

"Life as a newly ordained minister of the Word and sacraments is about building and deepening relationships." — Rev. Jonathan Langelak in *A Life of Friendship: The Calling of a New Minister*

"We stand here because Jesus Christ is our Head, giving to us all the blessings of our salvation and ruling every member, officebearer, and minister to gather, defend, and preserve His church."

— Lin Yang Zhi in *Enduring our Vacancy*

"Before God in prayer, the pastor must make a decision, at peace that the Lord by His Spirit will give the right direction and will bring blessings upon it." — Rev. Audred Spriensma in *The Macedonian Call*



salt shakers
joel 3:16 matthew 5:16

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PROVERBS 2:6

For the LORD giveth wisdom:
out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.

WELCOME TO THE 56TH ISSUE OF SALT SHAKERS!

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Dear Readers,

Welcome to another issue of the Salt Shakers. We thank the committee and the writers for their work in producing solidly Reformed, polemical and instructive articles for the edification of our readers.

The Salt Shakers takes seriously the responsibility to contend earnestly for the faith in these days where the truth is often silenced, and those who stand unashamedly for the truth are persecuted or labelled falsely as radicals. Only by way of doing sharp polemics is the truth preserved from error and developed in its fullness to the glory of God and the welfare of His church.

The spiritual fathers of the Reformation developed a heritage of strong polemics against the errors of their day. Their polemics are enshrined in our creeds. It is our responsibility to preserve this unique aspect of our Reformed heritage, an aspect that is often despised today, even by those who profess to be Reformed.

Welcomed in this issue is an article devoted to the celebration of our new sisterly relationship with the Protestant Reformed Churches of the Philippines (PRCP). The Session of CERC has decided to establish a sisterly relationship with the PRCP, on account of our unity in the Reformed faith. We rejoice in this new sisterly relationship and pray God's blessing upon it. We warmly invite their members to sign up for the Salt Shakers.

We hope that you profit from this issue of the Salt Shakers.

Blessings,
Aaron



ENDURING OUR VACANCY

>> Lim Yang Zhi



Lim Yang Zhi is a member of CERC and is the chairman of the *Salt Shakers* committee.

Vacancies have been part of our history in CERC. Yet our past experiences have not made the present situation any easier to bear. From the member's viewpoint, a vacancy means one less member in church to undertake any work, one less officebearer to bring the word to us, and virtually no one to preach. From the officebearer's viewpoint, a vacancy means one less brother to carry the ever-heavy, ever-demanding pastoral work and one less brother to keep our Session in the right spiritual course.

How can we bear through such times? Well, we could look back at how we bore through such times. Through our history, God has provided ministers time and again; and when He did not, He provided visiting ministers from sister churches to bring the word to us on Sundays. These provisions have been abundant, and, in God's providence, we still receive them.

Yet, with only the pulpit covered, the loss felt in a vacancy remains. Certainly another minister would, in a way, "do the trick". But let's remember that our ecclesiastical sisters have needs equal to ours (retiring ministers, vacant

churches of their own, etc.). And even if, D.V., our brothers in seminary should be declared eligible, the closest call we would give to him is at least twenty-two months away.

At this point, we should realise that playing this waiting game helps quite little. The game sometimes gets over us; in foolishness, we soon start to focus on what we *don't have* — a minister of our own. At worst, that focus leads us to be disappointed with God. At best, that focus leads us to blame-shift the problems in our church upon this lack.

But God never calls us merely to note, "I don't have this or that in my life", much less to be discouraged and blame-shift! Always, He calls us to see what He has given to us *right now*.

That is what we need to do now as a church — look at what our great God has given CERC!

Members of CERC, you and I, by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, have been tempered into this church. That same Spirit has given us the calling to be holy. Indeed, He has made us holy by regenerating and daily sanctifying us; at the same time, we are commanded to be holy. And CERC will not be God's holy temple if we do not strive to be holy. But when we do strive, God works in and through us to preserve our church without a minister.

Where should we start? Start by going to the church directory. Look through every card; think about the members

you see in the photos; think about how they are currently serving the entire congregation. Most of us should be surprised at how much everyone plays a part in the existence of our church.

Paul speaks of the place every member has in the church. He describes it this way: "God hath tempered the body together" (1 Cor. 12:24).

To temper something is to unite many parts with different characteristics into one organism for a single function. Every member perfectly fits in the one body of Christ. Just as our feet fit our bodies, so does that married couple fit our church. Just as our ears fit our bodies, so does that single person fit our church (vss. 15-16).

Fitting perfectly together, the members of the body work together for the functioning of the church. No one, in other words, is useless. Just as no one may say the eye is useless, so may no one say such of that couple in our church who is seemingly uninvolved in anything else in the church except for their covenant child. Just as no one may say the ear is useless, so may no one say cynically, "That brother is only good at putting money into the offering bag" (vss. 17, 19).

Fitting perfectly for the function of the body is only possible because *God* tempers the members. If God does not temper each of us, our church will be spiritually shambolic. But God tempers us — He regenerates us by His Spirit, justifies us by faith alone in Christ alone, and strengthens us by His grace to walk in His ways. All of His works

in us shape us to be that perfect fit for Christ's body.

What is the function (calling) of that body? Paul's focus in this chapter was not the church's calling; however, in his letter to the Ephesians, Paul turns to that calling: "Ye...are built upon... Jesus Christ himself...in whom all the building...groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord" (Eph. 2:20-21). To be a holy temple is the church's calling! Peter affirms this in his inspired letter: "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood..." (1 Pet. 2:5). To be a spiritual house and a holy priesthood — that is the church's calling!

Did you notice that both passages spoke of the church's calling *to be holy*? How important holiness is to the church of Jesus Christ! Holiness — to put away sin and to give ourselves entirely to God's causes — is top priority for every member of the body of Christ. Is it your top priority? Is it mine? Do we believe every member has a vital part in maintaining that holiness in CERC?

How should holiness be our top priority? I, a member of the body of Jesus Christ, have to strive for holiness in my life before I think about the holiness of the church. Daily, that warfare between the old and new man must be mine. That pride, that lust, and that worldly-mindedness, daily hindering me from holiness, must be the sins I wrestle with. What is your hindering sin, youth? What is yours, young adult, parent, and retiree?

Then, how would we know our sins, even our *sinfulness*? How would we know what it means to give ourselves to God? Knowledge, *doctrine*, is essential for holiness. You and I must know our

triune God, whose eyes are too pure to behold sin. You and I must know the total corruption of our souls apart from the omnipotent grace of God in Jesus Christ. You and I must know the warning of our Saviour, that not many in these last days will support, encourage, and influence us to be the holy temple of God, but that many will criticise, discourage, and tempt us *not* to be holy (Matt. 24:9-12). Daily, our devotions with the word reinforce this knowledge; daily, our personal reading of this magazine and others reinforces this knowledge; daily, the sermons published online reinforce this knowledge. Have we, on our own, sought for this knowledge in our desire to be holy?

When holiness is our personal endeavour, we will work together in this endeavour. You and I, working together to restore the brother fallen into sin; you and I, working together in Bible studies to know the truth more; you and I, provoking one another unto love and good works through private conversations — that is the way we are *a holy temple in the Lord*.

Members of CERC, you and I, by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, have been tempered into this church. CERC will not be God's holy temple if we do not strive to be holy. But when we do strive, God works in and through us to preserve our church without a minister.

To our vacant church, God has given you and me.

God has given us one another to be his holy temple — and He has given us *officebearers*.

These men are called by God. Through the ordered process of nomination, approbation, election, and ordination, God guides His church to call these men to the office. These men are also qualified by God. All through their lives, by the Spirit of Christ, God sanctifies men and develops in them the spiritual gifts necessary to serve in the office.

In their office, these men are also called to maintain holiness within our church. One of the most important ways they maintain holiness is by supervising the preaching of the holy word. Sunday after Sunday, they listen and ensure that what is spoken is nothing but the holy word. Another important way they maintain holiness is by their specific offices. The elders rule us, so that we maintain a holy personal life. The deacons wisely distribute the offerings to those in need — a work that consecrates the money we give for God's work.

Nevertheless, these men are just that — *men*. Though they are called and qualified by God, they are sinful men, even the chief of sinners. Their sins mar the holy calling God has given them. Their faults hinder the use of their spiritual gifts.

No man, no *officebearer*, is perfect, and that imperfection is all the more accentuated in a vacant church. Without a minister, the remaining elders and deacons will work more closely with the flock. The flock, in turn, will see the weaknesses of our officebearers more clearly. There will be greater cause to be disappointed and stumbled...and greater temptation to dishonour and slander our officebearers because of their weaknesses.

All this is not said to grant immunity to our session. By no means are they free of any accusation (see 1 Tim. 5:19-21 and our Church Order, Art. 79-80). All this is said so that we members remain aware of the devil's temptation to create disunity in the body through these sinful uses of the tongue.

Knowing that our session is human and sinful, what has God called you and me to do? God calls us to *exhort* them. As Paul commanded the Colossians to "say unto Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord" (Col. 4:17), so are we commanded to exhort our session to remain steadfast in their work. Speak individually to our elders; write a letter to our deacons. Direct them to the word that lays down their calling.

And *encourage*. The greater the weaknesses, the more urgent is a word of encouragement. When David was weary from fleeing a wicked Saul, Jonathan strengthened his friend in the LORD (1 Sam. 23:16). Just before Paul departed from Ephesus to Jerusalem, he gathered and encouraged the elders

(Acts 20:17-36). So are we to encourage our session during this time of vacancy.

To our church, albeit sinful men like you and me, God has given officebearers.

Look at what God has given! Faithful members of Christ's church, faithful office-bearers.

Stop it. It's too hard. It's too hard to think God has given every member for one another's good when attendance for church activities is little. It's too hard to think God has given officebearers when we have been offended by one of them. It's too hard to think God provides during this vacancy.

Too hard — I would say, impossible! Impossible, if we look *only* at the members and *only* at the Session.

But possible, by the grace of God, when we look at *Jesus Christ*.

Jesus Christ, our Head! Jesus Christ, with us and in us! Jesus Christ, to

whom we have been united by faith, now and forever!

Members of CERC, we stand here as CERC not just because there were ministers in the past. We stand here as CERC not just because officebearers have sacrificed their lives for the good of the church. We stand here as CERC not just because you and I have been faithful members. We stand here because Jesus Christ is our Head, giving to us all the blessings of our salvation and ruling every member, officebearer, and minister to gather, defend, and preserve His church.

Look to Him at this time of our vacancy. Don't look at this member who continually falls into sin, or that member who only knows how to sulk at the lack of zeal in our church. Don't look at this elder who has erred, or that deacon who has not shown mercy. Don't look at a minister as the only hope to solve all the problems of our small congregation. Look at Christ!

That is the way to endure a vacancy.

CHURCH POLITY: CHRIST IS KING

>> Lim Yang Zhi

My brothers and sisters: I hope you would not mind a second article from the same writer in the same issue. This article was borne unexpectedly, with a view to our recent elections of officebearers. Most of us should realise from this experience that we ought to know more —not just what process works best for us, but also what biblical, Reformed church polity is. I say this not to criticise our office-bearers or members. We stand together as one church; and if there's anything that we

could do better in, each of us is duty-bound to improve.

I am not attempting a comprehensive study of Reformed church polity. All I do here is to share what I know is proper church polity, according to God's Word and our confessions. And I pray this article will spur greater discussion among members (especially the men) and personal study into this matter. Let's not forget that almost all our past instruction on church polity (Rev.

Lanning's Church Order class between services and Prof. Hanko's weeknight classes) have been incomplete. While we could wait for another minister to pick things up again, it might be better to go through some principles on our own.

The first principle must stand out to us: Jesus Christ is King of His Church.

Scripture always names Christ as the Lord and King of his church. Christ is

called *the Head* of his body (1 Cor. 12); the name of Christ means “Anointed One” — that is, called from eternity and in time to be prophet, priest, and king (Ps. 2; Matt. 3:13-17; LD 12). When Christ was exalted to His rightful glory, he was declared by the angels to be worthy to receive “power [read it as *authority*]...and *strength*...” (Rev. 5:12) Christ Himself told his disciples, “All power [again, *authority*] is given unto me...” (Matt. 28:19).

As King, He holds the strength, or power. That is the *power* of His Word and Spirit to defend and preserve us in our fellowship with Him. As King, He holds *authority*. Christ, the King, dictates to us, His church, how we ought to live as His holy temple.

As King, Christ ordains that all of us carry the office of a believer, and that select men carry the special offices of minister, elder, and deacon. These two realities, we may consider in later articles.

But first — Christ is King. Is our church ordered according to this principle? As said in the editorial, though we are without a minister, thanks be to God, Christ is still our Head! But the application of this principle goes further: Because Christ is King, standing together as a church requires us to *submit* to and to *trust* one another.

Submission is often understood as the members’ submission to Session. That is proper; but it is not complete. After admonishing the elders, Peter writes to all members: *Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility* (1 Pet. 5:5). Submission is to put ourselves under another’s God-given authority. That submission is the submission a member has, when

he follows the manner according to which Session guides a congregational meeting. That submission is the submission an office-bearer has, when a member expresses concern and even criticism of certain endeavours in the church. So long as Session and members guide their actions according to God’s Word and our confessions, we are called to submit to one another.

Some might ask what we should do when Session has not contradicted the Word, but has acted, spoken, or decided unwisely in our opinion. There are times when the lack of wisdom needs to be pointed out in an official protest. Our Church Order permits and calls for that in Article 31.

But what happens when Session, maybe even classis, disagrees with the protest? Prof. Hanko in *The Believer’s Manual For the Church Order* outlines Scripture’s way of handling such situations. I summarise them below:

- 1) Both member and office-bearer’s motive must always be the good of the church [think of Ps. 137’s beautiful expression of that motivation].
- 2) Both member and office-bearer should never think he is 100% right (Phil. 2:1-3).
- 3) In connection to the first principle, both member and office-bearer should never judge each other’s position as a mere trifle: “He’s not really for the Reformed faith”; “He’s a trouble-maker”; “He only wants to keep himself in the office” [Jam. 3:11].
- 4) Both member and office-bearer must have with each other a positive rapport — “trust.”
- 5) Humility must characterise our speech. [Psalm 131 is highly

fitting: *LORD, My heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: Neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me. Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, As a child that is weaned of his mother.*]¹

The opposite of submission is to ignore what others in church have to say about me. Rebellion is to lose sight of Christ in the church. Rebellion says, “Who are they to tell me what to do? That brother has that fault, and that elder has that weakness”. But where is Christ in all this? Is not Christ working in member and office-bearer for the church, when they bring His Word to me? Just as our wives submit to us sinful husbands, and just as children submit to sinful parents, so we must submit to one another when we live according to the Word.

For the sake of Christ, follow Peter’s command: Be subject...be clothed with humility...humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God (v. 6). To submit ourselves to one another is to humble ourselves before God and Christ. That is what we want! Christ has called us also to trust one another as a church. To trust is to believe Christ sanctifies other members and office-bearers, so that they might serve one another for the church’s good. One does not exist for the other’s harm. The member exists for the good of the office-bearer, and the office-bearer for the member’s good. Why? Because Christ, having joined us members and them office-bearers to Himself, uses each part of the body for the good of the entire body.

I could not find a passage that explicitly

¹ Verses in parentheses are cited by Prof. Hanko; verses in bracket are my additions.

calls for trust; but the proverb, *in the multitude of counsellors there is safety*, implies this trust (Prov. 11:14; 15:22; 24:6). How could the counsellors — members and session — work together to decide on a course of action that brings safety, if they think this-or-that counsellor's opinions are foolish?

The opposite of trust is to forget Christ works in and through other members and office-bearers. *To mistrust* is to lose sight of Christ in the church. I look at the brother and think he is out there to cause trouble. I look at that elder and think he just wants to do things his way and not think about others. But where is Christ in this mistrust? Maybe that brother and elder did something foolish, even sinful, causing me to doubt them; yet I ought not doubt that brother and elder. I ought to direct them to Christ to see their folly and sin, and, having done so, work actively with them for the good of the church.

Think of mistrust this way: If you

doubt that brother, sister, or office-bearer, what are you saying of Jesus Christ? That His sanctifying work in that brother is a spoof? That His anointing of that sister is unimportant, insignificant, and even worthless? That the official calling of Jesus Christ to the office-bearer is a wrong choice? We would never say that of our Lord and Saviour. Neither should we about that brother, sister, and office-bearer.

What are some ways we submit and trust now? The committee's review of our election-process will be a test of our submission. How will we submit to Session's decision of the reviewed process? It is clear that submission does not mean we may not give any suggestions. However, perhaps the decision will not be what I think is the best. But it still works; it is still biblical. Yet, it isn't what I think is best. Will I — will you — submit?

One way to trust is within the process itself. No matter the specific

process, Session is responsible for the accounting of the ballots. They will count it. Will we trust them to count fairly? We should know by now that no process is foolproof. No process, however well-organized, is free of any sinful manipulation. The creator and executor of the process is a sinful man. The crux of the matter, it seems, is trust. We establish a clear process, and trust that God keep our session from that sinful manipulation.

So much for the first principle. Brothers and sisters, consider these things according to the Word. Let us grow *together* in our understanding of Reformed church polity.

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WISDOM (4): WISDOM AND FORNICATION

>>Prof. Herman Hanko



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I remind our readers once again that wisdom is a gift of God, earned for the people of God in the cross of Christ. It is the spiritual ability of the sanctified Christian to apply the truths and principles of conduct to his own life in the world, knowing that the way of wisdom is the way to glory and fellowship with God.

Foolishness, on the other hand, is not lack of knowledge: a foolish man knows the right and only way to heaven; but knowing this important truth, he chooses instead the way to

hell even though Scripture is filled with warnings.

Our total depravity means that we are by birth foolish. We can do nothing else and do not want to do anything else but that which is foolish. Only God's marvelous work of salvation can deliver us from our foolishness and make us wise. But every one of you knows that even being saved, we are still foolish in many ways and we easily do foolish things. We need to pray daily to be made wise.

In this article, the staff has asked me to write on wisdom and fornication. While disagreement is to be found among leaders in the church over the precise meaning of the two terms, we will use the terms in the broadest sense of the word as including all sexual uncleanness. That is, we will follow what our own Heidelberg Catechism says in the explanation of the seventh commandment.

What doth the seventh commandment teach us?

That all uncleanness is accursed of God and that therefore we must with all our hearts detest the same, and live chastely and temperately, whether in wedlock or in single life.

Doth God forbid in this commandment only adultery and such like gross sins?

Since both body and soul are temples of the Holy Ghost, he commands us to preserve them pure and holy; therefore he forbids all unchaste actions, gestures, words, thoughts, desires, and whatever can entice men thereto. (Lord's Day 41, Q&A 108-109)

We live in a world saturated with sexual immorality of all kinds. I need not mention them all here, but one knows that violations of the seventh commandment are thrust into one's face in newspapers, on bill boards, in TV programmes and advertisements, in magazines of nearly every sort, in modern music and art, in the constant reports of sexual sins in government from the highest to the lowest levels, and in the Roman Catholic Church.

We are told that the sex drive in humans is only a bit weaker than the hunger

drive. Yet, no sin lies in eating (except gluttony) but every conceivable sin is committed by man driven by his sex drive. The horror of it all is that in such countries and the United States and Canada, sexual sins are ruled legal and those who oppose such sins are charged with crimes and fined or imprisoned.

The deepest reason for such awful immorality in the world is the fact that the Scriptures have been forsaken as the rule of faith and life. More specifically, in a terrible gesture of defiance of God's law, the public display of the Ten Commandments is forbidden. Where in this sad world an objective law of God is rejected, and man is left with no standard of right and wrong, lawlessness prevails. There can be no sin where there is no law. And, let it be noted that there is no moral standard because man is, according to current teaching, nothing but a descendant of an earlier form of life, probably from a chimpanzee. Evolutionism has destroyed morality. God is no longer present in His world because He did not create it. Man does as he pleases.

In this world, the child of God must live wisely in all sexual matters.

Jesus warns against violations of the seventh commandment when He applies sexual sin even to a lustful look (Matt. 5:27-28, 31-32). In the Old Testament it seems violations of God's law were common and the most terrible sexual sins were committed in the rituals that were a part of idolatry.

Paul and Peter repeatedly warn the churches that no one who commits these sins will enter the kingdom of heaven (Gal. 5:19, Eph. 4:19, 22, 29, Col. 5:8, I Pet. 2:11, 4:3, and many more).

Solomon, in his book of wisdom (Proverbs) warns repeatedly against immorality. He speaks more than once of wicked women who seduce foolish men (Prov. 2:16-19, 5:3-6, 15-20, 7:6-27) and warns against an immoral life.

The foolishness of living an immoral life is often evident in this life. A homosexual is in danger of contacting the dreaded HIV virus, and it cannot be denied that this is directly God's punishment for that terrible sin that was the immediate cause of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The many so-called social diseases are increasingly common among the population. But this wicked world does not warn against the sin; it rather creates medicines and tools to continue the sin but not suffer the consequences. How foolish!

God's people are called to be a holy people in a society awash with sin. It is difficult and, in fact, impossible to attain to such holiness as Scripture requires of us. The solution in this struggle with our own sinful flesh is to live close to God in communion with Him. That means faithful attendance in church; constant meditation in and use of Scripture, prayer, prayer, prayer. ...A guaranteed way to avoid such sins is to condemn them and condemn those who commit them and speak of them to their face. In all our life, to have God's glorious name on our lips is the sure way not to transgress His law.

It appears to me that the worst attacks of the enemy on the church will come in the area of sexual sin. Already in our country owners of bakeries are punished for refusing to sell wedding cakes to same-sex couples who are going to marry. Schools are harassed for refusing to hire homosexual teachers, churches are ransacked for

preaching against homosexuality. Anti-discrimination laws are being passed to punish anyone and everyone who dares to defend biblical principles against sexual perversion.

But, while God's in His fury sends His judgments now upon the wicked, the end is far worse. Hell opens its gaping mouth to swallow these sinners. Let them who do such things make their case to walk in sexual sin before the judgment seat of Christ and they will

learn everlastingly that foolishness is ultimately hell.

Let all who read this, take note. I plead with you to keep yourselves pure and holy while single and while living in blessed holiness with your wife or husband. Throw the TV out if it tempts you. Do not read smutty books or magazines. Do not use your phones for sexual texting or accessing pornography on the internet. Do not engage in suggestive language. Love God.

And when and if we do fall into sin, for we are all weak and prone to evil, let us run with haste to Calvary and kneel at the feet of Him who died on the cross for us. There let us weep with sorrow and plead for grace. There, in that cross is the strength, which we do not have of ourselves, to walk a new and holy life.

That is wisdom's way. Heaven lies at the end.

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).

So far in our study of Romans 1:26-27, we have seen that this key biblical passage on homosexuality condemns lesbianism and sodomy, both in the act and the desire, as lust and not love, for they are "against nature".

Divine Judgment

Now we need to note that homosexuality is itself a judgment of God for sin. Fallen man is an idolater. He rejects the one, true God, who is the Creator and Judge of all, and worships various idols. Therefore, Jehovah gives them up to sexual iniquity, either heterosexual sins (24) or those of the homosexual variety (26-27). The statement that God "gave them up" (24, 26) means that He did not stop unbelieving man from these sexual sins but rather that He delivered them over to them.

Both idolatry and homosexuality are a denial of God's clear revelation in the creation. The universe itself declares that it was formed by the eternal, omnipotent, invisible and incorruptible Deity (20, 23), yet foolish man makes and worships images of corruptible creatures (23, 25). Likewise, the human body itself proclaims the appropriateness of sexual attraction and activity between the male and the female as the "natural use" (26, 27), yet some men and women engage in homosexuality, the trespass "against nature" (26).

Idolatry and homosexuality involve sins in the vertical and horizontal directions, respectively. Idolatry is rebellion against God Almighty above, the Maker of heaven and earth. Homosexuality is the denial of the sexual complementarity of male with female only, according to Jehovah's creation of human beings on this planet.

The Most High punishes the religious sin of idolatry with the moral iniquity of homosexuality. This teaching of Scripture, including Romans 1, that God punishes sin with sin was underscored especially by Augustine (354-430), the great doctor of grace in the early church. It is also a key element in hamartiology (the doctrine of sin) in the Reformed churches.

We ought to observe the connection between idolatry and homosexuality on the one hand, and God's wrath on the other. This is how the second half of Romans 1 begins: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness" (18). The

operation of the “wrath of God” “from heaven” includes giving people over to lesbianism and sodomy (26-27).

Homosexuality, therefore, is a judgment of God and a manifestation of His wrath in this life. Unless repented of, sodomy and lesbianism, and the approval of these sins, will be grounds for further divine wrath in the world to come, for “knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, [they] not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them” (32). A few verses later, Jehovah directly addresses the unbeliever: “after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God” (2:5).

This is the order of what we have seen from the latter part of Romans 1: unregenerate man commits idolatry; in His just judgment and wrath, God gives some over to heterosexual sins and others to homosexuality; the impenitent receive the full wrath of the Almighty in hell for ever. This is a deadly serious matter. All who are outside of Jesus Christ must repent of their evil ways and trust Him as the only Saviour!

Suppressing the Truth

Romans 1 sets forth man’s amazing capacity for suppressing the truth. All know that God is God and idolatry is sin, and so are left “without excuse”:

Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse (19-

21).

But the ungodly “hold the truth in unrighteousness”, that is, they “hold [down or suppress] the truth in unrighteousness” (18). The main way or means of suppressing the truth about God is that of *exchange*, putting something else in His place: they “changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things” (23). Wherefore, the Most High gives people up (24, 26, 28) to homosexuality and all sorts of sin, as well as to His wrath, both in this world and the next.

Since this article focuses on homosexuality, we note that our twenty-first-century world is increasingly suppressing the truth regarding lesbianism and sodomy. We are constantly being told that homosexuality is merely an “alternative lifestyle” or even a good way to live. Sodomites have been relabelled as “gay”, which means happy—a deceitful misnomer.

Often this suppression of the truth concerning homosexuality takes the form of rejecting God’s Word or seeking to ignore it. Others “reinterpret” the Bible and especially Romans 1:26-27, which has been attacked by the pro-homosexual lobby for decades in articles, speeches and books. This is just one modern form of revisionism or Scripture twisting, which leads to destruction and is condemned in 2 Peter 3:16.

Despite the suppression of God’s truth regarding lesbianism and sodomy, many problems are still unavoidable for homosexuals. First, the God-given

anatomy of the human body renders procreation through homosexual activity impossible. Second, the sexual practices of homosexuals are unhygienic, disgusting and dangerous. Third, family members, friends and others indicate to them in different ways (some of which may even be unwise or sinful) that homosexuality is unnatural and wrong. Fourth, believers and the true church continue to witness to the doctrine of God’s Word regarding the seventh commandment. Fifth, despite their best efforts at denial — a striking contemporary instance of “speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron” (1 Tim. 4:2) — homosexuals still know that their lusts and activities are “against nature”. Objectively, they are guilty and, subjectively, they feel guilty in their consciences to varying degrees and at different times.

This guilt results in well-above-average instances among homosexuals of mental problems, attempted suicide and suicide. Thus this sin against the seventh commandment leads some to sin against the sixth commandment: “Thou shalt not kill” others or yourself (Ex. 20:13). Related to all this is the heightened sense of fear among homosexuals: fear of ageing, fear of death and fear of diseases.

The repeated references in Romans 1 to God’s giving people over to sin (24, 26, 28) explain how iniquity enslaves people. The world refers to drunkenness and drug abuse, for example, as “addictions”, a humanistic way of avoiding speaking about the bondage of sin.

God’s giving over people to homosexuality (26-27) helps to account for the way in which this lust

brings people into moral bondage and enslavement. They “have pleasure” in their sin (32), yet, because of the nature of homosexual activity, it can never be entirely satisfactory. Even if the person wants to stop (at some level), he or she

finds it very difficult. Homosexuality is a habit-forming sin: the longer one lives in it, the deeper it becomes ingrained and the harder it is to break from it. Yet there is comfort for the believer who once walked in this sin. In the

cross of Christ, there is forgiveness with God that He may be feared (Ps. 130:4). The elect have this promise from their heavenly Father in every trial and spiritual struggle: “My grace is sufficient for thee” (2 Cor. 12:9)!

A LIFE OF FRIENDSHIP: THE CALLING OF A NEW MINISTER

>> Rev. Jonathan Langerak



Rev. Jonathan Langerak is husband to Sarah and pastor of the Heritage Protestant Reformed Church in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, USA.

Life as a newly ordained minister of the Word and sacraments is about building and deepening relationships. If you had asked me to describe what I thought life as a new minister would be like, I would not likely have said this. I would have said that it is about learning how to write two sermons per week, preparing catechism lessons, leading Bible studies, chairing meetings, and studying to bring the Word from house to house and in pastoral counseling. To be sure, I have found all of these and more belonging to my life as a new minister of the Word.

But as I’ve reflected on my life and calling as a recently-ordained pastor, I’ve come to appreciate that everything I’ve just talked about fits into the context of relationships. By relationship, I refer to a bond of friendship and fellowship

between two or more persons which bond is based on trust and assurance. If this sounds like friendship to you, then you are right.

I am a Reformed believer who loves the Word of God and the Reformed heritage of our creeds. To me, one of the most precious aspects of that heritage is the teaching of God’s covenant of grace with us and our children. I see the doctrine (teaching) of the covenant running like a golden chain through all of the Scriptures. The Scriptures teach that the covenant of God’s grace is the relationship of friendship that He has unilaterally and unconditionally established between Himself and His elect people in His only-begotten Son Jesus Christ. With humble joy and worshipful thanksgiving, I, like every child of God does, confess and am assured that God has made that relationship of friendship with me in Jesus Christ my Lord. As my Friend-Sovereign, Jehovah God has called me to follow Him and His will for my life. He called me to be His child, and as His child He has called me into the ministry of the Word. That calling I would now like to speak of in terms of a relationship with Jesus’ people, with Jesus’ Word, and with Jesus.

Friendship with Jesus’ People

As a new minister, Jesus calls me to be

a friend of His people. The friendship of God’s people begins with my family. This is true for every minister of the gospel. If God is pleased to bring unto the minister a wife and to give to him and his wife covenant children to steward, he must look well to the needs of his family. This is one of the requirements laid upon the minister (and elder and deacon) by the Word of God. 1 Timothy 3 gives the qualifications for office of a “bishop”, that is to say, a minister or elder. Among the first of these qualification is that he must be “the husband of one wife” (1 Tim. 3:2). This does not mean that a man must be married before he is ordained into the office of minister; God has and does use single men to a great effect in the pastoral office. But this qualification means that if God gives to the minister a wife, he must be a husband to her and to her alone. Furthermore, regarding his children, 1 Timothy 3 says that the minister must be “one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity”. The inspired apostle adds this significant parenthetical rhetorical question: “For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?” (vv. 4, 5).

Beginning with his family at home, a minister’s friendship flows out to the people of his congregation. It takes time

to build a friendship with the people of God. The kind of relationship that Paul had with the church of Philippi, such that he could write to them (Phil. 1:8), “For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ” is not built in a day, or a month. I have found that even in a small congregation it is not quickly done. The people of God must have time to take the measure of their new minister; the minister must have time to learn the names, personalities, and inner lives of the members of his flock. My personal experience was that it was five to six months before members of my congregation began to approach me with pastoral needs. I was heartened by the comment of an elder, after I had noted a couple of such visits in my monthly pastor’s report, that it was a good sign that members of the congregation were approaching me for private counsel: it indicated that they had concluded I was trustworthy.

The practical realities of finding the proper balance between ruling well his own household and taking care of the church of God can be challenging for the new minister. My experience has been that God is faithful to grant grace and wisdom. He has used the calling of Christ to “feed my lambs and my sheep” (John 21:15-17) to keep me focused on my calling to minister His Word publicly and privately. As I continue in this calling, He uses it at the same time to bring me into closer relationships of friendship with His people.

Friendship with other Shepherds

Another important area of friendship for the new minister is friendships with other ministers. These men are his colleagues, among whom he is a junior member. My personal experience has been that those who are also newer to

the ministry with me can sympathise with new-minister struggles and build up with the encouragement they receive from the Word and Spirit of the Great Shepherd. Those who are more senior are a valuable source of wisdom and encouragement from many years of experience shepherding the people of God. Together, we pastor the flock of Christ as under-shepherds of the Great Shepherd, Christ Jesus.

The new minister must know that because he has been called by Jesus, the ministry is about Jesus.

When David wrote, “Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” (Ps. 133:1), he was celebrating the gift of friendship and encouraging us to think back to Eden when everything — including friendship — was good, just as God designed it to be. The Psalm ends with “life forevermore”, encouraging us to think forward to eternity when everything will forever be as it should be (v.3). This applies particularly to the relationships among pastors.

In my experience, relationships with fellow pastors are a blessing. Together, we seek wisdom from Christ on how to pastor God’s people. We labour and pray to God that Christ may be formed

in our people, “till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13).

The practical realities of ministerial life means that relationships with other pastors need to be intentional; in other words: they take work. The minister can become too busy or lie to himself, saying “I don’t need friends”. But this is contrary to God’s Word and is foolish. God created us to be in relationship with others, as well as with Himself. Ministers need one another, just as they need every other member in the body of Christ.

Friendship with Jesus

Neither a relationship with the people of God or a relationship with other ministers is possible or blessed without a relationship to Jesus Christ. This is true for all of us, no matter what our calling or position is in the church. This is true for the minister. Jesus is the only way, truth, and life; no one, no minister, comes to the Father, except by Him (John 14:6). The Lord Jesus Christ is the Mediator of the covenant of grace which Jehovah God makes with His people. In Him, all the elect are chosen to everlasting life in the covenant. By His Spirit through faith, all the elect are made conscious of their membership in the covenant as the objects of the living God’s grace and favour. Through Christ, all the elect are assured of continual membership in the covenant now and unto all eternity, because Jesus Christ is “the same yesterday, and today, and forever” (Heb. 13:8). I know and am assured by Jesus Christ that all of this is true for me.

The Lord Jesus Christ calls men to be ministers of his gospel. Jesus called me

to the ministry, as He called the apostle Paul, who confessed in Ephesians 3:7-9, "Whereof [the gospel] I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by

Jesus Christ".

The new minister must know that because he has been called by Jesus, the ministry is about Jesus. The words of John the Baptist have been my watchword, admonition, encouragement, and blessing. "A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven...He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy

therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:27, 29, 30). The minister can become in practice a believer of works-righteousness very quickly if he is not careful. It is not his responsibility to save his congregation; Christ has done that by His once-for-all sacrifice on the cross. My calling as a pastor is to remind them of the reality that Jesus says to His church "I have called you friends", (John 15:15), and the implications this has for our lives and relationships in this world, that God may be glorified in us.

UNITED IN THE FAITH

>> Lee Meng Hsien



Lee Meng Hsien is a deacon in CERC.

During the Age of Discovery, many European superpowers ruled by the Roman Catholic churches sent missionaries to occupy territories under the auspices of carrying out the great commission of evangelism, believing it to be ordained by God. Many battles ensued between the colonial powers and the indigenous tribes of the land.

Like many colonies in the earlier centuries, the history of the Philippines had not only been shaped by colonisation, but its people had learnt to endure the unrelenting wars and battles with great fortitude during those tumultuous eras. The Spanish Empire first ruled the Philippines from the

early fourteenth century and continued to do so successfully for three hundred years. During that time there were many military challenges from pirates in neighbouring countries like China and Japan. These skirmishes bore heavy financial burdens on the Spanish Empire. Later the British, the Dutch, the Americans, and the Japanese tried to lay their hands on the Philippines too, hoping to secure the archipelago comprising more than seven thousand islands. For half a millennium, the Filipinos had been waging countless battles and revolting fiercely against these colonial powers. Life had never been smooth sailing for them.

It was not until the end of World War 2 that the whole political landscape changed for the nation of the Philippines. The Philippines declared its independence on 4 July 1946. Although the people today enjoy relative peace and harmony, they have been continually plagued by poverty, corruption, natural disasters, and wars against Muslim extremism.

Singapore as a tiny nation had similar circumstances. She was once a colony of the British Empire, then fell into the hands of the Japanese Empire. At the end of World War 2, the British Empire resumed its authority of Singapore. However, Singapore gained its independence from the British Empire when she merged with the Malayan Peninsula in 1963. Unfortunately, Singapore was ousted by the federal government of Malaysia, and under extremely unfavourable circumstances was compelled to declare her own independence as a sovereign state on 9 August 1965.

As sovereign nations sharing some similar historical backgrounds, there is one other thing both denominations share in common: our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Today, both CERC and PRCP are ruled by one great empire, God's Empire. His kingdom, where on the cross Christ demonstrated his love for those who sinned against him, is unlike the Roman Empire. Christ never seeks to take advantage of or destroy those sinners that his father

has given him, but seeks to restore them into an everlasting kingdom. God seeks to provide mercy and peace to us whom he has elected, and make us enriched citizens by grace in his wonderful salvation plan. Our kinship with our eternal God is sealed by the blood of Jesus Christ. He made his own Son to be our Friend, Lord, and Saviour. Our sins are pardoned because of him. He never destroys our lives because of our sins, but he builds up and gives us eternal salvation in him alone. Such is our Friend and great High Priest. His covenant is a covenant of peace between sinners saved by grace and our sovereign God. What a magnificent kingdom we have! What a blessed people the members of CERC and PRCP are!

In Romans 1:11-12, the apostle Paul declared how he anxiously longed to hear and see how his fellow saints were prospering in the faith of Jesus Christ. He was deeply concerned about their faith in Christ, even though he had never stepped into Rome at the time this epistle was written. Although Corinth was more than 1200 kilometres from Rome, yet distance did not hinder Paul from showing his deep affection and true love for his beloved brethren whom he had not met. The ancient Rome was a hotbed for all inconceivable sins and idolatry, sexual immorality, corruptions, slavery, and adultery — Rome had it all. The gospel Paul had earnestly sought to bring them through his letter showed his deep concern for them. His vivid understanding of the scripture and of the gospel, which they had humbly embraced and received by the faith of Jesus Christ, demonstrated the supremacy of Christ's unconditional love, and God's powerful salvation plan for his beloved people. He sincerely hoped to impart to them the almighty

doctrinal truth in order to establish a strong bond of faith within them. Although this epistle was written to complete strangers in Rome at a time when they enjoyed relative peace, the apostle felt the urgent need to give them strong doctrines of the gospel to keep them in the faith of Jesus Christ, lest they face the wrath of God by their sins.

**When saints bind
together in one
singular spirit of
Christ, stand firm as
one in him, and strive
together on one firm
foundation, no enemy
shall prevail against
them.**

The same word that Paul preached to Rome has been preached to sinners in Singapore and the Philippines. Through the preaching and hearing of God's holy word, sent by ministers of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America in early days, we have embraced this precious truth, have been transformed by Jehovah, and subsequently have been established as churches of the Lord Jesus Christ. Dependent upon the sovereign grace of God, and saved through faith, we have formed into CERC and PRCP. We continue to enjoy relative peace and harmony, allowing CERC and PRCP to worship and grow in conducive and secure environments within our own sovereign states. Because both churches confess to believe the same doctrine and subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity, we have found nothing that can hinder us from establishing a sister

church relationship despite the distance of 2400 kilometres that separates us.

CERC and PRCP seek to establish a sister church relationship because both churches believe in keeping the command and the ordinance of God. In the Confession of Faith, Article 27, to which both CERC and PRCP subscribe, we confess that "Furthermore, this holy church is not confined, bound, or limited to a certain place or to certain persons, but is spread and dispersed over the whole world; and yet is joined and united with heart and will, by the power of faith, in one and the same Spirit". Besides, both denominations desire to adhere to the duty of true churches of Jesus Christ our holy God has assembled together as his people by his work of grace, work towards "submitting themselves to the doctrine and discipline thereof; bowing their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ; and as mutual members of the same body, serving to the edification of the brethren, according to the talents God has given them" (taken from Article 28 of the same Confession of Faith).

Having identified and authenticated ourselves to be the true churches marked by these characteristics: our ministers preach the pure doctrines of the gospel, we maintain the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ, and we exercise church discipline in punishing of sin in accordance to God's word, and reject all things contrary to the pure word of God, we understand the importance of deriving immense benefits when establishing a sister church relationship.

No one single church must stand alone in this perilous and wicked world. There are several blindspots and areas of weakness within a church which

Satan loves to target and destroy. In Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, the preacher, Solomon, speaks about the strength of unity in the bond of peace. When saints bind together in one singular spirit of Christ, stand firm as one in him, and strive together on one firm foundation, no enemy shall prevail against them. And no evil shall have the victory over them. A threefold cord is not easily broken. Such is the beauty of a sister church relationship. One can also see how both sides can mutually benefit in

areas such as mutual encouragement in times of need, pulpit exchanges, fellowship, and the administration of the Lord's Supper.

Organically, our members in CERC and PRCP have little differences between them, apart from the language they use during worship and the food we consume over Sunday lunches. Such differences may become great topics for our conversations and cultural exchanges. Exciting moments await

us in the coming days, as we write the final pages of this amazing declaration of a sister church relationship.

In the meantime, let us seek God's will to be done as CERC and PRCP enjoy this great opportunity to unite brethren of like precious faith despite the distance separating us. After all, the distance is just a number. Forget the distance... let us savour some great local cuisine. Shall it be Hainanese chicken rice, chilli crab, adobo, or balut?

THE MACEDONIAN CALL

>> Rev. Audred Spriensma



Rev. Audred Spriensma is the home missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches of America.

This often-used phrase comes from the vision that the apostle Paul received while he was in Troas. Recorded in Acts 16, The Spirit had expressly forbidden the apostle Paul from going west with his missionary enterprise. The Spirit had also forbidden Paul to go north into Bithynia. Luke writes that it was the Spirit of Jesus. This reminds us that the work of preaching and of missions is controlled and guided by the Spirit of the ascended Lord Jesus. That Spirit was directing the Apostle Paul and his team (Silas, Timothy, and Luke) where they were to go at that particular time and place.

They were not to go into Asia. They

were not to go into Bithynia. So, the apostle Paul and his group went west to Troas to wait upon the Lord, where He would have them go. The command to go down to Troas came from the Spirit of Jesus, who blocking the way to the provinces of Asia and Bithynia, directed the missionaries to develop the church elsewhere. In Troas, during the night, Paul received a vision from God. This was not a dream, but a direct vision that Paul received from God. (Visions were given by God at times to His saints. The Scriptures were not yet completed. God gave a vision to Peter to go to the house of the Gentiles, the house of Cornelius.) Now a vision was given to Paul. In Paul's vision at Troas, Jesus neither spoke to him directly nor sent an angel. Instead Paul saw a man who called out to him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us". The vision was of a man from Macedonia. Paul must have been able to ascertain that the man was from Macedonia from his dress and speech. Macedonia was northwest from Troas, now what is part of Europe. The man asked Paul to "come over and help us".

This plea means first that Paul was to cross the Aegean Sea. The second part of the plea was a request for help. The verb has the connotation of 'coming to one's aid'. The request was for spiritual help. The Macedonian man indicated that he was not alone; he was speaking on behalf of his countrymen. This plea came from people who, by the Holy Spirit, would be made ready to receive the gospel.

Notice, from the Word of God, that Paul and his workers were immediately prepared to leave for Macedonia. They were together ready to follow the divine direction to go to Macedonia. There are several things that we need to note: 1) This passage is dealing with a missionary's deliberations on where he is to labour. 2) Paul and his companions waited for the Spirit of Jesus to tell them where to minister. 3) They were prevented by the Spirit from going west or north; they had to go to Troas. 4) In a vision, Paul received divine instruction to sail for Europe. 5) By waiting patiently for divine instructions, Paul and his associates

were recipients of God's indispensable blessings.

How do we apply this for today? Is mission work to be carried out only when there is a "Macedonian Call"? Does the "Macedonian call" apply every time a pastor considers a call to a particular church? In answering those questions, we take note that only once in all of the apostle Paul's missionary journeys was there a vision given to Paul with a man crying out for help. The vision given to Paul was the revelation of the infallible will of God. Therefore, given this divine vision, there was only one decision for Paul and his companions to make: obedience to God's direction. God was telling the apostle that he must go to Macedonia to preach. To stay in Troas or to go elsewhere would have been disobedience.

There are no more divine visions given today. We have the completed Scriptures given to us. It is through the Scriptures alone that the Holy Spirit speaks and gives direction. We do have calls given to us as ministers and missionaries asking us to "come over and help us". But we do not necessarily have a divine summon that this is where we must preach. In each call letter that a minister receives, there is the line: "On behalf of said congregation we therefore extend to you the call and come to you with the urgent request: "Come over and help us". Now the minister who receives this call must before God consider it. Does God want me to take up this new labour? Is my work finished in my present congregation?

The minister usually has three weeks to respond. In those three weeks, he first asks his current consistory permission to consider the call. This allows his consistory to give their input on his

current work. Is his presence and work still edifying for the congregation? (My father used to say, "Leave while they still like you. Do not overstay your welcome".) Is there unfinished business that the minister must remain for? The minister must not only study his present charge and its needs, he also must look at the needs of the church that is calling him. Are there pressing needs for a minister? Will he be able to work with that consistory and in that congregation? Not every minister can work effectively in any church. Each pastor has his own personality and quirks. Each congregation has its own characteristics and history. The minister must also take into account his wife and his family. Will they fit in well in the new setting? Is there a good Christian school for his children to attend? And if not, are he and his wife able to do that schooling by themselves? There does not appear a sign in the sky telling him exactly what should be his response to the call. He must pray for the Spirit's guidance that he may know the will of God. Three weeks also allows members of the pastor's present charge and members of the calling church to give input of the needs of the two churches. He must listen to the advice of a multitude of advisors in both the churches and perhaps of fellow pastors. Is the calling church a good fit? In my former denomination, a consistory unwisely put up on nomination for minister both a conservative and a liberal pastor. Rather than leading the congregation in the right way, they decided that the congregation decides which way the church should go. I have even personally received comments of consistory members of the calling church telling me not to come, that I was too conservative for their church! Do I willingly walk into a beehive of trouble and controversy or ill-will? Am

I the man that God wants to labour in that place and at this particular time? There is no magical wand. Before God in prayer, the pastor must make a decision, at peace that the Lord by His Spirit will give the right direction and will bring blessings upon it. So, there is still a call to "come over and help us". But it is not an infallible call. At times, the minister must answer, "No, I cannot come at this time". And the minister need not, and should not, give the reasons for his acceptance or decline.

In our mission work, we receive at times calls to "come over and help us". These calls are few today. When these calls come, the missionary and the mission committee must investigate if this a labour that is profitable and can lead to the planting of a church. Most of this work is in the way of church reformation. The missionary will make contact with the group by way of telephone and email, and follow up with exploratory visits. Is the group teachable? Is there a sizable group of young and old, single and married? Do they have contacts that we can pursue? Is the group interested in reaching out to their neighbours and relatives? Is there the possibility of the group being cohesive and growing into a church plant? We preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. And only by way of investigation can the missionary, his calling church and the mission committee determine if this is an open door that the Spirit of Jesus is opening to us. We pray for those contacts. We pray the Spirit to give us an open door. Are we to remain in Troas, or is the Spirit leading us in a new direction and a new place? May God give us wisdom and patience for His leading.

CHILDLESSNESS

>> Rev. Daniel Kleyn



Rev. Daniel Kleyn is a missionary of the PRCA to the Philippines.

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It is natural for a married couple to desire children. In fact, even unbelievers desire this. It is true that the latter generally do so for selfish reasons, and thus they often twist and subject this desire to the service of sin and the pursuit of earthly pleasure. Yet it cannot be denied that they too are created by God with the desire to bring forth children.

Believing couples, however, have more than just a natural desire for children. Their desire is also spiritual. They long for children because they understand that children are a gracious gift from God. They long for children because they understand the truth of God's covenant. They understand especially that the covenant means that God is pleased generally to give to believing parents elect children. Having these things in mind as they marry in the Lord, believers earnestly desire to be blessed with children from the Lord.

In some instances, however, God does

not give children. His plan is different from ours. Instead of a child there is emptiness.

I write especially with such childless couples in mind. The struggles they face are extremely difficult. Childlessness is for them an intense trial, a severe test of faith. Often it is a life-long struggle. Important for such couples, therefore, is to know how the Lord calls them to deal with this particular burden in life.

There are also others in the church who face this struggle. Perhaps there is a married couple to whom God has given one or two children, but not more. They too, though in a different measure, face some of the same difficulties. The same can be true of those who are single, desire to be married, but are not provided with a spouse from the Lord.

May the Lord give to each the grace needed to live a life that is pleasing to Him regardless of the particular trials He sends.

The Scriptures indicate that childlessness has been experienced by some of God's people from almost the beginning of time. Abraham and Sarah, for example, having received God's covenant promises with regard to an offspring, remained barren until it was humanly impossible for them to have children. Scripture also mentions others who were barren, such as Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel, Manoah and his wife, Elkanah and Hannah, and Zachariah and Elizabeth. Although all these couples eventually received children, they first went through some

significant struggles of faith.

One thing that God makes crystal clear through these accounts in Scripture is that He alone controls conception. He gives children to some, and that in His time. To others He does not give children. God alone is sovereign over life, not man.

The world, we know, thinks otherwise. Man believes that he, with his advanced knowledge and expertise in the use of birth control, invitro-fertilisation, and other medical means, can control conception and life. But he is as wrong as it is possible to be. God alone is the Giver of life. In fact, God even sovereignly controls the (often sinful) means that men use.

While God was pleased to give children to those mentioned above, that was not then, and is not now, always the case. More than a few godly couples find they are unable to have their own children.

There are many things that make the burden of childlessness difficult for a believing couple. It is difficult for them to hear that another couple is expecting a child. It is difficult for them to visit a mother and her newborn in the hospital. It is difficult for them to witness a baptism in church. It is difficult for them to visit with families that have children. It is difficult for them to speak with other women because they, as mothers, often talk about their children. It is difficult for them to be reminded each month of the barrenness that the Lord has willed for them. It is difficult for them to hear some parents

speak of children being “planned” or “unplanned”. It is difficult for them to hear some mothers say that their children are at times a “nuisance”. It is difficult for them because they often sit alone in a quiet house. It is difficult for them because they realise, as they get older, that they will never experience the joys of children and grandchildren, as most others do. And it is especially difficult because the Scriptures speak of children as blessings of Jehovah. The childless couple can feel that they are missing out on the experience of the joys of God’s covenant of grace.

Because of these things, the question the childless couple often asks is, “Why?” “Why doesn’t the Lord give us children? Why doesn’t the Lord grant us our request for this? Why is His answer, No?” Perhaps they even ask, “If the Lord has willed that we not have children, why does He still give us such a strong desire to have them?”

Ultimately the answer to these questions is what we read in Isaiah 55, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts”.

This text reminds us of the fact that we are often unable to understand the ways and the mind of God. That is why the child of God must be so careful with the question, Why? God does not always (or even often) show us why. And the reason He does not is because He knows that we, from our finite, earthly perspective, would not understand. His ways are far above our ways. His thoughts are way beyond what we can know and understand. But in all He does, God is wise. God has a

good reason for not giving children to some. He has planned the lives of all His children, and His plan for them is perfect.

Knowing this, the childless couple asks instead, “How does the Lord call us to deal with this burden? Many difficulties are experienced because of it. How do we, by God’s grace, endure this terrible struggle?”

Perhaps one of the most important things for the childless couple to realise and remember is that although they have no children, their marriage is complete. It is certainly a good thing, in our churches and yours, that much emphasis is placed upon the calling that godly parents have to bring forth children. But sometimes this emphasis can make us forget a fundamental truth regarding marriage — children do not make a marriage complete. What makes a home a home and a family a family is not children, but a godly marriage. And thus a home without children is not less blessed than one with children.

For this reason, those who are childless need to be careful that this struggle does not ruin their marriage and drive them apart. That can happen. There is a danger for childless couples to live totally separate lives. Instead, they should work to strengthen their marriage and the closeness they have as husband and wife.

This means bearing the burden together. The husband must not let the wife bear it alone, nor the wife the husband. The husband especially needs to be sensitive to the struggles his wife experiences because of childlessness. The woman, perhaps more than the man, feels the emptiness. This does not deny, however,

that the husband experiences it as well. And so the wife must not be insensitive to that either.

Husband and wife must help and support one another. This requires good communication. They need to talk often to each other about their struggles. They need to pray together about it. In these ways they will become closer and their marriage will, by God’s grace, be strengthened.

Those who are childless must also realise that they have a place in the church and covenant of God — a special place.

There is always much work to be done in the church and among the people of God. The sick need help. The widows, widowers and elderly need visits. Those facing certain struggles in life need encouragement. Mothers with many young children need assistance. And, within your congregation, the school society needs help to explore the avenues for Christian education.

Parents who have busy families often do not have the time to do these things. The childless couple, however, does. This is part of the special place God has given them in the church. It is good, therefore, to pray for and look for such things to do.

The childless couple is also able to do most of these things together. That is also true with regard to other aspects of their life in the church, such as attending Bible studies and lectures. Sometimes a couple with children finds that one of them has to stay home to care for the children. Those who have no children, however, have time and opportunity to do many (if not most) things together.

It is true that the childless couple sometimes wishes they did not have that time. That is, they wish they had children, their own children, to keep them busy. But the Lord has planned otherwise. They must seek to find, therefore, what other opportunities and work the Lord places before them. It is good for them to keep themselves busy in the work of the church. The blessing of God will rest upon that.

There are also other ways in which those who have no children can be and ought to be involved in the church. As members of the church, they rejoice with the whole congregation at the birth and baptism of a covenant child. God gives that child to believing parents, but He also gives that child to the church. This implies that those without children can be involved, as opportunity arises, in the spiritual nurture of these children. It implies that they are thankful to see the children of the church learning the truth and maturing in their faith. And it implies rejoicing with the whole congregation when the children of the church confess their faith in Christ. “Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep” (Rom. 12:15).

Another important thing for the childless couple to remember is that all of God’s people experience affliction in this life. Every home and every child of God has a cross to bear. Some are troubled by life-long sickness. Some are afflicted by marriage and family problems. Some have children that forsake the ways of God and never return. Some remain single their whole life. Some struggle with poverty or loneliness or the death of a loved one.

It seems that as each of us experiences

his own particular burdens in life, he can feel that his particular affliction is greater than that of any other child of God. We all think that way at times. We are convinced that no one else is suffering as we are, that no one else’s burden is quite as heavy as ours is, and that no one can possibly know what we are going through.

That is how it can seem to the childless couple as well. But that is not necessarily so. It should be remembered that all God’s people suffer. And “God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted [i.e., “tried,” DK] above that ye are able; but will with the temptation [“trial,” DK] also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Cor. 10:13).

One more thing, however, is that the childless learn, by the grace of God in their hearts and lives, to submit to the will of God for them. I realise this is easy to say, but quite another thing to do. It is a very real struggle of faith. Yet this is what the Lord calls us to do.

Those who are childless must realise that God wills this childlessness. The reason why God does this is usually unknown. But God’s ways are not our ways. And God’s ways are always good. The couple must learn to confess, and to believe in their hearts, that all things work together for their good. Yes, all things. And that for their eternal good.

What this really means is that the childless couple must learn to deal with their trial as each child of God must deal with his or her particular trials in life. Regardless of the burden that God places upon His children, each must learn proper submission to the will of a loving heavenly Father. We confess that God is sovereign. We confess that

He determines and controls all things — not only the “good” things, but also the so called “evil” things that happen to us. And the wonderful confession we make is that God does all this as a Father. This means He lovingly sends the burden of childlessness. He sends it because it is for the eternal good of those to whom He sends it.

Learning submission to the will of God requires much prayer. Those prayers certainly may include the requests for children. After all, God alone can grant that request. He alone can fulfil that desire of our hearts. And may He be pleased to do so, in His time.

But we must pray especially for grace. Perhaps the childless couple will always remain childless. As difficult as that is, they must learn that this is God’s will for them. And therefore they need His grace. The Lord tells us in our trials, “My grace is sufficient for thee” (2 Cor. 12:9). The grace of God is all we need. In the midst of our trials it is our greatest need. And God promises to give it.

Submission to God’s will also means learning to believe in our hearts that God’s ways for us are best. We would like our ways to be God’s ways. And when they are not, we struggle. But remember, God is wise. His wisdom is way beyond our wisdom. God in His wisdom looks at everything in the light of eternity. We see things one moment at a time, but the Lord sees the whole of our earthly life, including its end or goal. He knows the way you and I must walk to be prepared for our unique place in heavenly glory. He knows it because He has ordained it. Thus we must and can conform our wills to God’s will. God’s will and way for us is the only pathway that will lead us to

glory. It is the pathway we must walk to reach heaven. Any other way would be spiritually harmful. Any other way would not lead us to our eternal home.

Childlessness is difficult. It is very difficult. May the childless couple seek the grace humbly to submit to the Lord's will for them in this. For God's

will is not arbitrary. It is perfect. May each receive grace to sing the words of Psalter 383, "My life and all its perfect plan, was ordered ere my days began".

THE GOLDEN RULE

>> Marcus Wee



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Matthew 7:12: "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets."

Luke 6:31: "And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise."

The words in these texts are commonly known as the "Golden Rule" and formulated as such: "Do unto others as you would others do unto you". The Golden Rule is both a standard which we can follow and a command which we must obey. This is the standard: "As ye would that men should do to you". What we want others to do to us is the standard for what we are to do to others. This is the command: Do! We are not just to think about that standard, but must act upon it.

The Golden Rule is a principle of love. In the verses surrounding our text in

Luke 6, "love" is the one word which we can use to describe all the activities which we are commanded to do. "Love your enemies, *do good...*" (v. 27). "Bless them that curse you, and *pray* for them which despitefully use you" (v. 28). As such, we can tie the Golden Rule closely to the attributes of love which are described in 1 Corinthians 13, in particular verses 4-6.

We will consider two main points: first of all, negatively, what the Golden Rule is not; then, positively, what the Golden Rule requires.

Negatively, the Golden Rule is not: "Do unto others as others do unto you".

We can call this other rule the "Rule of Reciprocity".

The Rule of Reciprocity is an entirely different principle from the Golden Rule.

It involves reciprocating, or repaying what others do to me: repaying good with good and evil with evil. If someone helps me when I'm in need, I will gratefully return that help. But if someone gossips about me, I will retaliate with my own gossip. Or, at the very least, I will grow cold towards the person.

The Rule of Reciprocity uses a standard which is entirely different from the standard of the Golden Rule. The

Golden Rule is: "Do unto others as you would others do unto you". The Rule of Reciprocity is: "Do unto others as others do unto you". The words "you would" or "you want" are missing from the Rule of Reciprocity.

This may seem surprising to us: what we want is so important that it becomes the standard for what we do to others? Yes; but what we want is important *only insofar as* it helps us to determine how we are to love others. We give weight to what we want, *not* to demand that others give us what we want, but only to help ourselves love others.

The Rule of Reciprocity is to be rejected.

After the formulation of the Golden Rule in Luke 6:31, we read in verses 32 and 33: "For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same". Even sinners, that is, those who reject God and walk in sin, do good to those who do them good! Even sinners follow the Rule of Reciprocity.

The Rule of Reciprocity is to be rejected because it is essentially selfish in nature. Even when we do good to those who do us good, we are being selfish: we are doing what best suits ourselves and gives us the greatest advantage. Instead,

as a principle of love, the Golden Rule requires us to have charity, which “seeketh not her own” (1 Cor. 13:5).

Following the Golden Rule means that whatever the other person does to me is *not* the standard for deciding how to respond. Did the person gossip about me? I’m not going to gossip back about her. I’m not going to grow cold towards him. Was the person ungrateful towards me? I’m still not going to give up showing love to him.

How do we determine which rule we are following? Not by how we respond towards those who do good to us. The results in both cases appear very similar: we do good to those who do us good. But we determine which rule we are following by how we respond towards those who do evil to us. Do we repay them evil for evil? If so, we are following the Rule of Reciprocity, doing unto others as others do unto us. If we are following the Golden Rule, then we will be doing good even in response to the evil we receive.

We must not follow the Rule of Reciprocity, but that is not all.

Positively, the Golden Rule requires me to:

Put myself in the shoes of others.

This means that I do not impose what I want on others. On the surface, the Golden Rule seems to allow for that. Whatever I want or prefer, I will do to others.

We may even reason in the following ways: “I don’t care what others say about me, so I have the right to say whatever I want about others”. “It doesn’t matter to me what tone of voice

others use, so I don’t have to watch my tone whenever I speak to others”. Or, “When I struggle with sin, I appreciate people rebuking me directly, so I am always going to rebuke others when I see them struggling with sin”.

Obviously, these lines of thinking are wrong; yet, if we are honest with ourselves, how often don’t we act that way? What I prefer, what I think is right, is what I am going to do to you. Putting myself into the shoes of others means that I carefully consider my action with respect to the other person. Who is the person involved? It is not this: what would I want, given who I am, with my particular personality and preferences; but, what would I want, *if I were that person, in that situation?*

Putting myself into the other person’s shoes requires humility. 1 Corinthians 13:4 tells us that “charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up”. Charity is not proud, but humble!

Humility is recognising that my way of doing things may not necessarily be the best. Humility is esteeming others above myself, their preferences above mine, and the willingness to go under them, to meet their preferences, and to do to them what they would want. It takes humility to put ourselves into the shoes of others.

So, yes, what I want is still the standard that I follow in determining what I do to others; but it is what I want *after I have put myself into the other’s shoes.*

Putting myself in the shoes of others looks like this: even though I don’t care what others say about me; even though I don’t care what tone of voice others use towards me; even though I prefer others to rebuke me directly when

I struggle with sin; I will be sensitive towards the preferences of others, and treat them accordingly.

The Golden Rule positively requires me, in the first place, to put myself in the shoes of others. Yet it is not enough to stop there, because in the second place, the Golden Rule also requires me to:

Seek the spiritual good of the neighbour.

Once again I need to consider: who is the person involved?

Within each of us, there is an old man and a new man. The old man is totally depraved. He hates all spiritual good, and desires and does nothing but sin. The new man is regenerate. He hates sin and loves only what is spiritually good.

Sometimes, then, because what my neighbour prefers is from the point of view of the old man, and thus sinful, I will not do that action which lets him continue in sin, for his soul is in peril. To apply the Golden Rule in deciding what to do to my neighbour, I still must consider what I want to be done to me after putting myself in the shoes of the neighbour, yet *only from the point of view of the new man*, the one that desires only what is spiritually good.

Seeking the spiritual good of my neighbour requires me to love the truth. 1 Corinthians 13:6 states that charity “rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth”. Not only do I love the truth of God for its own sake; I also love the truth of God because it is the only way to truly love my neighbour.

This consideration does not undo everything else that we have said earlier.

We still need selflessness not to live according to the Rule of Reciprocity; we still need humility to put ourselves in the shoes of others. These requirements are not things in addition to the truth, but are part of the truth.

Conclusion

If we are honest with ourselves, we will acknowledge that all of us, as sinful creatures, constantly fail to keep the Golden Rule.

Let us examine the relationships in our lives, those in which we experience tension, whether periodically or even continuously. Could it be, perhaps, that this tension is caused by our failure to abide by the Golden Rule?

Now, we are often very quick to justify ourselves. "It is the other person who needs to keep the Golden Rule!" Perhaps this is true. But what is equally likely is, perhaps we have also failed.

If you are anything like me, you sinfully gravitate towards the Rule of Reciprocity, doing unto others as

others do unto you. "You did this evil to me? I'm going to respond in kind." If you are anything like me, you fail to put yourself in the shoes of others, and instead impose your preferences on them and get offended when your efforts are not recognized. "I was trying to be kind to you, and this is the ingratitude with which you repay me? I'm going to stop." We have all failed, and in many cases we have perpetuated that failure.

And because of that, we may be tempted to despair. There is the Golden Rule, high and lofty in its requirements. And here we are: poor, weak, sinful creatures, who fail to follow that standard and to obey that command. Yet all is not lost, for we have hope in Christ, who is both our example and power for following the Golden Rule.

Christ showed us the perfect example.

He did not follow the Rule of Reciprocity when we were His enemies and wickedly crucified Him on the cross. Instead, he put himself in our

shoes. The divine Son of God, while remaining sinless, took on our sin-weakened nature and was touched with the feeling of our infirmities, experiencing the same struggles which you and I face. And He sought our spiritual good, dying on the cross for our sins and giving us all the blessings of salvation in Him.

Christ is not only our example, but also our power for following the Golden Rule. That same life of Christ which enabled Him perfectly to keep the Golden Rule now flows within our veins, so that by His grace and Holy Spirit we begin to live according to this rule, not perfectly, but more and more. And isn't it our sincere desire to do so despite our sinfulness, and even the sinful response of others?

Christ empowers us to follow the Golden Rule, to do unto others as we would others do unto us. Christ has set an example for us. Let us go, then, and do likewise.

9 NOVEMBER 2019

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News from the Churches

Singapore

We are thankful once more for the time we could have with Rev. and Mrs. Arie den Hartog the last few months. It has been such a blessing to renew ties with them and receive God's word from Rev. den Hartog.

We are also eagerly looking forward to the three weeks that Rev. Jonathan Mahtani will be spending in Singapore with two of his sons and his mother. We are thankful once again for the continual pulpit supply provided by our sister churches in the PRCA until God provides us with a more permanent minister, God willing.

As summer draws to a close, we also prepare to bid our seminary students, brothers Josiah Tan and Marcus Wee as well as their families, good bye as they return to USA for their studies. We are thankful for brother Josiah's "mini internship" while he was in Singapore which included him leading during the worship service and speaking a word of edification as well as leading in Sunday School. We pray that the Lord continues to keep them and prepare them for their service in the ministry.

USA

Rev. Brian Huizinga accepted the call to replace Prof. Cammenga as Professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament. May God uphold him and his family and provide for them as they take up their new life and work in the seminary.

A delegation consisting of Prof. R. Cammenga, Rev. R. Kleyn and Rev. C. Griess made a two-week trip in end-July to Mexico City, where they gave lectures in two different denominations. We pray that the Lord will keep them safe and bless their work there.

Synod 2019 met from June 11-17 and daily reports with pictures can be found on the PRCA website. Synod declared Matt Kortus and Jacob Maatman as candidates for the ministry of the Word and are eligible for a call.

The Philippines

After many months of planning and preparation, seminary training at The Theological School Committee of the PRCP will begin training on Aug 13, 2019. Classis has approved brother Jeremiah B. Pascual, member of the First PRCP in Bulacan, as a seminary student. We pray that the Lord will continue to bless this work to train faithful, reformed preachers in our churches.



Fun at church camp mass games



Camp speaker Rev Den Hartog leading a Q&A session



Fellowship over a meal at camp



One of the teams with their completed scripture passage puzzle



Having a game of captain's ball during free time



Thanking God for the time of fellowship and spiritual refreshment we had at church camp!

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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