God's true churches, God will in due time make Antichrist and all his cohorts to fall and to be sent to hell.

Psalms 37:13 The Lord shall laugh at him: for He seeth that his day is coming.

God alone knows each of our beginning and our end. He knows when each individual will be taken out of earthly living – whether by accidents, sicknesses, persecutions, etc. The day of our death is determined by God, whether in our young or old age.

In our earthly life, every one of us should seek the kingdom of God and

His righteousness. We must believe wholeheartedly what Christ has done for us in His cross at Calvary. We must believe His crucifixion, resurrection and ascension, and all of God's revealed will in the Holy Scriptures. We must acknowledge our depravity and seek for His grace of forgiveness and redemption. Only then will God smile at us with His favour. He will make us His beloved and hide us under the shadow of His wings.

Only in Christ, we can be made righteous with the imputation of the righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ. Outside of Christ, we remained wicked and depraved. Upon the wicked, God shall indeed laugh at them with His wrath. The wicked have been sentenced to the condemnation of God unto eternal death.

Psalms 59:8 But thou, O LORD, shall laugh at them: Thou shall have all the heathen in derision.

The heathen are those who do not believe in the love of God to redeem His people through the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ. They want to continue in their own wickedness and to glory in their own successes. Thus God will judge them righteously in the way of their own sins.

Note that God will laugh at the wicked and have all the heathen in derision. It is an awful and fearful thing to be under the wrath of God.

This present time when God has not yet ended the time of earthly living,

is a time of God's forbearance and longsuffering. Thus every one of us must flee to the cross of Christ to seek His forgiveness and His imputation of the righteousness of Christ upon us. Whoever turns to Christ has the assurance that God's Spirit has worked in their hearts to grant them faith and repentance. Thus we can be assured that God will receive us in His favour and bless us with His manifold blessings.

Those who persist in impenitence and seek their own selfish pursuits, God will definitely laugh at them and finally bring them to shame and destruction.

Proverbs 1:26 I also will laugh at your calamity: I will mock when your fear cometh.

God is the one who will take vengeance

on the wicked. That is why He told us not to take vengeance upon anyone in our own hands. God will laugh at their calamity. He ensures that the wicked will face the consequence of their own sins. Very often, God judges the wicked greater with their own respective type of sins.

When the wicked experience fear, they have themselves to be blamed. They will know that God's judgements are always just. They will know that they face God's contempt because of their own indulgence in their wickedness. They have despised God's Word and have done many things deliberately against His Word. They have constantly mocked at God and His true people. Thus God is justified in His mockery of them.

In conclusion, we must know that our God is the judge of the earth. He knows those who belong to Him. He will bless the righteous with His peace, strength, joy, mercy and manifold blessings of grace. The righteous in Christ are His beloved elect people.

But those who persist in their own self-glory, pride and sins, God will literally laugh at them in His wrath and indignation.

Those who fear this Judge of the earth need to seek Him in faith and repentance. God, in His grace and mercy, will still hear the sincere cry of His people. Like the father of the prodigal son, God will embrace His repentant child, with His forgiveness and His everlasting love.

QUIT YOU LIKE MEN (IV)

>>Woon Tian Loong

Woon Tian Loong is a member of CERC.

So far, we have looked at the characteristics of a man – his strength and the implications, the temptations facing him, the form of a man, etc, and now we will conclude this series beginning with:

The Godly Example

While I would like to have also used Moses and David as wonderful examples of manliness, it would have made for an even lengthier article. Therefore, I would go straight to the man of men (who is God), the Lord Jesus Christ Himself as the prime example of manliness. Nevertheless,

when we read of Moses, David, and the other spiritual fathers, let us consider their lives and how we can learn from their example in manliness.

Jesus, we read, "...was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man..." (Phil. 2:7b-8a). How often when I read of the incarnation of Jesus, I am quick to interpret such verses as Jesus taking on the form of a human, and not paying attention that He took on the form of a human man. i.e., He did not merely take on the form of a genderless human being but the form of a male man. Anyone who saw Him on the street have no reason to doubt that He was a man for even in His form, mannerism and actions it would have been obvious

that He was a man.

Jesus, while he was physically on earth, was he not bold and strong? Bold to preach the truth, and strong to defend it against the scribes, Pharisees, and other enemies of God. He is strong, and yet "a bruised reed shall He not break...." (Isa. 42:3). He is respectable and a leader with great following, yet, is a lover of little infants of whom He says, "Suffer little children to come unto me..." (Luke 18:16). He is passionate, for the zeal of God's house has consumed Him (Jn. 2:17). He knows full well the ease that would be His if only He would forsake the cross, and yet, He forsook not His calling because He loves His bride, the church. He is responsible in fulfilling the calling that the Father

has laid upon Him and taking on the blame and guilt for our sins! Is He also not watchful, and steadfast in the faith? As we read of Him in the gospel accounts, it would be profitable to also consider His manliness in His going out and coming in.

Encouragement to Parents

At this point, I would like to gently encourage the parents to remember the training of their young boys into men. As mentioned, manliness is not natural. A boy needs instruction and direction on how to be a man. Much of it he would learn by the example of his godly father and perhaps older brother(s) and other men in the covenant. As David said to Solomon his son, so also let us say to our sons, “Be godly!”, “Be strong!”, “Be responsible!”, “Be manly”. There is one danger in raising boys and that is the danger of neutralising them. A boy by nature is livelier, more playful and more active. In practical terms, he tends to generate more noise and is harder to manage by both parents and teachers. Thus, it is very tempting for those who are in authority over him to, with a harsh hand, neutralise him

so that he becomes lifeless or timid for the sake of easier management. Yes, a boy will make many mistakes and may even sin grievously. With his energy, he may even use it for violence, of which he will need correction. Certainly, he needs discipline and training to direct that energy to noble goals of godliness. While it is more painstaking to direct that bundle of energy than to neutralise it, yet when they are well-trained and fulfil their calling to be men, they will be of great blessing to the covenant.

“Let all your things be done with charity”

“Charity”, or “love”, is essential to being a man and this point is deliberately kept for the end. We have considered the calling of a man and the many temptations to prevent him from being one. Why then should he strive to be a man? Why not give up already? Is it because of the benefits of being a man? Perhaps, and yet much more than that. Because a man loves. A man ought to do what he does with love. Greater than that however, a man also desires to be a man because of love. He loves his God who has called him to be a man. He

loves the design and wisdom of God in the creation of a man and thus he strives to be one, notwithstanding his own sins and weaknesses. A man wants to be a man because he loves those around him. He wants to be a man to lead his wife that he loves in a godly way. He wants to be a man to provide for and be a good example to the children that he loves. He wants to be a man to handle the responsibilities given to him in the church, in his family, and in his vocation. And if there be suffering, should he hide when it is his place to suffer and let his loved ones suffer instead? No. He loves them and thus even in this, he wants to be a man and endure the suffering so that his loved ones may be spared. He does all things with love; he is a man because he loves.

May God grant us men the grace to carefully consider our calling as men, and to “quit us like men” that we may walk pleasing to God according to His design and wisdom, and be a blessing to the church, our loved ones, and those around us.

**A man also desires to be a man because of love.
He loves his God who has called him to be a man.
He loves the design and wisdom of God in the creation of a man
and thus he strives to be one,
notwithstanding his own sins and weaknesses.**

CONTEMPORARY COVENANT THEOLOGY

>> Prof. David Engelsma



Prof. David Engelsma is a professor emeritus of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary.

Whereas in times past, most churches were silent, if not ignorant, about the covenant of grace, it is different today. Regardless that covenant and kingdom are undoubtedly the most prominent truths in the Bible, only the Reformed churches have confessed the covenant with any enthusiasm and taught it at any length and with any depth. Even these churches lost interest, probably because they allowed themselves to become attracted to the emotional, individualistic, semi-Pelagian religion of much of “evangelicalism” and of the charismatic religion. A church that teaches the members that salvation is a matter of our accepting God will be little interested in a theology that teaches that salvation is the matter of God accepting sinful humans. A “gospel” whose only interest is the salvation of the soul of the individual will have no place for the message of the salvation of the body of Christ — the covenant community, the church of which Jesus is the covenant-head (Eph. 5; Gal. 3) — which does not ignore the soul of the individual elect.

In the past, only a few Reformed

denominations emphasised the covenant, mostly churches in North America and in the Netherlands.

Today, things are different. The biblical truth of God’s covenant is on the foreground, not only in Reformed churches, but also in prominent, popular evangelical circles throughout Europe and North America — and elsewhere. Even leading modernist, apostate theologians, who still have influence in many churches, for example, J. D. G. Dunn, promote the covenant as the fundamental reality of the Christian religion as taught in the Bible.

This revival of interest in the covenant concerns soundly Reformed churches, not merely in that it underscores the importance of the doctrine of the covenant, but especially because the resurgence of interest in the covenant universally promotes a false doctrine of the covenant. The Reformed church that is sound in doctrine must guard its precious inheritance of the orthodox covenant doctrine. It ought also to witness to this fundamental truth of the gospel of Scripture against the heresies.

The first contemporary movement concerning the covenant to which Reformed believers must pay close attention calls itself the “federal vision”. The name itself indicates that this theological movement centres on the covenant, for “federal” means covenant. This movement, with its covenant theology, is especially dangerous to sound churches and their members because it is found in the conservative

Reformed and Presbyterian churches and seminaries in North America. Its origin is a Dutch Reformed theologian, Klaas Schilder, theologian in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated).

The “federal vision” teaches that God makes His covenant of grace with every baptised person, especially every baptised child of believing parents. He makes the covenant by means of baptism. The effect of the baptism of every person is that every person is united to Jesus Christ in a saving union. Every person, especially every baptised child, is born again, justified, and given the spiritual ability (the Holy Spirit) to believe on Jesus, to persevere to the end, and to be saved everlastingly.

This, however, does not assure the salvation of anyone. It is possible that the baptized and saved child refuses to believe. In this case, he loses his covenant salvation and has his union with Christ dissolved, so that he perishes eternally.

The explanation is that the covenant is *conditional*. The establishment of the covenant is purely gracious. But the continuation and perfection of the covenant are conditional. They depend upon the baptized child — upon his fulfilment of the conditions of faith and lifelong obedience.

The leading proponent of this covenant theology is the North American theologian, Norman Shepherd, for many years professor of theology at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, the unofficial seminary of the Orthodox

Presbyterian Church.

Shepherd is, and confesses himself to be, the faithful disciple of Klaas Schilder¹.

The advocates of the “federal vision” themselves acknowledge their close relation to the covenant movement that is known as the New Perspective on Paul (NPP). This is the second contemporary covenant theology of which Reformed believers ought to be aware. I ignore the founders of this movement, for example, James Dunn, because they are all modernist, unbelieving scholars. There is, however, a reputedly “evangelical” scholar who is influential in promoting this movement in Great Britain, North America, and other parts of the world, very likely including Singapore. He is the acclaimed N. T. Wright. Like his

of God with humanity in which there is a (conditional) salvation of sorts. Characteristic of this covenant (=salvation) in the theology of Wright are the following. First, one receives this covenant (=salvation) by gracious promise. But one continues in the covenant by fulfilling the conditions of believing and obeying the law. Covenantal salvation, therefore, can be lost. Second, the justification that, according to Romans and Galatians, is fundamental to the covenant and its salvation is merely God’s recognition that someone belongs to the covenant. It is not the imputation of the righteousness of Christ. Faith is not the means of this imputation. Rather, it is the identification of a member of the covenant. Faith is merely a “badge”, a “marker”, of membership in the church. Justification is only the “declaration” of membership in the

its heretical doctrine of justification, the NPP is committed to ecumenical oneness with the Roman Catholic Church, which union with Rome it advocates enthusiastically³.

A third characteristic of the theology of Wright and the NPP is its conception of covenant salvation as, ultimately, an earthly kingdom of universal peace. Like its outrightly modernist form of covenant theology (that of Dunn and Sanders), the hope of the theology of N. T. Wright is an earthly utopia. This is not lacking in the theology of the federal vision of Norman Shepherd.

Doctrinally, both the federal vision and the NPP err by teaching a conditional covenant. This takes form in the heresy of justification by faith and by works. Both covenant theologies explicitly deny justification by faith alone, without the works of the justified. Thus

The Reformed church that is sound in doctrine must guard its precious inheritance of the orthodox covenant doctrine. It ought also to witness to this fundamental truth of the gospel of Scripture against the heresies.

modernist cohorts, Wright emphasises the covenant of grace as the doctrine that controls and explains the entire message of the gospel in Scripture. He has written that “covenantal categories...are...central [in Paul]”.²

What the covenant actually is, in the thinking of Wright, is difficult, almost impossible, to determine. Never does he define the covenant that is central. He leaves the impression that it is a certain gracious relationship

church. Openly and brazenly, the NPP denies justification by faith alone, faith being the means of the verdict of God declaring the sinner righteous, the heart of the Christian gospel and the message of the 16th Reformation of the church. Denying justification by faith as taught by the apostle in Romans 3-5 and as confessed by the Reformation of the 16th century, Wright and the NPP also deny the five points of Calvinism as confessed in the Canons of Dordt and in the Westminster Standards. By

is lost, or denied, the entire gospel of grace, from election to the preservation of saints. Both the federal vision and the NPP openly and boldly deny and

¹ For the full account and criticism of the “federal vision,” see my *Federal Vision: Heresy at the Root* (Jenison, MI: RFP, 2012).

² N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

³ For a more thorough examination of the theology of Wright, see my “The New Perspective on Paul,” in *Gospel Truth of Justification* (Jenison, MI: RFP, 2017), 26-44.

reject the “five points of Calvinism” as confessed in the Canons of Dort, that is, the gospel of salvation by grace.

Against the contemporary theologies of the covenant, which threaten evangelical and Reformed Christianity in our day, it is the calling of sound Reformed churches to intensify their embrace of, and to witness to, the following concerning the covenant of grace. First, rather than a conditional agreement, or arrangement, the covenant is communion with God, established and maintained by grace alone, that is, unconditionally (Gen.

17:7; Gal. 3). Churches whose doctrine of the covenant views the covenant as conditional are vulnerable to the heresies of the federal vision and of the NPP, if their doctrine is not, in fact, essentially the same as that of these heresies.

Second, justification, which is fundamental to the covenant, and the enjoyment of the covenant, is by faith alone, without works. And this justification is the imputation to the believing sinner of the obedience of Jesus Christ (Rom. 3 & 4).

Third, the blessedness, the salvation, of the covenant is not earthly, but heavenly, not material, but spiritual: union with God in Christ. The perfection of this covenant-bliss will be the resurrection of the body and life everlasting in the new creation. There the celebration will be, not, “Thanks, O God, for beginning the salvation, which I myself maintained and perfected”, but, “Thanks, O God, for gracious salvation from beginning to end, grounded upon a justification by faith alone, without any work of mine” (Rev. 5:8-14).

AFFLUENCE

>> Paul Ong



Paul Ong is a member of CERC.

Affluence (noun): the state of having a great deal of money; wealth.

Singapore is one of the smallest countries in the world, with a mere landmass of 725 km². Though she is small, she is one of the richest nations. Since her independence in 1965, she has experienced a growth spurt from a GDP per capita of \$516 to \$55,235 in 2018. Singaporeans are getting wealthier, and their spending power continues to increase every year. It was reported on the news that each Singaporean has an average of \$252,371 ¹ (US\$185,281), and that is a lot of money! The purpose of this article is not to boast how rich

we are nor how much money we have, but to highlight the fact that we are living in a city of great affluence. We are able to live comfortably with a roof over our heads, and our children are able to get into well-recognised schools and have well-paying jobs.

Affluence as a Threat to our Reformed Lives

In this city of great affluence, there will be cases of affluenza. Affluenza (the word is a combination of affluence and influenza) is a spiritual disease that derives from affluence and is commonly defined as “extreme materialism and consumerism associated with the pursuit of wealth and success and resulting in a life of chronic dissatisfaction, debt, overwork, stress, and impaired relationships”². This spiritual disease can affect anyone and is very detrimental to a Christian’s life, as it shapes his/her worldview to be money and success-centred instead of God-centred. Like every disease, there

are tell-tale symptoms of it.

Discontentment is one of the most obvious symptoms of being affected by affluenza. We may have realised that as our wealth and possessions multiply, so does our discontentment, and we always feel what we have is never enough. This emotion is well-illustrated for us when the people of Israel were travelling through the wilderness to the land of Canaan. In Exodus 15 we read of a song dedicated to God for the victory of the Israelites after they were redeemed from their bondage. They sang and danced in freedom. However, it didn’t take long for them to change their point-of-view. They were without water for the first three days, and when they found water they realised it was bitter. “And the people murmured

¹ <https://www.straitstimes.com/business/economy/number-of-millionaires-in-singapore-up-11-to-183737-in-year-to-mid-2018-credit>

² <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/affluenza>

against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" (Ex. 15:24). They became discontent.

The second symptom of affluenza is self-dependence. Due to our sinful nature, when we live in abundance we tend to forget God. Why do you have to pray for your daily bread when you already have enough money in your bank? In those times, we are more likely to loosen our grip on God. We think that we have everything under control and become independent from God. Moses knew the dangers of affluence as well, and thus he warned the people of Israel of this before they entered into the promised land (Deut. 8).

Managing Affluence in our Reformed Life

Managing affluence or affluenza can be done with the guidance of the Word of God.

Knowing the Value

"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:19-21).

We have to realise the value of the earthly treasures that we have. The Bible reminds us that the treasures we have on this earth are only temporal. They will corrupt and can be lost. However, our heavenly treasures are eternal and belong to us forever. Our heavenly treasures are more important to us because they are our inheritance given by Christ!

Be Content

"Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb.13:5).

Be content with what we have. To be content means that you accept your circumstances from the hands of God wholly and that you trust in the Lord with all your heart that His will is best for you. Though we may not know how, God knows, and He tells us in His Word that He will never leave nor forsake us.

Conclusion

God has placed us in Singapore, a city in which affluenza besieges us on every side. We may experience the symptoms of affluenza, or we may not. Let us be aware of the threats, examine ourselves, and take heed to His Word. May God help us.

THE ZEAL OF THE SECOND GENERATION (I)

>> Rev. Arie den Hartog



Rev. Arie den Hartog is a minister emeritus of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America. During his active ministry, he served as a missionary (1979-1986) and minister-on-loan (2002-2005) to Singapore. Since 2018, he has often provided pulpit supply for CERC during her vacancy.

I have been privileged as a pastor to be in the midst of CERC to see the rising of the second generation in the church. During our last visit we talked about how we were in Singapore for the first time almost forty years ago. Some of you were members of the church already then. We were amazed to think about the fact that when we first came to Singapore some of the first generation (as we will call you in this article) were at the time young people in their early teens. We can well remember the zeal of the first generation. Many were students in the beginning, in secondary school, pre-U, and university and other schools. There was great excitement in

learning the Reformed faith for the first time. How blessed and wonderful the grace of God is when we first come to believe. The students were accustomed to exercising their minds because this is what they were required to do at school every day. They read good Christian books teaching the Reformed faith and studied the doctrines of the faith. They were not satisfied with merely accepting the truth without first having a measure of understanding of it. They often discussed and debated about the truth. Through these discussions they inspired each other. Through these discussions they learned together to distinguish the truth from the many false doctrines

which abound in the church world. By these debates among themselves they sharpened and deepened their understanding of the truth. They zealously witnessed to classmates and colleagues. They often brought classmates and friends to church with them, going to the places where these friends lived and journeying together with them to church. There was an air of excitement in the church created by ongoing lively discussions of the truth while on the way to church. The members of the church, especially at well attended weekly prayer meetings often gave personal testimonies about trials and hardships they were experiencing. A number of them regularly told of opposition and persecution they faced in their pagan homes from parents and siblings. Personally experiencing such persecution, and having to defend our interest in the Christian faith, has a way of making the truth of the gospel dear and precious to God's people. Through the process of the experiences mentioned above, close friendships were forged. I am amazed how many of these friendships which had their beginning in the early years of the church endured over the many years even unto today. There was great evidence of personal love for each other, and great concern for each other especially in regards to applying the truths of the gospel to daily Christian living. This is what Christian zeal looked like in those early years when the ERCS was first born and instituted as a church.

Now let's talk about the 'second generation'. By the second generation we mean those who today are mostly covenant young people. They have Christian parents. They have been born and raised in the church. Most have been instructed in catechism classes and are today mature and precise in

their understanding of the doctrines of the Reformed faith. They have learned to discern the truth from error and how to defend the truth through careful study of the Holy Scriptures, not just quoting one verse of scripture but through researching the word of God as a whole to know the whole of a given subject. The study of the confessions greatly aids the members of the church to be able to be engaged in this kind of important activity as church members and to grow to maturity in the faith. Paul in Ephesians 4 speaks of the goal of such growth as being 'the fullness of Christ', and 'perfect manhood' and maturity of the faith. The Reformed church has a glorious heritage of the truth graciously delivered to her by God. We ought all to be so very thankful for all which I have described above. It is a great blessing of God! The Reformed Church and the members of thereof have the solemn obligation with holy zeal for God, to believe, love, and maintain the truth of the covenant through the life of godliness.

The church has a second generation because of the truth of God's gracious covenant realized in her midst. Central to the truth of this covenant is the fact that God is pleased to continue His church in the line of generations with believers and their God-given children. As each new generation arises in the church each generation must be zealous to instruct the children growing up in the church in the fear of the name of God and the knowledge and love of His truth. Members filled with the Spirit of Christ must continue in holy zeal to perform their task.

The truth of the covenant has great implications for every area of Christian living. Based on the truth of God's gracious covenant with us, we

understand the great importance of Christian marriages in the church. They must from the beginning be established between two believers who seek each other from among those who are one in the truth of the Lord. The truth of the covenant teaches us about the calling of the married to bring forth covenant children and nurture them in the fear of the Lord. The truth of the covenant has implications for how we as God's people live in our homes and with our families from day to day. The truth of the covenant guides us in how we raise the children whom the Lord gives us. It is the basis for the serious covenant home instruction of our children and catechism instruction of our children by the church. All of these things are a great responsibility and a difficult calling. We together as a church must perform this calling with a holy zeal for God and for His church. Zeal for God is not merely a vague feeling of excitement but must be evident in the way we realize our calling before God and in His church. Our zeal must be for God and for His church and for defending and keeping His truth in the church.

In the last few visits to Singapore, members of CERC have often asked whether we have seen evidences of spiritual decline of zeal in the church and in our care for one another. The answer to this question is sadly, probably yes. In the next article for the Salt Shakers I will consider some of the evidences of this decline in zeal. What may be the causes of this decline? Also how can we restore the zeal which there seemed to be among the first generation? How should we make this a subject of our prayers?

Decline in zeal is a very serious thing. In the Lord's letter to the church of

Ephesus which is recorded in the opening chapters of the book of the Revelation, the Lord warns this church about having lost her first love. Decline in zeal is evidence a church that has lost its first love. Jesus calls this church to remember from what she has fallen and to repent. She warns her that if she does not do this He will remove the candlestick from her, whatever this means. In our next article we will discuss what this means and the seriousness of this.

Zeal for God is a very important thing. It is beautiful. It is God-glorifying. It is the mark of living, genuine and personal Christianity. It comes from being filled with the Spirit of Christ and walking in His Spirit. God hates religion without zeal. Even when the church is sound in doctrine, without zeal this knowledge of the truth will soon lead to dead orthodoxy and cold formalism. It will lead to a religion which is nothing more than external ceremony and heartless following of tradition.

There are differences between the first and second generation that make the loss of zeal a greater danger but not an unavoidable thing. Many who belong to the first generation had a dramatic and exciting conversion. They were suddenly brought from the darkness of unbelief to the glorious light and blessed hope of the gospel. All these things are the wonderful works of God. However, the second generation has known truth more gradually and perhaps in some sense less dramatically. The heritage of the truth was passed down to them from their covenant parents. This is definitely God's way in the sphere of the covenant. There is, however, a danger that covenant young people will take the truth which

they have for granted and have less appreciation for the preciousness of the truth. Sometimes the second generation is not sufficiently thankful to God for the heritage of the truth which He has given to her. Because of the sinful nature which we still wrestle with every day of our lives, we can over time become complacent and careless. This is so serious that if we do not revive this zeal among us, God may someday take His glorious and blessed truth from us. So we must earnestly and prayerfully guard ourselves and His beloved church among us from spiritual declension.

Over time the difficulties and hardships of day to day Christian living and our willingness to accept these from the Lord can cause a decline in our zeal. Our faith is tried by many trials over the years that perhaps in the days of our youth we did not anticipate. Because of our own sinfulness we sometimes grow weary in well-doing, and begin to faint in the exercise of our Christian faith.

It is the nature of youth to be excited and enthusiastic. This is a beautiful and God-given characteristic of the days of our youth. We must be careful not to throw cold water on the zeal of youth and by so doing quench their enthusiasm. When we grow older we must be established in the truth by growing in our knowledge and understanding of it. This takes continual effort to study God's word and to grow deeper in our understanding. The fruit of such activity is that we become stronger and steadfast in the truth. Our faith as we grow older will often have less evident enthusiastic expression. The roots of our faith are undergrown and we do not testify of this faith as God gives us opportunity. This also is a sin. However, the genuineness of our faith in the latter years of our life must show itself

in steadfastness in the truth through having a deeper understanding of it. If we have lived faithfully as Christians, over the years we have learned much by the many experiences of our life. It is of great importance to hold fast to the truth through the years of our life in all and every circumstance. This is the beauty and value of the later years of our life. This also a genuine manifestation of Christian zeal which we must all appreciate and be thankful to God for. There are many distractions in the Christian life that can cause a decline in zeal. At the beginning of Christian living we may not yet have experienced these and our new found faith had not yet been tried by these. These distractions have a way of stealing our hearts away from God and cause us to grow cold in our love for Him. These distractions can become a new form of idolatry contrary to the complete devotion which we must have to Him in all of our life.

Especially in the context of life in Singapore, the emphasis on higher education and the tremendous efforts required to achieve very high standards of success in life can cause us to lose focus. Regular attendance at the worship services and active involvement in the life of the church can be crowded out through our business and involvement in our careers later in life. After you have finished reading this article read Titus 2:11 to 14. Notice especially reference to being zealous in good works for which purpose also Christ has redeemed us by His precious blood. There is much more to say about this whole subject. We will continue in our discussion in the next Salt Shakers article, the Lord willing.

FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD (II): THE BELIEVER'S GOOD WORKS

>> Rev. Nathan Langerak



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

The editorial staff of *Salt Shakers* asked me to write on the subject of fellowship with God. The last instalment established that fellowship with God is grounded on the believer's justification before God. Fellowship with God is the essence of the covenant of grace. The covenant of grace is the gracious relationship of fellowship that God establishes with His elect people in Christ. To be a member of the covenant of grace is salvation. The fellowship that God establishes with his elect people — the covenant — is based objectively on the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Jesus Christ accomplished by Him at the cross. By the cross of Christ, God confirmed His eternal covenant of grace. All His promises are yes and amen in Jesus Christ. Fellowship with God is also based exclusively on the cross of Christ in the believer's own mind and conscience. This is the lovely experience of justification. By God's gracious act to forgive the sinner his sins and to impute to him the righteousness of Jesus Christ by faith alone, God also assures the believer of His grace and eternal life. Fellowship with God is in

no sense based on the believer's works, especially works done in faith.

How, then, are the works of believers related to fellowship with God? That is the subject of this article.

At the outset it is necessary to state that insistence—uncompromising—on the truth that justification is by faith alone wholly apart from the consideration of the believer's works does not in itself imply that the believer does not have a calling to do good works. This is always the slander by those who do not believe justification by faith alone against that doctrine. Against that slander the believer must double down on the insistence that works are not part of his righteousness and thus not part of the basis of his fellowship with God. In justification God justifies the ungodly. Where sin abounds the grace of God much more abounds. In justification there is no calling, no ability, and no necessity for the believer to do good works. A man must damn his own works in the judgment of justification, otherwise his conscience will always be tossed about with doubt, and he will be condemned before the tribunal of God. To condemn works as of no account toward righteousness with God is exactly the power of faith. True faith casts off all confidence in one's own works and clings to Jesus Christ and His perfect righteousness alone as the only ground and foundation of salvation and righteousness before God.

Because the subject is fellowship with God — the covenant — and in light of

the fact that Christ's righteousness is the only ground of the believer's salvation, it is important to connect the doctrine of justification and the doctrine of the unconditional covenant.

The doctrine of justification by faith alone is the truth that guarantees salvation without conditions. Because the believer's right to eternal life — now and forever — is based solely on the imputed righteousness of Christ, the believer's works cannot contribute to his salvation. Since the faith by which the believer is justified is natural to no man, but is the free gift of God given to the elect alone, justification by faith alone means that salvation is unconditional. To say that the righteousness of Christ is the only ground of salvation is also to insist that fellowship with God is grounded on that righteousness alone, since the covenant is salvation. So also because fellowship with God is based solely on the righteousness of Jesus Christ merited at the cross and imputed to believers by faith alone, the covenant cannot and does not have any conditions — works that believers must perform in their own strength or by grace — upon which the covenant of grace, fellowship in the covenant, or any benefit of the covenant of grace depend.

When the discussion turns to the subject of works in the covenant, justifying faith — the faith that refuses to work for righteousness and cleaves only to Christ for righteousness — is the starting point again. It must be the starting point because apart from justification it is impossible for

a man to do good works. Apart from justification he only works out of self-love or fear of damnation, motives that are abominable to God and thus make all the man's works wicked.

The Belgic Confession in its treatment of good works in article 24 begins with justifying faith: "This true faith, being wrought in man by the hearing of the Word of God and the operation of the Holy Ghost, doth regenerate and make him a new man, causing him to live a new life, and freeing him from the bondage of sin". The confession uses the word "regenerate", in the sense of conversion and sanctification, not in the sense of the first work of God in salvation to make the dead sinner alive. So the subject of article 24 is sanctification and good works. The confession says sanctification is by faith. Faith makes a man a new creature. Faith causes him to live a new life. Faith frees him from the bondage of sin. What the confession means by "this true faith", it explains later as "this justifying faith". The faith that refuses to work in justification and for righteousness is the same faith that causes a man to live a new life. As righteousness is by faith only, so sanctification is by faith only.

Faith makes a believer a new creature because by faith God sanctifies the believer. Sanctification is God's gracious act in the heart of the justified believer to break the dominion of sin and to cleanse him from sin's pollution. The sinners, who in justification appear as ungodly and as ungodly are declared perfect for Christ's sake and worthy of eternal life, must also be made saints. In justification God declares ungodly persons worthy of eternal life. In sanctification God makes ungodly persons saints.

The fruit of the act of God to sanctify the believer by faith is that out of faith he practices good works. True faith works by love. Faith is the root out which come the fruits of good actions of love of God and love toward the neighbour. The same faith that condemns its works in justification is the faith that works those works as the fruit of God's work of sanctification. The believer, then, is not sanctified by his works any more than he is justified by his works. Rather, because God cleanses his heart by faith from the guilt of sin in justification and by sanctification from the dominion and pollution of sin the believer brings forth the fruit of good works. To put that very simply: he is not a saint because he does good works, but he does good works because God made him a saint.

This sanctifying act of God is closely related to and dependent upon justification. An illustration will show this. Two acts are involved in jailing a criminal. The first is the declaration of his guilt by the judge. The second is the act of the bailiff to lock the guilty criminal in prison based on his sentencing. So there are also two acts involved in freeing him from prison. First, the judge must declare the criminal not guilty. Second, the bailiff must release the acquitted criminal from prison based on the judge's verdict. In justification God releases the believer from guilt. In sanctification God frees the believer from the prison and filth of sin.

The sinner by nature and on account of his guilt is the slave of sin and Satan. He must sin because he is guilty. He must be given over to sin because he is guilty. He must be destroyed by his sin and eventually perish in hell for his sin because he is guilty. By justifying His

people God frees them from guilt. As a necessary consequence He also releases them from bondage.

The righteousness of Christ that is imputed to the believer in justification is worthy of life, blessing, and freedom from sin. In sanctification God gives that life, blessing, and freedom from sin. The justified believer is also the sanctified saint whom God frees from the dominion of sin and cleanses from the pollution of sin.

Just as the guilty criminal lives a filthy life in a dungeon, so the guilty sinner lives a filthy life in bondage to sin. When God releases the sinner from sin's guilt, God also releases him from the filthy bondage to sin, makes him clean and holy, and causes him to live a new life.

Relating sanctification and its resultant fruit of good works to the fellowship of the covenant of grace follows from this. In the gracious and wonderful work of sanctification, the believer experiences God as his God, who for the sake of Christ's perfect righteousness given in justification frees the believer from the power and dominion of sin in sanctification. Sanctification is a work of God no less wonderful and no less gracious than justification. In justification the believer experiences God as the one who frees him from guilt, liability to punishment, gives him the right to eternal life, and grants peace in his soul. In sanctification the believer experiences God as the one who cleanses him from the terrible dominion and pollution of sin and causes him to live a new life.

This sanctifying work of God belongs to the gifts of the covenant of grace and is part of the believer's fellowship with

God in Christ. Because God is his God in Christ, God not only justifies him but also sanctifies him. Because God sanctifies the believer, he does good works and walks with his God over against the world. The believer does not have fellowship with God by works any more than he has salvation or heaven by works. The believer does not experience fellowship with God by works any more than he will experience heaven by his works. Rather, because he has fellowship with God, he experiences God as the God who frees him from the dominion of sin and causes him to live a holy life in covenantal fellowship with his God. Good works are fruits, fruits that God gives to him by the gracious work of sanctification as his covenant God.

This work of sanctification, with its resultant fruits of good works, are inseparable from justification but must be sharply distinguished from it. The sanctification of the believer and the works that are the fruits of sanctification are in no sense to be considered part of his righteousness before God or as the ground or foundation of any benefit of salvation. The Reformed creeds teach this simply by saying that works do not *merit*. Because clever heretics avoid the word merit but teach the substance of the term, it must be said that works do not gain, obtain, or work any part of salvation. After we have done everything that is our duty to do,

we remain unprofitable servants. This must necessarily be the case not only because the doctrine that works obtain with God robs God of the glory of His salvation, but also because the works that the believer performs by the power of God's grace and Holy Spirit are still in this life polluted and defiled with sin. That which is tainted with sin is worthy only of punishment.

Because good works proceed from the good root of faith and are all sanctified by God's grace, they are good and acceptable in the sight of God, but they are not of any account toward justification and thus cannot be the ground or reason for any benefit of salvation or blessing from God. Since Christ's righteousness is perfect and obtains all salvation and every blessing of salvation for the elect, there is simply nothing for works to gain.

What place then do works have in the covenant? The lives of good works that God causes believers to live are testimonies of gratitude that God requires of those whom He has redeemed and reconciled to Himself by Christ Jesus. In light of the truth that God sanctifies believers and causes them to live new lives — He works in them both to will and to do of His good pleasure — God gives them their thanksgiving too. Godliness, good works, and thanksgiving are not works of men any more than election, the

cross, and regeneration are works of men. They are the works of God that He graciously gives and in which He causes believers to walk. In their lives believers become active, and all their activity is to be attributed to the grace of God. To those thankful lives they are called, and all their obedience to that call is to be traced and attributed to God's gracious work in them.

It is only in light of this understanding of good works that the reward of grace, about which Scripture speaks, can be considered properly. God rewards the works of His people. The reward, though, is of grace. Put plainly this means that while God rewards the works of His people, that reward is not obtained or gained *by* those works. Rather, the reward given to the works has the same basis and foundation that the works themselves have. God's people are sanctified and as the fruit of that they do good works on the ground of Christ's cross alone and because of His righteousness alone. He is made unto them wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Such is the value of the righteousness of Christ imputed to believers that His righteousness not only merited for them lives of good works, but also rewards for the good works. The works are gifts, and God also graciously crowns His gifts with His reward.

The lives of good works that God causes believers to live are testimonies of gratitude that God requires of those whom He has redeemed and reconciled to Himself by Christ Jesus.

REFLECTIONS: BRITISH REFORMED FELLOWSHIP FAMILY CONFERENCE 2018

>> Cheryl Lim



Cheryl Lim is a confessing young adult in CERC.

In my previous article for *Salt Shakers* (May 2018), “Thoughts on Travelling”, I concluded with the opinion that visits to sister churches or events organised by them make splendid vacation plans.

In this article, I share with readers my reflections on one such trip made in 2018.

The British Reformed Fellowship (BRF) and its Family Conference

In July 2018, I had the privilege of attending the British Reformed Fellowship (BRF) Family Conference for the second time. The BRF was “founded in 1990 by a group of Reformed Christians concerned for the defence of the Historic Reformed Faith in the British Isles¹” (BRF, 2018). Many from our sister church, the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church (CPRC), and its mission field, the Limerick Reformed Fellowship (LRF), are members of the BRF. Serving as our Lord’s beacon in this part of the world, one of the aims of the BRF is to promote knowledge of the Reformed faith as expressed in the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards. It does so through two key means: (1) publishing the British Reformed

Journal (BRJ) twice a year, and (2) organising the BRF Family Conference once every two years.

These family conferences are similar to CERC’s annual church camps. They are spiritual retreats, filled with edifying speeches, lively discussions and enriching Christian fellowship. These conferences have been held consistently since 1990 at various locations across the United Kingdom, including Wales, England, Northern Ireland and Scotland. Up until 2014, the conference speakers have been Professors David Engelsma and Herman Hanko from the PRCA, men familiar to many of us here in CERC. At the last two conferences, Rev. Andy Lanning – no stranger to us either – replaced Prof. Hanko as one of the conference speakers.

BRF Family Conference 2018

The 2018 conference was held from 21 to 28 July at Hebron Hall in Wales, with the theme “The Reformed Family – According to the Word of God”.

While similar to CERC’s church camps, there were also a few notable differences. First, the conference was about twice as long (~8D/7N), spanning across a Sunday. Attendees were thus able to enjoy Sabbath worship together at the conference location. Also, there were no formal group discussions after each speech. Instead, there was a time of Question & Answer during which the speaker addressed questions from the floor. The conference was also distinctly international, with attendees from the UK, Republic of Ireland, USA, Canada,

Brazil², Germany, Hungary, Australia, and of course, Singapore.

These attendees came from diverse backgrounds which allowed for wonderful conversations, many of which centred on how the Lord had led them to the Reformed faith. These interactions were one of the highlights of the trip. They provided me with an acute sense of the workings of God’s providence in saving and preserving His people. Those who are His, the Holy Spirit gives no rest till they have been irresistibly led to the Father. These conversations also promoted a greater appreciation of what the Lord has provided us with in Singapore – the freedom to worship God in Spirit and in truth, in a faithful Reformed church. There were some I spoke to who had experienced persecution in their search for and pursuit of the truth, or who were struggling to find a faithful church to worship in. In a sense, this brought to life the practical difficulties faced by some with regard to church membership, issues highlighted and addressed in Prof. Engelsma’s books *Bound to Join* and *A Defense of the Church Institute*.

The focus of the event was undoubtedly the conference speeches, which were centred on “The Reformed Family”. There were six main speeches and a

¹ The British Isles refers to the islands of Great Britain and Ireland (both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland), including the thousands of smaller islands around their coasts.

² Read the 15 Oct 2018 issue of the *Standard Bearer* for the conference perspective of Lidi Cecilio, the attendee from Brazil.

special lecture. As may be expected, the takeaways and insights gained were aplenty. While I leave the interested reader to listen to the full recordings of these talks³, I highlight a couple of learning points that have special application for us in CERC.

God, not only to them, but also to the church. They are members of a family that their spiritual brothers and sisters should show love to.

Enriching as these speeches were, it may seem odd to many of us that there were

Learning at the conference was not restricted to spiritual matters. There were two day trips organised, during which we were exposed to lessons on history. These trips included a visit to a castle built in the 15th century (a real treat for Singaporeans!) and an open-air museum which showcased the historical lifestyle, culture and architecture of the Welsh. Some of the exhibits even date as far back as the 12th century. These breaks were a good time for sightseeing and fellowship.

The church must be characterised by discipline, order, peace, godliness and love. We do well to reflect, from time to time, on whether we as members of the church live as family.

First, important as the physical family is, the point was also made that the real and lasting family is the church – our spiritual family. While physical relations will cease to exist in heaven, members of the church universal will continue to be spiritual brothers and sisters. And so, as the second generation sets up physical, covenant families, let us not neglect to serve and care for the spiritual family of God as we are able to. Furthermore, just as the Word of God governs our physical families, so it governs the spiritual. The church must be characterised by discipline, order, peace, godliness and love. We do well to reflect, from time to time, on whether we as members of the church live as *family*.

Second, as more children are brought for infant baptism and fill our pews, they are to be viewed as part of this spiritual family. Members of the church play a part in the rearing of these covenant children as we, together with their parents, make the vow in the Baptism Form. Likewise, parents ought also to see their children as gifts from

not any group discussions as we are used to having. However, this does not imply an absence of spiritual discussions. Instead, such conversations were rife! The conference overflowed with groups of people discussing the speeches along the corridors, in the lecture room, over meals, in the evenings and during the outings. People were obviously excited about the Word, about putting it into practice, and about sharing one another's experiences. In fact, one of these conversations eventually led to two semi-formal discussions amongst the singles. There, we were able to share about the spiritual struggles, temptations and pressures faced in such a calling, but were also encouraged by testimonies of spiritual victories through learning contentment and submission to God's will. These discussions reinforced various lessons taught in the speeches – that singles have their family life in Christ and the church and are not bereft of fellowship, and that singlehood is a gift from God, through which one may care for things of the Lord.

Encouragement to Attend

The BRF Family Conference is an opportune way to meet and get to know members of our sister church, the CPRC, and the LRF. Although not directly organised by them, many of their members attend the conference. Another bonus is that one also gets to meet friends from our other sister church, the PRCA, who have a fairly large representation at these conferences. Truly a time for rekindling of old friendships, and for starting of new ones.

For those whom the Lord makes possible, I would highly recommend considering attending the next conference. It is planned for 11-18 July 2020, at Castlewellan (yes, a castle!) in Northern Ireland. The theme is "Union with Jesus Christ", with speakers Prof. Engelsma and Rev. Lanning (and yes, another incentive to attend!).

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³ These may be retrieved from <https://www.britishreformed.org/conferences/>

WHITER THAN SNOW

>> Rachel Yeow



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White as Snow

Imagine this scene: snow silently and lazily falling from the skies, blanketing the fields, clothing the trees, covering the towering mountains, turning the grass, the road, the stones into one white sheet. The storm passes; the sun comes out, shining gloriously, reflecting and illuminating the whiteness of the fresh snow and blinding the eyes with the glaring whiteness and its brilliance. The usual landscape has been entirely transformed.

What comes to mind?

Cold? Freezing?

For me, that white wintery scene gives me a sense of peace and warmth (ironically). The quietness of snow falling on the ground gives a feeling of calmness and serenity. The feeling of snow as it touches the skin is fresh, soft like wool, powdery, and gentle. The view of the fresh, untainted, clean layer of snow and its pristine whiteness, its glittering brightness, and its smoothness is overwhelming and memorable. It is a magnificent view of perfect white, and it gives a sensation of simplicity, purity, and spotlessness.

Snow is a fantastic gift from God, a marvelous creation by Him, and is often cited for its whiteness in the Bible. The colour white is frequently mentioned in the Bible and carries with it an important symbolic significance. We see it being used in representation of the majesty of the Lord in Daniel 7:9 – His “garment was white as snow” – and Mark 9:3 – “His raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow”. Whiteness also signifies purity, righteousness, holiness, and most importantly victory over sin.

Red as Crimson

In contrast to the whiteness of snow, the redness of crimson in Isaiah 1:18 describes sin. Sin is like red dye on a piece of white cloth. Red is the colour of lust, wrath, bloodshed, and destruction. It is a hard and stubborn colour that tarnishes the cleanliness of a white cloth, and no amount of washing can remove it. This is true of sin. Our deeply depraved nature is akin to soaking the white cloth in red dye by our numerous backslidings in sin. When sin entered into the world, men became spiritually dead and became enemies of God. Every sin that we commit deserves His wrath and curse. Nothing of our accomplishments can remove them.

Our Prayer

May we humble ourselves to acknowledge our sins, knowing our own depravity and the deadness we are in. Can we say like the psalmist in Psalm 51:3-4, “For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only,

have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight” or like Paul in Romans 7:24, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” Therefore, as David did, let us pray for the forgiveness of our sins. In Psalm 51:7, “Purge me with hyssop” can be represented as a ceremonial distinction, similar to that of the cleansing of a leper or purification of an unclean person through the sprinkling of water, blood, or hyssop. This phrase signifies the cleansing of our soul through the shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is only by the blood of Christ that we can be purged from the guilt of sin, cleared and purified from an evil conscience.

Despite our wretchedness, God in His everlasting mercies had compassion on us. In Isaiah 1:18, God changed sin into the very opposite: “..though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool”. This speaks of a complete transformation of the reddest dye to pure white like snow – without any form of darkness, just like the complete transformation after a heavy snowfall that covers the place in one white sheet! We can be whiter than snow, who were black with corruption! The fountain of Christ’s blood makes the tainted garment white again, thoroughly discharging the stain, ensuring that we have no sinful thoughts, works, or evil desires. We may then be cleaned, purified, white, and spotless just like freshly fallen snow. “They...washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 7:14).

Being made white as snow expresses the idea of our sin being blotted out in its entirety for eternity, so that we are presented to God as “not having spot, or wrinkle...and without blemish” (Eph. 5:27). We are made holy and spiritually clean, which Satan cannot change. Christ’s sacrifice reveals the blessed truth that He came and bore the punishment of our sin completely, assuring us that we are not only acquitted but also accepted in God’s sight and have communion with Him. We believe “that God, for the sake of Christ’s satisfaction, will no more remember my sins, neither my corrupt nature, against which I have to struggle all my life long; but will graciously impute to me the righteousness of Christ, that I may never be condemned before the tribunal of God” (HC, Q&A 56). In all our prayers, let our thoughts be constantly directed to the huge sacrifice that Christ has made for us.

God’s Abounding Grace

This is the work of justification and represents the power of Christ’s blood and righteousness. This is all by the grace of God. Nothing in ourselves can remove the sin within us. Neither can we do anything by ourselves. The prayer which we make is only possible by the grace of God. Our nature delights in sin and does not want to be delivered from it. Only by the grace of God can we see our sinfulness, hate it, and desire forgiveness of it. Everything is of God, nothing of man!

Through God’s grace and His unspeakable gift in the person of Christ and the power of the Spirit we can be whiter than snow, untarnished and pure like fresh snow falling from the skies. We can have an eternal life with God! This is so beautifully promised to us

in John 14:2-3: “In my Father’s house are many mansions...I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”

When sin entered into the world, men became enemies of God, and our depraved natures caused us to show our hatred to God. However, with the washing of our sins, we can now be filled with love towards God. As much as snow is pure, whiter than snow speaks of the purity of our soul when we gain the victory over sin and Satan. We, being born again, can lead a clean and regenerated life, a life that walks with God, and that of a new creature.

Oh! What a comfort and joy this is for us! Like the psalmist mentioned in Psalm 51:8, we will be able to hear joy and gladness. This joy here is described to be acquired by hearing – for only by the hearing of God’s Word can we find joy, comfort, and peace. It is a joy when we read of God’s promises to pardon our guilt and admit us into His presence. It is because of this that we receive strength in the midst of our struggles in this earthly pilgrimage.

Our Application

We give thanks to God for His mercies on us, who, as depraved sinners, are not deserving of forgiveness. How then should we respond?

Let this be shown through the fruits we bear through our earthly walk. May we lead a regenerated life and always be reminded of the call to repentance and reformation. As in Isaiah 1:16, “Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil”, it is not only sorrowing over the sins we committed, but also

striving not to repeat the sin and crushing any dispositions or tendencies that would incline us to committing it. We must repent from our sins, detest our sins, and destroy the roots of sin that are in our hearts. Let us have a humble repentance and dependence on God. For if we sincerely turn to God, He will not cast us out and will blot out all remembrance of our sins, cleansing us and making us whiter than snow!

Shall we ask ourselves: Do we have the desire to be whiter than snow? Do we want to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind? Do we have the right attitude when we pray for the forgiveness of our sins? Do we want to increase in spiritual growth of the new man? Do we have a struggle in our lives as pilgrims in this world?

“For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge!” (2 Cor. 7:10-11a)



News from the Churches

Singapore

Grandville PRC extended a call to Rev. Erik Guichelaar to be Minister-on-Loan to Singapore. Rev. Guichelaar has declined this call. We continue to pray fervently that God will provide us with a minister in His time. Meanwhile, we are thankful for the continual help of pulpit supply from our sister churches in the PRCA. Prof. Ron Cammenga and his wife were in Singapore for the first time in December 2018 and ministered to us for four Sundays. We greatly enjoyed their time with us and pray that God will continue to bless them in their callings back in Michigan. We were then assisted by Rev. Audred Spriensma and his wife for the next four Sundays. After them, we look forward to welcoming Rev. Stephan Regnerus into our midst.

In the month of December, CERC held both the annual Vacation Bible School (VBS) and the CKCKS Camp. We thank God that we can continue having such activities which are part of the church's efforts in bringing up covenant youth in the fear of God.

The month of December also saw new additions into the church through Public Confession of Faith and Baptism. We also celebrate the birth of three covenant children – Caleb (son of Josiah and Hui Qi), Asher (son of Lee Yang and Joanna), and Jeshurun (son of Yang Zhi and Nicole). We thank God for His continual blessings upon us.

USA

Faculty and students of the PRC seminary attended a Reformed conference on the Synod of Dordt (400th Anniversary) on 18-19 January 2019 at Westminster Seminary East (Escondido, CA). They also had the opportunity to fellowship and worship with members of Hope PRC in Redlands, CA.

The Philippines

CERC sent a delegation to the Philippines to explore the possibility of having a sister relationship with the PRCP. It was a fruitful trip and some of the work there accomplished includes: (1) confirming the unity that we have, (2) discussing CERC's and PRCP's current church relationships and plans (if any) in seeking church relationship with other churches, (3) gaining familiarity with each other, (4) discussing the process of establishing the sister church relationship.

Provident Christian Church in Marikina City which is currently being mentored by Rev. Daniel Holstege has indicated its desire to be a member of PRCP. The PRCP has also adopted the Protestant Reformed Fellowship in Albuera, Leyte (IPRFA) as its first official mission field.



Rev. Emmanuel Singh presenting his mission work in Kolkata during Reformation Day Conference



New additions: Jeshurun (son of Yang Zhi and Nicole), Caleb (son of Josiah and Hui Qi), Asher (son of Lee Yang and Joanna)



Pastor Den Hartog speaking during Reformation Day Conference



Confession of Faith and Infant Baptism



Baptism of Joezer Chin, son of Yuh Bin & Annie



Children's special item at Open Sunday

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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Opinions expressed in the articles are solely that of the writers. Contributions of general interest from our readers and questions are welcome at: cksaltshakers@gmail.com

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