

"For sanctification, therefore, as for justification, we believing sinners are to look to, and depend upon, Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ alone."

— Prof. David Engelsma in *The Relation of Justification and Sanctification according to the Reformed Faith*

"The sheer complexity and importance of blood reveal to us how marvelous God's works are and His perfect wisdom in creation (Ps. 139:14)"

— Emily Chua in *Scarlet Red*

"In 1953, the PRC denomination suffered a massive split due to doctrinal errors and many congregations suffered; Redlands being no exception."

— Paul McKelvey in *Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands, California*



salt shakers
joel 3:16 matthew 5:16

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Go to the ant, thou sluggard;
consider her ways, and be wise:
which having no guide, overseer, or ruler,
provideth her meat in the summer,
and gathereth her food in the harvest.

Proverbs 6:6-8

WELCOME TO THE 55TH ISSUE OF SALT SHAKERS!

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Dear readers,

In your hands is another set of articles for your spiritual consumption. You may consider this as the door gift for this week's annual church camp – yes, the release of our June edition has been deliberately scheduled on the eve of our camp. Take the salt with you to Johor; taste it during the two-hour-long journey to the hotel. With equal delight, taste it *with one another*: Ask each other, “Has reading been your covenant obligation?” Or, “How have we been receiving our church's preaching in recent months?” Or even, “Have we had opportunities to direct others to read Rev. Stewart's articles on homosexuality?” In this way, and many more, we hope this magazine flavours your fellowship this week.

To all our readers: keep your eyes on the lookout for this year's Reformation Day Conference advertisement. Rumour has it that the theme will be on the Synod of Dort once more. As one person shrewdly remarked, “If the Synod convened for two years, we should commemorate it for two years.” Do you agree?

Happy reading!

Your Servant in Christ,
Yang Zhi

READING: A COVENANT OBLIGATION

>> Aaron Lim



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

“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.”

— Hosea 4:6

Introduction

The Word of God presents to us a serious warning. My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. This word of judgment was declared by the prophet Hosea to Israel, the covenant people of God.

The prophet Hosea was sent by God to the ten northern tribes of Israel to pronounce judgment upon them. Israel had sinned grievously by her idolatry and all kinds of immorality in the land. The context of this chapter informs us that there were swearing, lying, killing, and adultery in the land. There was no truth, or mercy, or knowledge of God in the land. There was a thorough lack of fear of Jehovah in the land. Every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

As a result of her gross sins, God sent the prophet Hosea to pronounce terrible judgments upon Israel. It is

striking that God at the beginning of the book instructed the prophet Hosea to marry a prostitute by the name of Gomer. That marriage was to be a picture of God’s relationship to his people. Israel, like Gomer, had played the whore and had been unfaithful to her husband. She had gone a-whoring after other gods and walked in the ways of sin.

To Hosea and Gomer were born three children, two sons and a daughter. God called the first son Jezreel, and declared that He would execute vengeance upon the house of Israel and cause to cease the kingdom of Israel. Then He instructed Hosea to name the daughter Loruhamah, which means that God will not have mercy on the house of Israel, and He will utterly take them away (1:6). The son was named Loammi, which means that Israel is not God’s people, and he will not be their God (1:9). Terrible judgments await Israel for her spiritual adultery and whoredom.

Our text tells us that God’s people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. This lack of knowledge is not one of ignorance. It is not as though the Israelites never had the knowledge of God and did not know how to obey Him. It is not as though the Israelites wanted to obey Jehovah but perished because they did not know how to.

Rather, this lack of knowledge is one of wilful rejection and disobedience. Israel had been given the true knowledge of Jehovah God, but they had rejected it. The judgment was primarily given to the priests, who were tasked with

instructing Israel in the true knowledge of God. But that judgment also fell on the entire land of Israel who had rejected the knowledge of God. Israel had been taught the law of God from her youth, how Jehovah is to be worshipped and served. But she forgot that law and turned after the idol gods of the land.

The same judgment can befall us too. Israel’s rejection of the knowledge of God is not something that happened only in Israel’s history. The same sinful natures in the Israelites are also present in us. We who have been given the true knowledge of God can reject that knowledge and turn after idols. The history of Israel serves as important instruction for us who live in the church today.

How important then, it is to preserve the true knowledge of God and to walk according to that knowledge. Through reading, we gain knowledge. Through reading, we observe God’s warning to His people that they will be destroyed for lack of knowledge.

What is Reading?

Reading is a conscious activity of processing words into meaningful concepts and applications. One can simply read through a whole page of words and yet not understand their meaning. But proper reading is one where the reader is actively processing what he reads into meaningful ideas.

The goal of all reading is to gain knowledge or to develop a skill. One goes to a medical skill to gain medical knowledge and skills necessary to be a

good doctor. One goes to a law school to gain knowledge about the laws of the land and the skills to be a good lawyer.

The Basis of the Christian's Responsibility to Read – The Bible

The Bible has much to say about reading. That is because the Bible makes a deep connection between reading and our salvation. God saves us and causes us to grow in the knowledge of that salvation. Through reading we grow in the knowledge of our salvation. God does not save us and leave us on our own. God has saved us in order that we grow in grace and in knowledge. The duty to read is inseparable from our salvation. God saves us and causes us to grow daily in the knowledge of that salvation.

He causes us to grow in the knowledge of our sins and miseries, how totally depraved we are and how corrupt our natures are. He causes us to grow in the knowledge of our salvation, how we are saved by his sovereign and particular grace in the cross of Jesus Christ. And then He causes us to grow in the knowledge of gratitude and how we are to live a life of gratitude for his great salvation.

But the Bible also connects reading with learning the fear of Jehovah. In the Old Testament times, God commanded the king to read. It was through reading that the king learned to fear Jehovah his God. Deuteronomy 17:19 tells us, "And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them". Reading the law of God is inseparable from learning to fear God and to obey Him. And the king was commanded to read all the days of his life. Reading was

to be a lifelong activity of the king.

The Bible also makes reading an important activity in the believer's life. Reading occupies an important place in the believer's life. In the New Testament the apostle Paul gave charge to the young pastor Timothy to give attendance to reading, to exhortation, and to doctrine (1 Tim. 4:13). That instruction was not confined to Timothy only, or to the office-bearers of the church, but to all the people of God, because they must also give attendance to exhortation and to reading. The idea there is that young Timothy as well as us must turn our minds to, devote ourselves to, and apply ourselves to reading.

When the apostle Paul was in prison awaiting his execution, he instructed young Timothy to bring the books, but especially the parchments (2 Tim. 4:13). "Bring the books, I want to read them and be comforted by their instruction before I die." Even prior to his death, the apostle did not disregard reading. He regarded reading not only as a lifelong duty, but also a lifelong joy.

Hating Knowledge

On the other hand, the Bible often describes the wicked and unbelieving as those who reject knowledge, those who do not read. Proverbs 1:29 says, "For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD: They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices". Those who hated knowledge, those who do not read, are those who do not fear the LORD.

Jesus' rebukes to the scribes and Pharisees of His day, and sometimes

to His own disciples, often began with the question, "Have ye not read?" He was rebuking them for not reading the Scriptures and understanding its true meaning.

God's Warning against the Deception of False Doctrines

An important basis for the Christian's duty to read is the fact that God has warned His people about the deception of false doctrines. False doctrines and false teachers are plentiful today. Jesus said, "For many shall come in my name, saying I am Christ, and shall deceive many" (Matt. 24:5).

There is the false, widespread doctrine in our society that every religion has its own merits, or that all religions are true. God's Word teaches us that there is only one true God and only one true religion.

There is also the false doctrine of materialism, which teaches that happiness consists in gaining more material things. "Eat, drink, and be merry" is the theme of materialism. The more money I get, the happier I will be. Materialism can also take its form in chasing after academic achievements. Our public schools teach that the way to a better life is to get good grades, get into a good university, and establish a good career for ourselves.

False teachers in the church world are also spreading their false doctrines, including those who bear the name Reformed. There are those who teach the lie of a conditional covenant, or the allowance of divorce and remarriage.

Reading is of utmost importance to combat the threat of false doctrines in the church.

A Covenant Obligation

At the root of the basis for this duty is God's covenant of grace with us. God's covenant is his bond of friendship that He establishes with us in Jesus Christ. God has made us His friends. Eternally, before the foundations of the world He has chosen us to be His friends. In the cross of Jesus Christ His only begotten Son He made us His friends. And He continues to be our friend till the end of our lives and into all eternity.

Since God is our sovereign Friend, we are to grow that friendship like any other friendship does. Psalm 25:14 is a beautiful description of what that covenant friendship is like: "The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant". God has revealed His friendship with us in His Word, so we read that word daily to grow in our friendship with Him.

That is why the Bible has often been described as God's love letters to the church. He reveals Himself to the church in this book and shows His love for His beloved bride. So the bride reads those love letters to grow in her knowledge and love for her Husband.

The Spiritual Consequences of Not Reading

Our text tells us that God's people were destroyed for lack of knowledge. They did not know His ways, who He is, and how He is to be worshipped and served. They believed the lie, because

they had rejected God's truth, and God sent them a strong delusion. And they believed the lie unto their destruction.

The Reformed believer who does not read is like the soldier that charges into the battlefield and does not know how to use his rifle. He lacks the knowledge and ability to fight the war. That soldier is useless and is quickly picked off and killed by his enemy.

God has instructed in His Word that the Christian life is a fierce spiritual warfare. The Christian is constantly at war, in his own soul against the old man of sin, against the forces of evil in the world, and against Satan.

So the Christian must read to know himself and the battle that he is in. He must know who his enemies are, what their strategies and tactics are, and whom he can rely on in the battlefield. Above all, he knows the captain of His army with an intimate knowledge of love and relies on Him to fight the battle of faith.

What The Duty to Read Means

The duty to read means that I recognise that God is a God of knowledge, and He has given me a small knowledge of Himself. Knowing this truth, I endeavour to know Him as much as I can. The faith that unites me to Him consists of knowledge. Our catechism calls this a certain knowledge, that is, a convicted knowledge.

Reading serves to increase my knowledge of the creation of my God. All the knowledge of geography and science and nature serves to teach me about the wisdom and greatness of my God. All the knowledge of history serves to teach me God's purpose in the gathering of His church and the days leading up to the final judgment and second coming of Jesus Christ.

Reading good Reformed and Christian literature helps us to mature in our faith. We mature in our understanding of our faith and are no longer like children, tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine.

The Reformed believer who reads is like the soldier who matures and develops in his knowledge and skills. He progresses from knowing how to use the basic weapons in his arsenal, the rifle and the grenade, to more sophisticated weapons in order to defend himself better and to destroy the enemy more effectively. As he matures, he becomes more knowledgeable of the enemy's tactics and strategies and knows how to counter them more effectively.

Reading serves the good of the church in her coming generations. Because we are a covenant people, we are to be thinking about our future generations. Developing a good reading habit helps to pass on that good habit to the next generation for the good of the church.

The duty to read means that I recognise that God is a God of knowledge, and He has given me a small knowledge of Himself. Knowing this truth, I endeavour to know Him as much as I can.

WISDOM (3): WISDOM AND INDUSTRIOUSNESS

>>Prof. Herman Hanko



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With this article, I continue with the discussion of the staff's chosen theme of Scripture's teachings on Wisdom. They have assigned me an article on the theme above, with its opposite "Wisdom and Laziness".

The Word of God pays a lot of attention to work and has instruction on the importance of work, the priority of work, and how to fulfill our calling to work.

The Bible makes a distinction however, between our work to support ourselves and our families in the world and to work for spiritual things. Paul makes an emphatic point of the necessity to work in the world when he writes the Thessalonians: "For even when we were with you, we commanded you, that if any among you would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some of you walking disorderly, working not at all but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread" (2 Thess. 3:10-12).

On the other hand, Jesus tells the people

who had come to Capernaum: "Labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for the meat that endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed" (John 6:27).

In another place, Jesus warns us not to concern ourselves with what we shall eat and what we shall drink, and wherewithal we shall be clothed. We are rather to seek the kingdom of heaven and God's righteousness (Matt. 6:31-34).

How are we to reconcile these two important teachings of Scripture?

The answer to that seeming contradiction is that our work here in the world is in fact, if done to God's glory, a seeking of the kingdom of heaven and God's righteousness. It is labouring for the meat that never perishes, which, as our Lord made plain, is Christ himself.

Two things must be said here.

Scripture glorifies work here in this world. It glorifies all work. It puts a halo on every kind of occupation. We here, especially in Singapore, must remember that to hurry behind a garbage truck emptying peoples' garbage cans is as glorious as being the CEO of an international company that deals with billions of dollars in making and selling of hand phones. It is as pleasing in the sight of God to get calloused hands and sweaty shirts digging ditches as it is to rule a country with royal robes. A janitor in a factory once told me: "God

has given me the best job in the world sweeping floors, and so I have to do the best job that I can".

Why?

God does not give us work to go on vacations, buy new cars, eat costly food and dress as royalty — although those things are not sins in themselves. But we work to seek the kingdom of heaven — while here on earth! and working at seemingly lowly jobs.

And here we see where wisdom must direct our lives.

If we work to have a better place in the world and enjoy earthly things, we are fools, for riches disappear, earthly goods cannot cure our cancer, material possessions will not keep us from the grave, and riches will not stave off death. What good are they if we labour for the things that perish?

But if we work to take care of our families, it is different. Our families are covenant families, and we seek God's covenant when we provide for our families. We work to give our children Christian education. We work to support the church and the preaching of the gospel. We work for our interests in and love for the kingdom of heaven.

Then we are wise. Remember what wisdom is? It is using the best means to seek the highest goal. The highest goal is salvation with Christ in heaven. The best means is to seek that heavenly kingdom by walking our pilgrim's journey from here to glory. For that we

need earthly food and drink, earthly clothing and a place to live. But these things are not ends in themselves; they must serve a higher purpose. Maybe we ought to read Psalm 37 again. And maybe we ought to take a long, hard look at ourselves to learn whether we are wise in our pilgrim's journey.

And so work is honourable. And we are urged by Scripture to do our work well. Solomon in Proverbs warns against laziness: "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways and be wise: which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer and gathereth her food in the harvest" (Prov. 6:6-8).

And consider what follows: "How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of thy hands to sleep. So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, thy want as an armed man" (verses 8-10). (My colleague in Seminary was wont to quote those last verses to a student who arrived late for class.)

Because of the importance that a person may not be lazy, Solomon,

almost smiling (I think), says a lazy man is a man who always has an excuse not to do what he is supposed to do: "The slothful man says, There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets" (Prov. 22:13). Because farming was the chief occupation in Israel in the old dispensation, Solomon sometimes describes a lazy farmer who lets the weather determine whether he works in his field: he considers snow and cold good excuses to stay inside where he can huddle over the fire in the hearth. But, says Solomon, such a one will not have crop when harvest comes. So it is also with the Christian who always has a good excuse not to do what he knows he should. He is foolish. The wise man does his calling, no matter what obstacles that have to be overcome and no matter the cost to himself.

I worked my way through high school and college by weeding on my knees in vegetable fields, pressing working clothes in a laundry, working on a ranch and cleaning out stinking chicken coops, smelly pig pens and manure from barns. I worked in the blazing sun on hot sand, setting up and smearing old crankcase oil on forms for

curbs and gutter. I always thanked God for these jobs, for they made it possible to go to college and Seminary. I never thought that God might be displeased with me for doing such "lowly" work.

Finally, we have, in an unusual connection, the blessedness of doing what God calls us to do. While the verse I am about to quote refers primarily to our calling to engage in spiritual activities and be loyal to God's truth, it refers to all our labours. It is our calling to put our faith into practice because we believe in the victory of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58).

That work is, I know, milking cows (by hand), making ice to support my schooling and my wife, and changing the oil in my car to save a bit for tuition.

Wisdom is work now, any work, for God's glory, and thus to seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

HOMOSEXUALITY: WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH? (3)

>>Rev. Angus Stewart



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For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet (Rom. 1:26-27).

Having introduced the subject of homosexuality and explained that it is "against nature" in the last two articles, we now continue our exposition of Romans 1:26-27, the key biblical text on this subject.

Condemnatory Biblical Words

Let us consider the Most High's moral evaluation of lesbianism and sodomy in Scripture. Nowhere in the Bible does it ever say that homosexuality is good,

wholesome, holy, or pure, as if it were something to be endorsed or celebrated or practised as an “alternative lifestyle”. God's Word is not even mildly positive as regards sodomy or lesbianism. Nor is it neutral or merely mildly critical. Kevin DeYoung is correct: “Even many revisionist scholars acknowledge that the Bible is uniformly negative toward same-sex activity”.¹

The consistent testimony of Holy Scripture, in both Old and New Testaments, is strongly and emphatically condemnatory, for homosexuality is an “abomination” (Lev. 18:22) before the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. As we saw in the last instalment, Romans 1:26-27 repeatedly states that it is unnatural. This passage further describes homosexuality in terms of “*vile* affections” (v. 26), which the Greek lexica explain using such words as “dishonourable”, “disgraceful”, “shameful”, and “degrading”.

These sodomites “*burned* in their lust one toward another” (v. 27), meaning that they were sexually inflamed or consumed with their impure affections². That homosexuality is “unseemly” (v. 27) teaches that it is indecent, obscene, disgraceful, and shameful. Yet the ungodly revel in gay *pride* parades! In this too, twenty-first-century sexual immorality is in step with the proverbial arrogance of ancient Sodom: “The shew of their countenance doth witness against them; and they declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not. Woe unto their soul! for they have rewarded evil unto themselves” (Isa. 3:9). Romans 1:27 speaks of the “error” of homosexuality, for it is a deliberate wandering, roaming, or going astray from God's truth through deception and delusion.

This is not merely the language of a Victorian moralist or a populist politician or a right-wing activist. These are the words of the Holy Spirit Himself in the inspired book of Romans, the most systematic presentation of the gospel of salvation (from sin) through Jesus Christ alone!

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the God of love
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Acts and Desires

It is important also to note that Romans 1:26-27 deals with homosexual acts *and desires*. The Almighty judges that *both* are unnatural and vile.

This needs to be pointed out because some argue that, whereas the Bible condemns homosexual acts, it does not oppose homosexual desires. However, this is a very strange argument. If X is sin, it is sinful to desire X! Thus the Lord Jesus argues regarding adultery: “whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Matt. 5:28). Stealing is a sin, murder is a sin, bestiality is a sin, and idolatry is a sin; so it is sinful to *desire* to do any of these things.

Our Heidelberg Catechism faithfully sets forth the meaning of “Thou shalt not covet” (Ex. 20:17):

Q. 113. What doth the tenth commandment require of us?

A. That even the smallest inclination or thought contrary to any of God's commandments never rise in our hearts; but that at all times we hate all sin with our whole heart, and delight in all righteousness.

Clearly, it is the “heart” (with its “inclination[s]” or “thought[s]” or desires) that is the chief thing in the tenth commandment, the previous nine, and all of ethics. Later, the Catechism points out that we need to “learn more and more to know our sinful nature” (A. 115) and not think only about external acts.

One senses in the argument that homosexual desires, though perhaps not homosexual acts, are okay, a desperate, though ill-fated, attempt somehow or other to justify sodomy and lesbianism, at least in some sense. But this view betrays a total ignorance or denial of the sin of concupiscence or one's sinful (internal) desires. It is thoroughly Pelagian to claim that only actions can be sinful but to deny the evil of the heart and its desires or yearnings. Thus the Triune God speaks of the “*vile affections*” of homosexuality (Rom. 1:26), that is, its passions or desires that are dishonourable, disgraceful, shameful, and degrading.

¹ Kevin DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?* (Nottingham, England: IVP, 2015), p. 73. In proof of his statement, DeYoung proceeds to quote homosexual Dutch scholar, Pim Pronk, and Dan O. Via (pp. 73-74).

² The *ek* prefix in the Greek *exekautheesan* serves to intensify the burning.

Lust, Not Love

When the Apostle Paul writes that “the men ... burned in their lust *one toward another*” (v. 27), he is describing *mutual* desires. So Romans 1:26-27 cannot be dismissed as if it merely opposed homosexual rape or pederasty or master-slave “encounters”. Our text opposes *consensual* homosexuality, whether long-term or short-term, “committed” or casual.

In that sodomites “[burn] in their lust *one toward another*” (v. 27), it is inaccurate, misleading, and downright false to speak of “gay love”. Instead, it is biblical, and therefore accurate and true, to label it “gay lust”. It is an attack upon the God of love falsely to dignify what He calls a sinful, burning lust with the honourable name of love.

Scripture's infallible teaching regarding the burning lust of homosexual men accords well with the standard results of surveys³. Here are three typical conclusions:

Homosexual men are more promiscuous with other men than (ungodly) heterosexual men with women.

Homosexual men more frequently engage in intercourse with male strangers than (ungodly) heterosexual men with female strangers.

Homosexual men are more given to unrestrained sex or sexual “experimentation” than (ungodly) heterosexual men⁴.

This is not to say that in all of the above areas every homosexual is worse than every heterosexual. Nor are we denying that many heterosexuals perform sinful, obscene, and disgusting sexual acts. Rather, given that homosexual intercourse is, by God's own explicit declaration, intrinsically depraved and shameful, and that sodomites “[burn] in their lust *one toward another*” (v. 27), it is not surprising that they have significantly higher incidences of promiscuity, including with strangers, and more perverse “experimentation”

than heterosexuals.

Nor is it strange that many homosexuals boast of their perverse sexual activities and want to promote them in the general populace. After all, the homosexual ethic cannot, by definition, endorse or practise marital faithfulness between one man and one woman for life. It neither honours nor recognises any transcendent, God-given laws. Nor does it value scriptural sexual ethics or even traditional, conventional morality, which homosexuals often view as stifling or “bourgeois”. In any conflict between biblical boundaries on the one hand and “freedom” or “self-expression” in promiscuity on the other, the latter will win out in homosexual ideology.

³ Robert A. J. Gagnon cites and analyses many such studies (The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics [Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001], pp. 453-459).

⁴ This includes bondage, sadomasochism, anilingus, and eating their partners' bodily wastes or smearing it on themselves.

SCARLET RED

>> Emily Chua



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As we all know, blood is imperative for numerous functions of our body. In Genesis 9:4, blood is described as the life of all flesh. In a nutshell, blood

consists of both a “liquid” and a “solid” component. The “liquid” component consists mainly of water, proteins, and nutrients; the “solid” component consists mainly of red blood cells, white blood cells (neutrophils, monocytes, basophils, eosinophils, lymphocytes), and platelets. Each cell type serves a distinct function: red blood cells for the delivery of oxygen to vital organs such as the lungs and heart; white blood cells to recognize and mount immune responses against pathogens to prevent illnesses; platelets for blood clot formation to cease bleeding when

blood vessels are damaged. All these work together to meet the needs of our body, thereby sustaining it and enabling us to perform our daily tasks. The sheer complexity and importance of blood reveal to us how marvelous God's works are and His perfect wisdom in creation (Ps. 139:14).

While physical blood is able to sustain our physical life, it is unable to do so spiritually. When man fell into sin, we became spiritually dead in trespasses and sins. Given God's just nature, these sins have to be atoned for and

covered (1 Cor. 6: 19-20). In order to achieve this, sacrifices which involve the shedding of blood have to be made. This can be seen when God first covered Adam and Eve in clothes of animal skin. This set the precedent for the killing of animals as sacrifices made in the Old Testament (O.T.). In the O.T., a total of seven feasts were ordained by God for His people (Lev. 23-24). During each feast, the people were commanded to put away their earthly callings and consecrate the day to the worship of the Lord. A meat and drink offering would be made by the priest on behalf of God's people through the shedding of blood for the atonement and covering of their sins. The blood of these animal sacrifices was also used to sprinkle on the priest's garments and the altar before presenting the offering before God. These animal sacrifices were made in remembrance of their daily sins which required atonement and the purging of their guilt from these sins (Heb. 10:2-3).

However, the blood of any depraved man or animal was simply insufficient to pay for the sins of man. The depraved man only daily increases his debt (Heidelberg Catechism, L.D. 5, Q&A 13). Moreover, God will not punish any other creature for the sin which man has committed, and no creature can sustain the burden of God's eternal wrath against sin, so as to deliver others from it (L.D. 5, Q&A 14; Heb. 10:4). Hence, the perfect sacrifice must be both very man and very God. One would presuppose O.T. sacrifices were inconsequential then? Not at all, since God ordained it. These sacrifices served as types of the coming of the perfect sacrifice: Christ. Christ was both God and man (John 1:13-14). Unlike corrupted man, Christ was perfectly holy, without spot or blemish (1 Pet.

1:19), and only His blood is able to redeem us (Luke 22:44, John 19:34).

In the O.T., circumcision was another means through which blood was shed. God instructed Abraham to circumcise himself and every other man within his household. This sacrament involved the cutting of the foreskin of an eight-day-old male child and signified a token of the covenant which God made with Abraham (Gen. 17:11). In addition, this outward sign depicted inward devotion to the Lord and separation from sin (Deut. 30:6, Col. 2:11).

This bloody O.T. sacrament performed upon little babies has since been replaced by baptism in the New Testament (N.T.). This is because there was no need for further shedding of blood, not even circumcision, given how the blood of Christ on the cross has fully fulfilled God's demand for justice. The sprinkling of water involved in baptism is like unto the washing of our sins and regeneration through the blood of Christ. During the Great Commission, Jesus commanded His disciples to baptize all nations in the name of the Triune God (Matt. 28:16-20). When we are baptized in the name of the Father, God the Father witnesseth and sealeth unto us that He makes an eternal covenant of grace with us. When we are baptized in the name of the Son, He sealeth unto us the washing away of all our sins and the inheritance of righteousness before God. Likewise, when we are baptized in the name of the Holy Ghost, He sealeth unto us that He will dwell in us and sanctify us to be members of Christ (Form for the Administration of Baptism). Through this sacrament, we receive comfort and full assurance of God's goodness towards us, putting off the old man of sin and putting on

the new man. Henceforth, we are able to lead a new and godly life (Belgic Confession, Article 34).

Does that then mean that the ways of salvation in the Old and New Testaments are different? Not at all, as this is the error of dispensationalism. Though circumcision and baptism are different in administration, both are outward signs reflecting the same spiritual truth of salvation achieved by Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

Today, we partake of the Lord's Supper in remembrance of Christ's holy sacrifice and the work that He accomplished on the cross: the satisfaction of God's wrath against sins and the imputing of His righteousness unto us. As His blood was shed only for those He has chosen, we can be assured of His love and grace towards us (John 3:16, Eph. 1:7, Rom. 5:8-9). Through this sacrament, we are made partakers of His blessings of eternal life, righteousness, and glory (Form for the Administration of the Lord's Supper). Likewise, through baptism, we are reminded of the blessed covenant that we have with God despite being sinners. With this in mind, we ought to consecrate our lives to show forth gratitude and praise to our almighty God.

Beloved brethren, are we now convinced of the importance of blood? Let us hold fast to the truth of the perfect sacrifice of Christ on the cross, who with His precious blood has fully satisfied for our sins.

WEAKNESS

>> Lee Kong Wee



Lee Kong Wee is an elder in CERC.

Introduction

The rubric under which the committee has asked me to write this article is ‘*Strength of Youth*’. Interesting, then, that the topic is about ‘weakness’. As I pondered on this apparent irony, it soon (ought to have been sooner — that’s a weakness) dawned upon me that strength and weakness are closely connected. In fact, they almost always appear together, like two sides of the same coin. To speak of one without mentioning the other is almost impossible. In any person, we can find both strengths and weaknesses. So it is with any church. The scope of this article is confined to the weaknesses of a church. Among many weaknesses we can find in a church, in my judgment, the two main ones are in the areas of preaching and discipline.

Preaching

Preaching has fallen on hard times in the contemporary church scene. God-centred, Reformed, expository preaching is a rarity among churches all over the world. The typical sermon or ‘sermonette’ that is sounded from the pulpit of many churches is nothing more than a superficial explanation of the Bible passage or text, without proper reference to its biblical and

historical context, varnished over with illustrations or personal stories that supposedly apply the text, and emotionally charged with calls to faith through repeated but empty pronouncements of God’s love and desire to bless the hearers. This is especially true in churches who have departed from the historic truths of the Reformation and have embraced the worldly culture of consumerism and man-centred free-will. Because the focus is on winning ‘converts’, the content of the gospel is modified, diluted and packaged to attract as many people as possible to ‘accept’ it. The gospel is promoted and ‘sold’ as a commodity in the religious market, as if seeking to gain the largest market share. The ‘bad news’ — that we are vile and depraved sinners under the just judgment of a holy God against our sins and condemned to hell, and are absolutely helpless to save ourselves — is often removed; while the supposed ‘good news’ that ‘God loves you’ makes Him out to be nothing more than a human(-like) Being who yearns to love and save sinful man but can only stand helplessly by waiting for man to accept His love. In some churches, preaching is side-lined by their focus on ‘worship’, by which they mean bands and choirs leading the congregation in singing praise songs on a stage, the whole atmosphere hardly distinguishable from a musical or rock concert. Some other churches elevate the sacraments to the place of prominence in their worship services, teaching that the sacraments in and of themselves confer grace to the partakers, apart from the preaching.

Over against such preaching and worship, the faithful church of Jesus Christ maintains that sound preaching is the chief means of grace that nourishes and builds up the church. Sound preaching that interprets the Word correctly and applies it to God’s people (whether office-bearers, husbands, wives, parents, adults, young people, children) provides the spiritual food and nutrition necessary for healthy spiritual growth. Superficial and insipid preaching weakens the church and causes her to become malnourished. Worse yet, false preaching poisons the church until she dies. Of course, the sacraments that confirm the message of the preaching, as well as personal spiritual disciplines of Bible-reading, prayer and meditation are also means of grace that build up our faith. But the chief and primary means is preaching, faithful and lively preaching, for preaching has everything to do with the Word, and *the* Word is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, Who is All-in-all. The sum and substance of our Christian faith is Jesus Christ. He is the foundation, the object, the focus, the end (goal) of our faith. Preaching is powerful and life-giving because it proclaims Jesus Christ, the *living* Word of God (1 Cor. 1:18, 23-25).

Hence, the Reformed church has always insisted on the proper training of men for the ministry. The human instrument, called to such a sacred and weighty responsibility of preaching, must be thoroughly trained and equipped that he may rightly divide the Word of truth. And only when he does so, and proclaim the Word of the King

(not his own) faithfully, will the church be gathered from without and within, and preserved in her generations. In this regard, the elders of the church must be conscientious in their duty to supervise the preaching. They must ensure (and elders must pray for much wisdom to do so) that the pulpit is well-guarded against errors and false doctrines creeping in. Elders must maintain the primacy of preaching in the worship and life of the church. Working closely with the minister, they see to it that the preaching is faithful and lively, and addresses the needs of the congregation so that she is instructed, admonished, comforted, built up, strengthened and made zealous unto good works.

The weakness and strength of a church's preaching has to do with ministers and elders. But also members, in the aspect of taking heed to what we hear, and obeying. "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (James 1:22). "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts" (1 Pet. 1:19). "Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock" (Matt. 7:24). We all understand that *merely* listening to the preaching Sunday after Sunday will do us no spiritual good. Each one of us in the pew must *lay hold* of the Word preached *by faith*, and earnestly pray that the Spirit of Christ will apply that

Word to our peculiar circumstances, expose our sinful nature and actual sins in our lives, and work repentance and faith in our hearts. Our primary concern when listening to a sermon is that the Word will examine and expose *us* in its searching light, and sanctify *us*, and not *that* brother or sister sitting over there. From this perspective of how we listen to preaching, a church's preaching can be weak because the hearers do not take heed to the preaching as they should, and the Word falls on the wayside, on stony ground or among thorns.

How does CERC do in preaching? It is easy to cast our glance at other churches, but let's turn the spotlight on ourselves. What are the weaknesses in our preaching? How can I as a minister, an office-bearer, a member strengthen the preaching?

Discipline

Another area of weakness in many churches is the proper exercise of Christian discipline. Many churches struggle to do so, or even neglect it, because of its difficulty. Discipline is difficult because of our fallen and depraved natures. We tend to minimise our own sins and magnify the sins of others, when it ought to be the other way round (Matt. 7:1-5). When we see a weakness or sin in a brother or sister, or are sinned against, instead of going to the brother or sister privately to seek their good and repentance, we so easily break the 9th commandment (HC Q&A 112). When our brother sins against us or we against him, instead of

forgiving him or seeking his forgiveness, we break the 6th (HC Q&A 105-107) and 9th commandments. We are prone to be uncharitable and judgmental, to esteem ourselves better than others, to evaluate ourselves to be more righteous than others and are very slow to admit that we could be wrong and others right. The Session, though vested with the authority of Christ to exercise church discipline, is not immune to pride, a judgmental spirit and impatience when dealing with a sinning member. Hence, the proper exercise of discipline, individually and as a church, requires a deep and abiding sense of our *own* sinfulness (1 Tim. 1:15, Gal. 6:1, 1 Cor. 10:12), coupled with an unfeigned, fervent love for our neighbour that covers the multitude of his sins (1 Pet. 4:8). This does not mean we condone all kinds of sins in the church and ignore them, but it means we are slow to pass judgment, and even when called to do so, are inclined to judge and speak of our brothers and sisters in the most favourable manner (Canons Head 3/4, Article 15). That many churches are weak in the exercise of Christian discipline is not surprising — once we understand (do we?) the ugly pride and self-righteousness that are rooted so firmly in our sinful natures.

Nevertheless, difficult as it may be due to our depraved sinful natures, the church must exercise proper discipline because it is the command of the King of the Church Himself (Matt. 16:19, 18:15-21, 1 Cor. 5:4-5, 11-12). To this

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then she is strong, for then she depends and leans upon the
Almighty Arm of God, which upholds, protects and preserves her
through all her weakness.**

end, members and office bearers must earnestly pray that God will give us humility and lowliness of mind, love and forbearance when we deal with one another in the church. Let us take heed to the exhortation of the apostle Paul to the church at Ephesus: “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you” (Eph. 4:31-32); and to the church at Philippi: “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves” (Phil. 2:3). Let us pray that the Lord will give office bearers the tenderness and firmness of our Good Shepherd when dealing with

wayward members, exercising this key of the kingdom with godly courage and wisdom. And even when the extreme remedy of excommunication must be carried out, what members and the unbelieving world must see in the process and act is a *manifest* spirit of love in seeking the repentance and rescue of the sinning brother, and not an impatient, harsh, and unforgiving attitude towards him. God has wisely ordained the proper exercise of Christian discipline as the means to preserve the purity and peace of the church. The mark of a church that is strong in the exercise of discipline is a great blessing of peace within her.

How does CERC do with regard to the exercise of discipline? As individual members, how do I interact and speak

with my brother and sister when there is offence? As office-bearers, how faithful are we in the exercise of this key of the kingdom in shutting the kingdom against unbelievers, and opening it to believers?

Conclusion

The church of Jesus Christ in this world has many weaknesses — because of her sinfulness. But in her weakness lies her strength. When she *knows and confesses* her weakness and sinfulness, then she is strong (2 Cor. 12:9-10). For then she depends and leans upon the Almighty Arm of God, which upholds, protects and preserves her through all her weakness and warfare until she reaches safely home in heaven. There she will be without weakness, perfect in strength.

HOPE PROTESTANT REFORMED CHURCH IN REDLANDS, CALIFORNIA

>> Paul McKelvey

Paul McKelvey is a member of the Young Adults Society of Hope PRC in Redlands, CA, USA.

The 1930s was quite an exciting time in Redlands, California. In 1932, members organised First PRC of Redlands (which in the 1950s became Hope PRC) consisting of 35 families and having the services in a rented Seventh-day Adventist church. Rev. Gerrit Vos served as our first minister from 1932 to 1943. During that time, the families built their first church, started the first school in the PR denomination, and would eventually have their first school building.

Rev. Peter De Boer became the new minister and served the congregation

from 1943 to 1948. The next minister was Rev. Leonard Vermeer who served from 1948 to 1953. The congregation grew from 55 families in 1948 to about 80 in 1953. Unfortunately, the growth was not going to last. In 1953, the PRC denomination suffered a massive split due to doctrinal errors and many congregations suffered; Redlands being no exception. Initially, 11 families remained, but within a few weeks, the number rose to 27 families. We lost our school, church, and parsonage in the split. However, God provided us with the means to meet for worship as the congregation struggled through this trial.

God led a new minister, Rev. Henry Kuiper, to look after his flock from 1954 to 1958. In 1959, God blessed

our congregation with another minister, Rev. Herman Veldman, and the members were able to purchase a new church building and parsonage. Rev. Veldman served his flock until 1963, and in 1964, Rev. Cornelius Hanko took up the ministry to serve at Redlands. His ministry lasted until 1971 with the congregation consisting of 29 families.

In 1972, the congregation grew to 33 families, Rev. Marvin Kamps became our minister. He served the congregation until 1976 when Rev. Jason Kortering took over ministerial duties. In 1975, the members completed the building of Hope Christian School at 1309 East Brockton Avenue, the same school which the author attended with all the significant expansions and

improvements which would happen in the years following 1975. Rev. Kortering continued his ministerial duties until 1979. The congregation had grown to 37 families. During this time, we had sold our building to use the funds to build the current building where Hope PRC meets for worship at 1307 East Brockton Avenue. During the time for construction, we rented out the church that was originally constructed in 1933 and lost in the 1953 split.

Between the years 1979 to 1981, Redlands did not have a minister. Although without a shepherd, the church continued on looking for a new minister while continuing to grow. Finally, in 1982, God answered the congregation's need for a new minister, and sent Rev. Kenneth Koole. He served the church from 1982 to 1989, overseeing 42 families. In 1983, the church held their first service in their newest church on Thanksgiving Day. After 30 years, our congregation had a school, church, and parsonage once more to call their own.

Rev. Arie den Hartog became our minister in 1990 and served his calling until 2001. The author remembers him quite well and is thankful to God for having this man here. The congregation grew to 52 families at this point. In 2002, God appointed Rev. Martin Vander Wal as minister where he served until 2011. Then, in 2011 till the writing of this article, God sent his faithful servant Rev. Brian Huizinga to serve as our minister. A brief thanks to all the prior ministers for their labours here and to Rev. Huizinga for his current ministry. May he serve and lead God's flock in the coming years as this world grows ever darker and the light seems to shine less with each passing day.

The history of Hope Redlands is much easier to describe than her congregational life. Although smaller than some of her sister congregations, Hope Redlands still has about 77 families. With a church being that large, the life of the congregation becomes complex quite quickly. If the author can speak in broad, general terms, many of the men work out of home with a few working from home. There are many stay-at-home moms, while some of the younger married or unmarried women have jobs. There is a great diversity in occupations among the men, such as engineering, construction, landscaping, finance, computers, education, medical, etc.

An aspect of Hope Redlands is our drive for fundraisers. The vast majority, if not all of the funding for the school, church, and other causes, come from the congregation itself. Some of the annual events feature some type of fundraiser for the school or some society within the Church. Some of the fundraisers could be special dinners ranging from casual potlucks to formal dinners, volleyball tournament, jog-a-thon, golf tournament, pie social, chili cook-off, music night, and window washing. Recently other fundraisers have become a staple, such as a garage sale where the members bring items to sell to the general public. The funds go to help raise money for the school to pay for the expenses.

Although evangelism efforts are not unique to Hope Redlands, the congregation has different avenues to evangelise which other churches may not be able to do. Throughout the year in Redlands, the city hosts a Farmer's Market. Local farmers and various other solicitors go to one specific street on a Thursday night, weather

permitting, to sell their goods. During the summer months, the evangelism committee leases a space with which to engage the local populace about the church in Redlands and a door to the gospel. Apart from the farmer's market, the evangelism committee has contact with men in the California prison system. Currently, the committee has correspondence with 42 prisoners. Despite some of these men never being able to leave prison for their past sins, the men by the grace of God have come to know of the gospel as set out by God's Word. For some men, they came out of false religions or heretical teachings of Christianity. The men are truly hungry to hear such a word after being so long in the dark. Truly the harvest is plentiful. From time to time, the committee sends a few men to the prisoners to bring materials or to have a meeting with them.

Each church within the Protestant Reformed denomination has its own unique character. The congregation in Redlands is no different. Apart from many, if not all of the other churches of the denomination, Hope lives in an arid climate where the air has little to no humidity for most of the year. The summers are especially hot and dry. We love to show hospitality and share our warm climate with visitors. Come visit!

THE RELATION OF JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION ACCORDING TO THE REFORMED FAITH

>> Prof. David Engelsma



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

What These Saving Works Are

The importance of this topic, not only for Reformed Christians, but also for all Christians is that justification and sanctification are the two great saving works of Jesus Christ by His gospel and Spirit in this life.

The apostle teaches these works of salvation in the epistle to the Romans. He teaches justification in chapters 3-5. Being justified, we have peace with God and access into this grace wherein we stand (5:1, 2). The apostle teaches sanctification in chapters 6-8. "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" (6:1).

Justification is God's work by the gospel of delivering the elect sinner from the guilt and punishment of sin. He declares the believing sinner righteous. The benefit is peace with God.

Sanctification is God's work by the gospel of delivering the elect, and now justified, sinner from the pollution and reigning power of sin. He makes the believing sinner holy. The benefit is an honourable and God-glorifying

life. Sanctification delivers the believer from the shame and misery of a life dominated by sin.

The Relation between These Saving Works

Both justification and sanctification are gracious works of God. Neither is the accomplishment of the sinner himself. God justifies, and God sanctifies. In neither work does the sinner cooperate with God in saving the sinner. It is a mistake, a corruption of the gospel of grace, to teach that, whereas God justifies, the sinner himself cooperates with God in his sanctification.

It is true that the believer is called actively to sanctify himself (see 2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Pet. 1:15, 16). The explanation, however, is that God works the holiness of the believer by means of the irresistible call to Him to sanctify himself. God sanctifies in such a way that He makes the believer active in God's work of sanctification.

The glorification of the predestinated sinner of Romans 8:30 includes, if it is not chiefly, the work of making the sinner holy already in this life. Holiness of life is genuine glory as unholiness is shame, and it is God, God alone, who glorifies, as it is God alone who justifies.

The relation of the two saving works is that Jesus Christ always accomplishes both of the works in the elect sinner simultaneously. Whom He justifies, them He also glorifies, that is, sanctifies (Rom. 8:30). The explanation is that Jesus is a complete Saviour. As sin has two damning, shaming, destroying

aspects — guilt and pollution — so also Jesus as the Saviour delivers from both aspects, that is, from sin in its entirety. Further, once the sinner is justified, sin no longer has the right to rule over the justified sinner. Justification is the legal warrant for sanctification, as it also has sanctification as its goal. To the woman taken in adultery, Jesus declared, "Neither do I condemn thee," that is, "I justify you," and in the next breath, "sin nor more," that is, "I sanctify you" (John 8:11).

Justification is perfect already in this life. Sanctification, in contrast, is very much imperfect in the earthly life of the child of God.

It is heresy, therefore, and a reproach upon Jesus, to teach that Jesus is the Saviour of some persons, but not the Lord of their lives, that is, that He forgives, but does not sanctify. Likewise, antinomism is heretical. This is the false doctrine that Jesus justifies humans, but does not sanctify them, with the result that the lives of some justified children of God are not lived

in accordance with the law of God.

The relation of justification and sanctification includes an important difference. Justification is perfect already in this life. The justified sinner is perfectly righteous in the judgment of God. He will be no more righteous in the final judgment than he is today. Imputed to him is the perfect, complete obedience of Jesus Christ.

Sanctification, in contrast, is very much imperfect in the earthly life of the child of God. In fact, in this life this saving work always remains only a very small beginning (see the Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 114, where the German original is *“einen geringen anfang,”* *“geringen”* translating as “slight,” or “very small”). Even the holiest of believers, let us say, the apostle Paul, is “carnal, sold under sin” (Rom. 7:14), at the very end of his life. He never does the perfectly holy work that he desires to do, and always does the sinful act that he desires not to do. This is the imperfection of sanctification in this life that is the humbling message of Romans 7.

Nevertheless, in the sanctified believer the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ reigns, not the remaining, indwelling power of depravity. The manifestation of the rule of holiness in the believer is that he repents of his sins, sincerely

strives to love God and the neighbor, and begins to live according to all the commandments of God. He does not supinely give himself over to the temptations of the wicked world and to the lusts of his own sinful nature. Although the “[sinful] flesh lusteth against the Spirit,” so that we “cannot do the things that [we] would”, the Spirit wars “against the flesh”, so that we do will to do the good, and begin to “be led of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:17, 18). Christ rules him, not the devil.

The Reformed creed, the Canons of Dordt, rightly describes sanctification as deliverance from the “dominion” of sin. It is not deliverance from the “body” of sin (see Canons, 5.1). Not yet!

Inasmuch as sanctification is never perfect in this life, it can be, and is, progressive, as justification is not, being perfect. The Spirit of Christ works holiness in the believer in such a way that he loves God more at 80 than he did at 17. This love exerts itself so that he hates his sinful nature and the depraved world more vehemently at 80 than he did at 17. He is himself as totally depraved by nature at 80 as he was at 17, but his crucifying of that nature at 80 is more determined and intense than it was at 17. His sorrow over yielding to that nature is deeper. And his yielding to the Spirit to work

in him is more heart-felt.

The new obedience is still small until the day of death, but it is a mightier beginning. It exercises itself by being more careful to avoid temptations and by praying more zealously that God not lead the believer into temptation, but deliver him from evil.

Advance in holiness reveals itself also by a longing for deliverance from his sinful nature and sins through death that the 80-year old did not have as fervently at 17.

The Means of Justification and of Sanctification

Whatever may be the differences between the two outstanding saving works of Jesus Christ, they are both alike in that Christ accomplishes them by faith, and by faith alone. The means both of justification and of sanctification is faith.

It is, or ought to be, beyond question in Reformed and Presbyterian churches that justification is by faith.

It has not so clearly and definitely been established that also sanctification is by faith, and by faith alone. Here and there are troubling rumblings, and even expressly stated declarations, that sanctification is by the law, at least, partly. That is, the means and power

**Both justification and sanctification are gracious works of God.
Neither is the accomplishment of the sinner himself.
God justifies, and God sanctifies.**

of the holiness of the child of God is the law. This amounts to the doctrine that the believer himself accomplishes his holiness. Jesus saves in justification. But the believer himself saves in sanctification, if not exclusively, then by cooperating with Jesus. This implies that the salvation of the believer depends upon him himself in one fundamental aspect of salvation.

The ground put forward for the false doctrine is, in general, the important place of the Ten Commandments with regard to the Christian life in the theology of the Reformed church and in the life of the Reformed believer. Specifically, the basis that is supposed to undergird the doctrine that sanctification is by the law is the Reformed confession that the law is the guide, rule, or standard of the holy life of the believer.

But a rule, or standard, is not a means. Observance of a standard is not the power of living according to the standard. The power of sanctification

is the gospel of Jesus Christ. The law cannot sanctify, any more than it can justify. “By the commandment sin... become[s] exceeding sinful” (Rom. 7:13).

Both with regard to justification and to sanctification, salvation is by faith, and by faith alone. Neither in justification nor in sanctification is salvation by the law. Jesus is the Saviour. As He justifies, so also does He sanctify *by faith, and by faith alone*. The issue at the Jerusalem synod was as much the holy life of sanctification as it was justification. Peter proclaimed that God purified the hearts of the Gentiles “by faith” (Acts 15:9). The meaning is: by faith *alone*.

That faith, not the law, is the power and means of sanctification is creedal for Reformed Christians. Article 24 of the Belgic Confession — the article on sanctification — declares that it is “true faith” that causes man “to live a new life...freeing him from the bondage of sin...[and] which excites man to the practice of those works which God has

commanded in his Word”.

Therefore, all of salvation is gracious. Grace delivers from sin’s power, as it also delivers from sin’s guilt. Like righteousness, so also holiness is not the sinner’s own doing, by keeping the law, but the doing of Jesus by the gospel.

For sanctification, therefore, as for justification, we believing sinners are to look to, and depend upon, Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ alone.

“Christ, having redeemed us by his blood, renews us also by his holy Spirit”, and that in such a way, namely, by means of faith, that our good works are the “fruits”, not of the law, but “of our faith” (Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 86).

Sanctification, which has the law as the guide of its holy life, is not the product in oneself of the efforts of the believer to keep the law, but “the grace of the Holy Spirit” (Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 115).

BOOK REVIEW: HOLDING HANDS, HOLDING HEARTS

>> Noelene Wong



Noelene Wong is a member of CERC.

Dating being a 20th-century invention, there is no mention of the word in the Bible. It does not tell you directly who you should date, whether it be Peter or John, or what activities you should do on dates. Nevertheless, the Bible is filled with principles that apply to the dating process. The book *Holding Hands, Holding Hearts* is a helpful read and guide to explore dating and relationships from the biblical perspective. This book review shares a few pointers of that.

Relationships are hard

Relationships in marriage were easy, until the fall.

Genesis 3:7: “And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.”

Sin brought about God’s curse upon Adam, Eve and the whole human race after them. The curse has destroyed our friendship and fellowship with God. It has also damaged our relationships

with one another. The marriage design of commitment, intimacy and interdependence, which should be developed while dating, has been twisted. Instead of committing to each other, partners often seek their own self-centred concerns. Instead of intimacy, there is shame and things done outside in secrecy. Instead of interdependence, conflicts prevail. There is more hurt to each other than enjoyment due to God's curse upon us.

Additionally, God's specific curse upon the woman due to sin is the pain in childbirth and her desire towards her husband (Gen. 3:16). A woman under the curse of God puts the man above God in her heart. The man becomes an idol whom she seeks to possess, control and rule for her carnal desires. This is clearly seen and expressed in numerous advertisements and shows worldwide through the large emphasis on beauty and sex to entice men. However, this worldly obsession can also be found in our own hearts through the old man of sin.

Furthermore, God's specific curse upon man is the daily anguish of labouring all the days of his life on earth (Gen. 3:17-19). Instead of ruling and leading the relationship and family, the man overlooks or neglects her under the heavy burden and weight of work. We too are not immune to this as the old man of sin still lies in our hearts.

Therefore, relationships are difficult.

We struggle in marriage and dating because of the effects of sin in us. But there is good news, hope is in Christ.

Learning to love

Our problem of sin can be fixed through Jesus. By His death and resurrection, we are redeemed from the curse of God (Eph. 1:7). Through Jesus our relationship with God is restored. We are in His covenant and are given the new man that seeks after righteousness and holiness. We no longer seek each other to fulfil our emptiness and carnal desires. Rather, we are liberated to love and enjoy the blessings together as man and woman.

Colossians 3:12-17 describes how God's love enables us to love others beautifully. "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by

him." By reshaping our lives according to the Word of God, we are able to love and forgive our partner, we are able to sacrifice and serve each other. This is the fulfilment of God's law and the greatest expression of God's love for us through Jesus Christ (John 3:16).

Hence, the redeemed man leads her in love. He serves her by providing her with all her needs and sanctifies her with his words. He keeps and nourishes her like a tender plant under his care. Similarly, the redeemed woman ministers help to him in wisdom, submission and godly fear. These are virtues the Lord blesses His people with, that they may love one another with the love of God in the centre of their relationship.

Conclusion

With the knowledge of the effects of sin and our redemption through Christ, we can be aware of and avoid the potential pitfalls in dating and marriage by God's grace. As we walk soberly in obedience to His Word, we may enjoy the promises and blessings of God with one another.

Read the book to understand more clearly on what was briefly reiterated, and explore how to manage attraction, dating, commitment for marriage and waiting for marriage.

Holding Hands, Holding Hearts

by Richard D. Phillips & Sharon L. Phillips is available for loan from the CERC Library.

Relationships are difficult.

We struggle in marriage and dating because of the effects of sin in us.

But there is good news, hope is in Christ.



News from the Churches

Singapore

CERC's annual church camp will be held 10 - 13 June 2019 under the theme "Walking in the Spirit [Galatians 5:16]". Rev. Arie den Hartog will be the speaker. We pray for a time of fellowship and growing in unity as a church during this event.

USA

The PRC Seminary had its Dordt400 Conference which took place on 25 – 27 April at Trinity PRC. The conference was held as a humble remembrance and celebration of the defence of God's sovereign and particular grace through the Synod of Dordt held in the Netherlands 400 years ago. Presenters at the conference included the seminary's faculty, PR ministers and foreign ministers (including Rev. Angus Stewart from the CPRC in Northern Ireland and Rev. Mark Shand from the EPC in Australia).

The PRCA seminary has completed its second semester. Seniors (Matt Kortus and Jacob Maatman) are in the midst of preparing for their synodical exam in mid-June while Josiah Tan and Marcus Wee have returned home to Singapore for the summer. We welcome Josiah and Marcus and their families back into our midst!

A new Spanish edition of the Reformed Witness Hour (RWH) is being produced and may be found on Youtube under the channel name "PRC Español". Additionally, a reminder that all international listeners can tune in to RWH via Sermonaudio wherever you may be.

The Philippines

Maranatha PRC recently celebrated her 36th anniversary as a church. We thank God for His goodness and faithfulness in sustaining them as a church.

Rev. Daniel and Sharon Kleyn are currently on an extended furlough in USA (until 18 June) to allow Rev. Kleyn to take some courses in order to obtain an advanced degree and to prepare for classes to be taught in the PRCP seminary in the future. The tentative schedule to start training in the seminary is in August 2019 should plans for the seminary be approved in the June Classis.

Australia

The Evangelical Presbyterian Churches of Australia are having their biennial youth camp in Brisbane from 28 December 2019 to 3 January 2020. Rev. Martyn McGeown from the Limerick Reformed Fellowship of the Republic of Ireland will be their guest speaker and they wish to invite young people and young adults aged 13 and up. Please contact Megan Higgs at meggyhiggs@gmail.com for more details.



Opening Sports Day with devotions



Learning a new sport - Lacrosse



Trying out defence techniques



Practising the perfect pass



Learning another new sport - Handball



Group photo of Lacrosse participants and coaches

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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