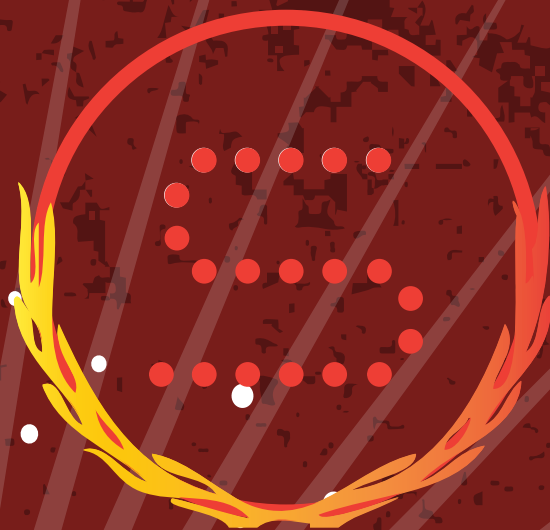


"In the course of this defense, polemics names the name of the heretic, so as to warn the congregation against him (see 1 Tim. 1:20). Polemics is not polite. It is an all-out, bloody warfare." — Prof. David Engelsma in *Polemics and its History*

"To seek the salvation of our fellow members is to help them in their need, to warn them when they stray, to encourage them when their way is difficult, and to live in peace and harmony with everyone." — Prof. Herman Hanko in *Wisdom and Helping Others*

"Miscarriage is sometimes referred to as 'the loneliest grief' or 'the invisible grief'." — Dr. Matthias Wee in *Miscarriage*



salt shakers

joel 3:16 matthew 5:16

Issue 57 | Nov 2019

As we have therefore opportunity,
let us do good unto all men,
especially unto them who are
of the household of faith.

Galatians 6:10

WELCOME TO THE 57TH ISSUE OF SALT SHAKERS!

CONTENTS

To Be Reformed	3
Wisdom (5): Wisdom and Helping Others	6
Homosexuality: What Does the Bible Teach? (5)	8
The History of Polemics	10
The Strong Helping The Weak	12
The Christian in the World: Early Childhood Educator	13
The Christian's Calling to be Disciplined (1): Challenges	14
Miscarriages (1)	16
News from the Churches	19

Dear Reader,

The *Salt Shakers* committee presents another issue of the Salt Shakers. We are pleased to present this issue at CERC's Reformation Day Conference (RDC). The RDC commemorates the wondrous work of God in preserving the Reformed church in the truth, over against the errors that abounded during the great Synod of Dordt. These errors are ever present in the church today – old errors dressed in new garments. The church is therefore called to do battle constantly, on behalf of God's truth and His precious church. She fights a valiant warfare, counting all but loss for the excellency of the truth that is in Jesus Christ.

In this issue we have Prof. David Engelsma explaining the nature, necessity and history of polemics in the church. Prof. Engelsma demonstrates that polemics have long been a characteristic of faithful Reformed churches. Failure on the part of Reformed churches today to do polemics is failure to recognise that glorious history and confession that they possess. Polemics is a bloody warfare, according to Prof. Engelsma; it requires great sacrifice and will involve suffering and persecution on the part of the faithful church.

Prof. Herman Hanko relates the concept of wisdom and helping others in his article. He explains how the concept of love is involved in the wisdom of helping our neighbour, which seeks his salvation ultimately. Our neighbours are not those out there in the world, but those whom we come into contact with every day, especially our neighbour in church. Wisdom seeks the salvation of those we come into contact with. This is the nature of true love.

Dr. Matthias Wee also pens an enlightening article on the griefs of miscarriage, a grief not uncommon to couples in the church. He explains its impact on the couple and to those around them, and offers biblical suggestions for coping with this tragedy.

We pray that you will be edified by these articles, and remember to pass the salt.

Blessings,
Aaron

TO BE REFORMED

>> Lim Yang Zhi



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

In our hands is this new issue of *Salt Shakers*. Most likely, you received it during our church's Reformation Day Conference. Understandably, then, this editorial is about being Reformed.

But what's the point in writing about being Reformed?

What's the point, when we (think we) know what the doctrines of the Reformed faith are? What's the point, when we, second-generation Christians, have been labelled as those who have a failing zeal for the Reformed faith? What's the point, when the issues of our congregation are about the Christian's *life*, not about the Christian's *doctrine*? Wouldn't it be more appropriate to address these matters directly, rather than talking about *being Reformed*?

Such articles have their merits; but let's not think that to be Reformed equals "all-doctrine-zero-application." To be Reformed is not just to "get your doctrines right." Perhaps some have demonstrated this belief: It's wrong. In that belief, there is a huge disconnect between doctrine and life. There ought not be that disconnect. God's Word has nothing but condemnation for that

disconnect (see Isa. 29:17, for instance).

To be Reformed is not to have that disconnect. Rather, if we remember what it *truly* means to be Reformed, we will stand strong to face the weaknesses within our congregation.

I do not say this to downplay the issues, as if to say, "Here is the solution for everything; use it." I say this as a starting point to all the appropriate ways to deal with these issues.

I am not writing just to you, "less-zealous" young people; after all, we have already discussed these issues openly in our meetings. I am writing to all members—young adults; middle-aged adults; parents; grandparents and retirees. Consider the issues that our congregation is facing, and deal with them according to God's Word.

After all, to deal with weaknesses with God's Word is to be Reformed, isn't it?

This is a development within our church. Starting as a group of Christians converted from heathendom, and then going through a doctrinal controversy, we are now a church confronted with troubles beyond heathendom and doctrine.

What is the way ahead? It is no different—be Reformed! That is, Let the Word shape how we deal with those troubles, personally, and as a church: That is what it means to be Reformed.

Or, as Psalm 15 puts it: *Speak the truth in your heart*. Know the truth—and that means know doctrine—but know

it *in your heart*. Then speak it—in your heart, yes; but also in your homes, and in this church.

What is truth?

It is *God's revelation*. Truth is what God in His Word has *said, shown, and declared* to us. Truth is what *God* has said. As the God of truth, He determines what is true (Deut. 32:4).

Truth is more; truth is God's revelation of *Himself*. As Jesus said in His prayer, the Triune God has revealed Himself to Christ; and Christ has revealed the triune God to us (Jn. 17:25).

Truth is more; truth is God's revelation of *Himself in Jesus Christ*. God reveals Himself *in Christ*, when Christ descended into our human flesh. In and through Christ, God reveals His grace and truth, righteousness and peace (Jn. 1:14; Ps. 85:10). In other words, *the truth—Truth—is really Christ*, as Christ had said (Jn. 14:6).

Truth is still more; truth is God's *powerful* revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ. Truth is powerful, because the Truth, Jesus Christ, both God and man, is strong to deliver us from the bondage of sin. Jesus Himself knew this; therefore, He prayed to the triune God, *Sanctify them* [my people] *through thy truth; thy word is truth* (Jn. 17:17). *Sanctify*—to cleanse from sin and consecrate to God—requires power; that power is the truth.

Because the truth is God's powerful revelation of Himself, the truth is ultimately spoken *in our hearts*.

Certainly, God sanctifies our minds. He causes us to use our minds to understand who He is, who Christ is, and what He has done for us in Christ. However, the truth, God's sanctifying power, works in our hearts as well. God knows our hearts are so deceitful above all things that they need to be sanctified (Jer. 17:9). God also knows our hearts are the source of all our thoughts, desires, emotions, words, and actions (Prov. 4:23). To overcome the power of sin in us, God goes to the center of our lives and changes it radically.

Therefore, Reformed doctrine, faithful in its summary and explanation of the truth, is not mere knowledge. It cannot be, because truth is not mere knowledge, but a knowledge that transforms us to love and fear God. Mere intellectual knowledge cannot work that transformation. In other words, the truth is not only intellectual doctrine; it is the heart-changing application shaped by that doctrine.

Therefore, what should we do when our love for doctrine fails? Find the application.

When the doctrine of the covenant becomes dry for us, look at how God's faithfulness to us works into his ordained pictures of that faithfulness—our covenant homes, marriages, and church! The love that fuels the mother's

firm hand of discipline; the forgiveness for the husband that has neglected his family's spiritual needs; the patience for the office-bearer that is weak—the basis of these attitudes is God's faithfulness towards us in Christ! Our love for covenant-theology grows when we work out these applications.

When the explanation of Christ's human nature seems unnecessarily repetitive, meditate on our experience of his grace and mercy in our time of need. Is it the need for comfort when a family has lost a child? Is it the need for money when the single has lost his/her job? Is it the need for forgiveness for a secret sexual addiction? There is grace, there is mercy, because Christ, our sinless High-Priest, *knows* our trouble and need. Our love for Christ—to know Him more, hence Christology—grows when we keep in mind these applications.

Where true doctrine is, right application will be found. Nurture your love for doctrine by looking for these applications.

But what shall we do when we see failure to apply the truth? Find the truth first.

When no one seems to be talking about the growing influence of materialism, confront one another with the doctrine

of God himself—is *your* God Jehovah, or the paycheck? When no one seems to be talking about the misuse of the tongue against fellow members and office-bearers, confront one another with the doctrine of God's church—is the church the body of Christ to you, or your personal punching-bag? When someone says with smug satisfaction, "I already know that doctrine," ask him, "How has that doctrine shaped your life?"

Confront the failure of application with doctrine. Confront, *not* because "We are a doctrine-smart church," but because Jesus himself said, the *truth will set us free!*

Yet all that I have said seems to be... difficult.

It is difficult to make the connection between the intellectual doctrine and life-transforming power of the doctrine. Either we find it hard to connect the doctrine we hear to our lives; or we find it hard to connect the spiritual problem of our lives to the doctrine we hear.

How are we to get over this problematic difficulty? Psalm 15:2 teaches us: *Speak the truth.* We have said that God reveals the truth—He speaks the truth to us in His Word. But now that He has spoken the truth to us, *we* are to speak it. Again, here, we have seen that we speak

**The truth is not only intellectual doctrine;
it is the heart-changing application shaped by that doctrine.**

it to ourselves first of all. Daily, we confront ourselves with how the truth has shaped our lives—and how we have failed to submit to the truth.

But the rest of God's Word goes further.

God directs us to the church, CERC. We have seen how the church is one body of Christ in the previous editorial; in connection to this spiritual problem, every member *must* help one another to make the connection between the intellectual truth and life.

This is the God-ordained place where we overcome the lack of practice to speak so frankly. Certainly, those of us who come from unbelieving families have never experienced what it means to admonish someone else without provoking the person to more sin. But we must not let that past hinder us from the blessed life we now have in the church. The Spirit (whom John calls *the truth*) is in each of you to help each other. Believe that, and (with all due humility) boldly confront one another.

But God does not stop at the church; going deeper, He directs us to the covenant home.

What is in this home? In a covenant home is a table (Ps. 128:3). It does not matter how large, expensive, or decorated that table is, or whether a physical table exists! In that home is a time, place, and routine, where father, mother, and children sit together *and talk*. Not just time, place, and routine to talk about the next vacation to have, but to talk *spiritual* things, and to do so *daily*. God has created the covenant home for this purpose—to make the connection between the truth and our lives. The fruits around the table make this purpose clear: “Joyful children,

sons and daughters... / Olive plants in [spiritual] strength and beauty / Full of hope and promise sweet” (Psalter 360). Joyful, strong, beautiful, hopeful are our children, because the truth shapes their hearts to be such children!

Who are in this classroom for doctrine-centered godliness? The Psalm is clear: *Fathers*. God-fearing *fathers*. God-fearing fathers that are at the table daily (read: without their smartphones). God-fearing fathers who guide the conversation—whether around earthly or spiritual things—to apply the Word. God-fearing fathers, brought up in a broken, unbelieving home, or a weak, covenant-home, who will not allow their past to discourage them as leaders. *And mothers too*, God-fearing in every way like the father.

Parents, can we do better around our tables? I believe so; there is room to improve in our covenant instruction. There is room for more self-examination with each other. There is room for us to be less obsessed about the kids' sleep and academics, and more concerned about the kids' faith in God and spiritual nurturing. I do not say, “We have not self-examined; we have not been more concerned about our spiritual role.” We have done all these, by God's grace. But there is room for more to be done.

Just think of how much the church will benefit! Yes, Psalm 128 says, *The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion*. Out of Zion, the family is blest; but isn't it true the other way—out of the covenant home, the church is blest? After all, a God-fearing, covenant home *shall see the good of Jerusalem*. Why? Because the LORD builds his church on strong homes that *influence others outside the home*. The single youth, the only believer in the home, can find spiritual

solace by a godly father that speaks in encouragement to that youth. The God-ordained single can find spiritual friendship with a mother that nurtures her spiritually with meaningful conversations. The covenant parents with arrowless quivers or wayward arrows can find their covenant children to nurture and admonish in *all the children of the church*.

Brethren, speak the truth. Speak it to yourself. Speak it at home; *learn* to speak it at home. *Keep learning* to speak it in the church.

I said at the start that what I have written is a starting point to address the issues of our congregation.

Prove my word with God's Word, brethren. I did not intend to give anything more than a starting point. The proper place to address issues is not here, but in *fellowship*. Discuss these weaknesses together, therefore; pray over these weaknesses together. Even weep together when the weaknesses overwhelm you; but do not forget to rejoice in Jesus' promise, that His church *shall* stand.

Let the Word guide you in your ways as a child of God. That is what it means to be Reformed.

WISDOM (5): WISDOM AND HELPING OTHERS

>>Prof. Herman Hanko



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

An article on the subject above is the last of this series on wisdom. Wisdom is spoken of often in Scripture and highly commended to the people of God as a most important part of their calling as citizens of the kingdom of heaven and sons and daughters of their heavenly Father.

I remind you of two things that I have spoken of before, and that we need to remember as we read this article.

The first truth is that wisdom is, according to the last verses of Proverbs 8, another name for Christ. Christ is in Himself the wisdom of God. He is that because He is the highest work of God that reveals God's purpose to do all things that best serve the highest goal. God's eternal purpose in all He does is to glorify Himself in a way that best reveals His glory as the only true God. Christ Himself is the highest and best way to reveal His own glory and bring glory to Himself.

The second truth follows from this. If we are wise, it is because we possess Christ. That is, all that we believe and teach is the greatness of our Saviour to

whom we belong. And to be wise in our life is to pursue in all that we do, the glory of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

More particularly, the wise person knows that to do God's will leads to heaven. The opposite is that the foolish man ends in hell.

My wife and I were struck once again by this when, in our devotions; we were reading Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount" in Matthew 5-7. The sermon ends with the parable of two men, one of whom built his house upon a rock; the other built his house on the sand. In the terrible storms of life, the house on the rock stood; the house built on the sand came crashing down.

In this parable, the Lord makes clear that the wise person who built his house on a rock was the one who obeyed Jesus' teaching: "Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them . . ." The other man who built his house on the sand saw his house washed away in the floods and storms of life.

It reminds me of our encounter with a minister in Myanmar. He built himself a house in which to live with his family of five children. It was really only a small shack with two small rooms and a rickety porch in the front. It was built on poles sunk deeply into a swamp and connected to the road with a tottering bridge. When he proudly showed me his house, he told me with great pleasure that under one of the poles on which his house was built he had placed a Bible because he wanted his house to be built on the rock of Scripture. I am

sure that in God's eyes his house was a better house than some huge multi-million dollar mansions I have seen. He was a wise man!

Turning now more particularly to the subject of helping others, we find two texts in Scripture that will help us understand our calling to help others. The first is the familiar summary of the second table of the law: "love thy neighbour as thyself". The second is Galatians 6:10: "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good to all men, especially to them of the household of faith".

Let's consider the first text first.

This summary of the law is found elsewhere in Scripture (See e.g., Gal. 5:14). Its two main ideas are "love" and "neighbor". Who is our neighbour? And what is love?

Wisdom tells us to love our neighbour. Our neighbour is not everyone in the world — as I was taught in grade school. How can I possibly love everyone in the world? But my neighbour is one whom I meet on my pathway in life. He is the one who bumps into me in his mad rush. He is the student sitting next to me in school. the one who is near me on the MRT, but is crippled, the one whom God puts in my path. The question is not: Is he a child of God? or not? The question is, Does he for some reason need me? Does he need assistance for some reason? Is he one with whom I am forced to speak? Is she a mother in the apartment alongside of mine whose child is sick and who can't

do her work because she is too busy with her child?

Now, what is meant by love?

Paul defines love as being “the bond of perfectness” (Col. 3:14). Love is therefore that Christian virtue that 1) loves every person whom God places upon his pathway. Strangely, this is not the nice people who are themselves friendly and kind; the Pharisees, says Jesus, do that. But those whom we love are only those who are our enemies, who hate us, who speak evil of us, who persecute us (Matt. 5:44-48).

Love is therefore giving: giving to our neighbour what he needs; giving whole heartedly; giving graciously, giving with all that one has and can do, giving at personal cost of time and possessions, giving without thought of one's self, one's inconvenience, one's personal pride.

Yet, if love is the bond of perfection, that part of the definition of love means that we seek our neighbour's salvation. That is genuine love. We pray for those who persecute us — as Stephen did. We tell of them of the truth of Christ and point out that the way of sin leads to hell, but the way of the truth leads to glory. We love them by seeking their salvation.

Many of you witness to your fellow schoolmates and are willing to help them in their need. This is loving our neighbour.

Loving our neighbour is not joining with him on his way to hell because you want to be friendly. Loving our neighbour is not bringing food to the hungry, sending love packages to war-torn countries, taking “street people”

into your home. Love is to say to them: “I will give you my car because you need one, while I don't. I do this because God has so loved me that He has given me what I do not deserve; and it is now my desire that you too love God and worship Him”.

Now let's consider Galatians 6:10.

It is clear that by the word “especially”, the Scriptures mean to make a distinction between the “household of faith” and “all men”. Further that word “especially” means that those of the household of faith are to be the first objects of our love.

We are called to walk wisdom's way in all our relationships with our fellow saints. And that means in our own church first of all. It is our calling to love our brothers and sisters in Myanmar and India, but in Singapore first. We are to help everyone in need. We are to live in peace and unity with everyone, even if there is personal loss involved. In that sense of the word, love is complete self-forgetfulness. Consumed by our neighbour's need, we are even somewhat reckless in our efforts to help. In Matthew 25, where Jesus describes His sheep, He speaks of their works they have done to others, and says that in doing good to others, they do good to Christ. But the altogether surprising response of his sheep is that they have no recollection of ever doing good to anyone. Why? They did it without any thought of themselves.

But even in our own congregation we are to seek the salvation of all our fellow church members — without exception.

Other denominations are sometimes so busy sending help to foreign people and even preaching the gospel there,

that they neglect teaching their own covenant children the truth of God. Is that wisdom's way?

To seek the salvation of our fellow members is to help them in their need, to warn them when they stray, to encourage them when their way is difficult, and to live in peace and harmony with everyone.

To love our neighbour in the church means also that we be willing to confess our weaknesses and our sins to our brothers and sisters whom we have hurt by our conduct. James especially urges this on the people of God (James 6:16). We must do this even if we “lose face”; we must do this if it requires of us to sacrifice our own “rights”, “positions”, and “reputation”. We must, says Paul, “Consider others better than ourselves” (Phil. 2:1-3).

The saints are to be “especially” loved with all that that implies.

But we cannot limit ourselves to the church. We must love “all men”. Paul too means, of course, those other people whom we are able to love and help. He certainly is not admonishing us to love some rich mogul 5000 miles from us whom we have never met. No: “Love thy neighbour”. That implies doing good to all whom you meet.

That is wisdom's way. That is Christ's way. That is God's way. He loves us who deserve nothing and were in fact His enemies. That love is revealed in the cross of Christ, God's own Son, whom He loved. He gave his Son for you and me. He loved us with an eternal love. Knowing this great love, cannot we love one another — and our needy neighbour?

It is my judgment after being in Singapore several times, that the members of CERC are faithful in witnessing to their neighbors and attempting to lead them to faith in Christ and the knowledge of the truth.

Now comes the all-important question:

Are we witnessing also by our own lives? Are we ready to sacrifice material gain for the salvation of our neighbours? Are we living examples of our profound thankfulness for God's love for us in Christ? Are we willing to lay ourselves on the altar of self-sacrifice to be an instrument in God's hand to save

our fellow saints? to save our unsaved neighbours?

May God grant it.

HOMOSEXUALITY: WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH? (5)

>>Rev. Angus Stewart



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

Blame It on the Genes!

Whatever role genes, hormones (pre- or post-natal) or brain structure might have as regards a predisposition to homosexuality, these in no way excuse it or clear sodomites or lesbians of guilt before Almighty God. All scientific research and analysis in this area, including that done by advocates of homosexuality, is at best inconclusive. Regarding the quest for the "gay gene", one wonders, "Are there also genes for other sins? Is there a gene or a combination of genes for stealing (even kleptomania or compulsive stealing) or pederasty or bestiality, etc.?" If there were, would these things be OK? No! The Bible is very clear on this and most people, even in our day, reckon that stealing, bestiality and pederasty are simply wrong. What about a distinctive DNA for idolaters, Sabbath breakers or covetous people?

Every fallen human being has a natural predisposition to tell lies: "The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies" (Ps. 58:3). Included in this is the desperate attempt on the part of many to excuse homosexuality. Man's total depravity means he has a predisposition to evil lusts against the eighth commandment (stealing) and all forms of the seventh commandment (e.g., fornication, adultery, pornography, harlotry, polygamy, incest, homosexuality, pederasty and bestiality), as well as all the commandments of God.

Alfred Kinsey (1894-1956), known as "the father of the sexual revolution", was the creator of the Kinsey Scale, also called the Heterosexual-Homosexual Rating Scale. Excluding the rating of X for "no socio-sexual contacts or reactions" which was added later, it classifies people from 0-6:

- 0 Exclusively heterosexual
- 1 Predominantly heterosexual and only incidentally homosexual
- 2 Predominantly heterosexual but more than incidentally homosexual
- 3 Equally heterosexual and homosexual
- 4 Predominantly homosexual

but more than incidentally heterosexual

5 Predominantly homosexual and only incidentally heterosexual

6 Exclusively homosexual

An ardent evolutionist and a practising bisexual, whose research has been proven to be biased and skewed, Kinsey sought to normalize homosexuality and promote the idea of the fluidity of human sexuality. If we accept his classification, for sake of argument, one may well ask if there are different genetic factors for each of the six classifications. What about the DNA of someone who moves up or down the scale?

It is widely acknowledged that there is a higher percentage of homosexuals in cities than in the countryside and among those with higher education than those without it. How do genes explain this?

What about homosexuality in identical twins? Statistically, the identical twin of a sodomite is more likely to be homosexual than a general member of the populace. But it is certainly not the case that, if one identical twin is homosexual, then the other always is too, as would have been expected if identical twins had the exact same genetic make-up and homosexuality is

simply a matter of genes.

According to some new research, however, though identical twins come from the same fertilised egg, they do not share identical genetic profiles. Instead, they share very similar genes. Even then, the high similarity in genetic make-up does not tally with the percentages of homosexual identical twins.

Human Choices

Although some people have a greater predisposition to homosexual lusts than others, just as some have a stronger proclivity than others to sinful pride or anger or stubbornness, Holy Scripture emphasizes the role of choices or decisions in the sexual desires and behaviours of lesbians and sodomites in Romans 1:26-27, the key biblical passage on homosexuality:

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.

Moreover, many admit that they choose to be homosexuals and simply do what they want to do. Indeed, a large number of sodomites and lesbians do not like the idea that their DNA predisposes them to homosexuality, because they think that being “born gay” still suggests that they are somehow wrong or abnormal.

Others openly declare that the notion of a “gay gene” was merely a useful ploy to gain sympathy and acceptance

from heterosexuals. For a time the old bromide that “homosexuals are simply born that way” was helpful to reduce societal disapproval in the Western world and elsewhere. In many countries, things are moving towards the goal of the “final phase”: the universal and wholehearted acceptance and celebration of homosexuality, with the mocking, side-lining, censoring, condemning and even criminalizing of dissenters.

God justifies the penitent homosexual by forgiving his sins and imputing to him the righteousness of Jesus Christ through faith alone.

We read of the “two witnesses” of Revelation 11:7-8:

And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them. And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called *Sodom* and *Egypt*, where also our Lord was crucified.

Christ’s witnessing people are persecuted and slain not only by the world as oppressor (“Egypt”) and tempter (Babylon, “the great city”), and the false church (Jerusalem, “where also our Lord was crucified”), but also the sexually depraved (“Sodom”). This is becoming more and more evident in our own day.

1 Corinthians 6 especially gives

absolutely certain proof that homosexuality is not merely a matter of genes, hormones or brain structure. The apostle warns,

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate [i.e., the homosexual passive partners], nor abusers of themselves with mankind [i.e., the homosexual active partners], nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God (9-10).

Paul immediately adds, “And such [including homosexuals] were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (11). God justifies the penitent homosexual by forgiving his sins and imputing to him the righteousness of Jesus Christ through faith alone. Jehovah also sanctifies and purifies him, so that he no longer lives under the dominion and slavery of sodomy, though the flesh battles against the spirit, as with all true Christians (Rom. 6-7; Gal. 5:16-25).

God does not change the homosexual’s genes when He converts him to Christ by His sovereign grace. No more does He do this than He changes the genetic make-up of “fornicators”, “idolaters”, “adulterers”, “thieves”, “covetous”, “drunkards”, “revilers” or “extortioners”. He graciously pardons and cleanses them by His Holy Spirit and incorporates them into the body of Jesus Christ, the church, for homosexuality is not the unpardonable sin.

THE HISTORY OF POLEMICS

>> Prof. David Engelsma



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

Introduction

By polemics, the Christian church understands the spiritual and doctrinal warfare that the church is called to fight against heretics who attempt to destroy the church by introducing into the church false doctrine. The church carries on this warfare especially by means of her professors of theology and ministers of the gospel. The method of the warfare is especially preaching and teaching. Writing is also a weapon.

False teachers may attack the gospel from within the church. Then they are the church's own theologians and ministers. Such was Pelagius in the early church. Such also was Arminius in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. In this case, the orthodox ministers and theologians carry on their polemics within the church. This usually results in schism, for which the heretics are responsible.

Or, the false teachers may attack the church from without. Such was the evolutionist Charles Darwin, whose theory of origins was, and continues to be, a threat to Reformed churches, even though Darwin was never a member of

a Reformed church. Such also was the Roman Catholic theologian, Bellarmine, whose attack upon Reformed Christianity at the time of the Reformation was a threat from without the Reformed churches.

Polemics is the church's defense of the gospel and of herself against these enemies and their attacks. All opposition to polemics, therefore, is, in reality, advice to the church that she surrenders the gospel to its foes and that the church herself willingly give herself up into the hands of Satan and the hosts of hell.

Polemics is controversy, or spiritual war. On the part of the church, it occurs by the exposure and condemnation of the error that threatens the gospel and by the clear, sharp, uncompromising defense of the truth that is presently under attack. In the course of this defense, polemics names the name of the heretic, so as to warn the congregation against him (see 1 Tim. 1:20). Polemics is not polite. It is an all-out, bloody warfare.

Polemics may not be dismissed as the activity of trouble-making, hard-headed ministers and professors who are spoiling for a fight. Polemics is biblical. The very word itself is biblical. "Polemics" is the Anglicized form of the word in the Bible that is translated "war" and "fight". For example, it is the word in Revelation 19:11 that declares that Jesus "makes war". In Revelation 2:16, it is the word that warns churches that fail to fight false doctrine in their midst that Jesus Himself will "fight" these churches by His Word.

Even when the term itself is not used,

Scripture calls the church, particularly the minister, to engage vigorously in polemics: "Earnestly contend for the faith..." (Jude 3). One could understand the text this way: "Engage vigorously in polemics!" Polemics on the part of the true church is a divine calling. Every minister is called to be a polemicist in his preaching and teaching. Every church must guard the precious gospel by polemics. Every consistory must require its minister to engage in polemics. Every *member* must join in defending the truth with polemics whenas he or she has the opportunity.

History

The churches of the Reformation have engaged in polemics from the onset of the Reformation. Only by means of polemics has the faith been preserved in the true churches of the Reformation of the 16th century. I think, first of all, of Luther's vehement and fundamental defense of the faith in his *Bondage of the Will*. But this work was only one of many polemical works demolishing Roman Catholic doctrine and establishing Protestantism on a sound foundation. Calvin likewise was a vigorous polemicist, not only against Rome, but also against a myriad of heresies, some of which appeared within the Reformed churches themselves. His *Institutes* alone bristles with polemics. Virtually every explanation of sound doctrine is immediately followed by refutation of the errors that oppose the truth.

The Reformed creeds are polemical. Question 80 of the Heidelberg Catechism is a severe condemnation of the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Supper: the

“popish mass”. Article 24 of the Belgic Confession has the Reformed churches “detesting the Anabaptists” for their rejection of the civil magistrates. The Canons of Dordt judge the Arminian heresy as a “bringing again out of hell the Pelagian error” (Canons, 2, Rejection of Errors, 3).

For a theologian or a minister to be polemical is not to be a “radical”, or some other kind of nasty person, but it is to be genuinely Reformed. To fail, or refuse to be polemical, especially in the case of a minister or a professor of theology, is to fail, or refuse, to be Reformed. In view of the fact that Scripture requires every minister to contend for the faith, to refuse, or fail, to be polemical is to be grievously derelict in the duty of his office. A minister who refuses or fails to be polemical is like a soldier in the kingdom of Christ, who, as the battle is raging, lays down his sword and retires from the field of battle.

Contemporary Threats Regarding Polemics

And this is the great evil of our age. Ministers and theologians are no longer polemical. What is even worse, they flaunt this disobedience as a Christian virtue, charging their colleagues who do contend for the faith with the evil of radicalism or the sin of hatefulness. Usually, those who refuse to be polemical defend their refusal as the manifestation of love. They are loving, whereas their polemical colleagues are unloving. As loving men, they refuse to engage in polemics.

The question is, to whom are they loving? Certainly not to the church, whom they expose to the destructive, damning effects of heresy. Certainly not to God, whose name they permit to be dishonoured by the false teachers,

thus becoming complicit in the taking of God’s name in vain. Certainly, they are not loving towards the truth of the gospel, which they allow to be corrupted by false doctrine.

But they love themselves. Either they like to leave the impression with others that they are fine, outstanding specimens of the virtue of love — head and shoulders above their colleagues. Or, they desire to spare themselves the wounds invariably suffered by one who engages in the spiritual warfare of controversy. In either case, the one who refuses to be polemical loves only himself.

Fundamental to the polemics required of the true church and her ministers is that they war against the contemporary assaults upon, or departures from, the gospel. This is the sacred calling of every professor of theology in particular. According to the Reformed “Form for the Installation of Professors of Theology”, the professor must “caution” his students “in regard to the errors and heresies of the old, but especially of the new day” (emphasis added). Implied is that the professor himself engages in polemics with the new errors and that graduates of the seminary are instructed to do the same in their ministry.

The false doctrine of old Rome at the time of the Reformation is introduced today in a new form by the heresy of the federal vision. And the federal vision is not the form of the heresy that is safely tucked away in the Vatican and in the decrees of the Council of Trent. The federal vision is a real threat in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, in the Presbyterian Church in America, in the United Reformed Churches, in many nominally Calvinistic churches in Great Britain and Europe that embrace the “New Perspective on Paul”, and, therefore, also

in the dangerous ecumenical organisation known as NAPARC. Contemporary polemics with the heresy of justification by faith as a human work must not today contend with the Roman Catholic theologian, Cardinal Sadolet, but with the Presbyterian/Reformed theologian, Norman Shepherd.

The charge to the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore, to the Protestant Reformed Churches in North America, and to all soundly Reformed and Presbyterian churches in the 21st century is that they engage in spiritual and doctrinal warfare (polemics) with heresies “especially in the new day”.

To be sure, there is another danger regarding polemics. This is the danger that the church engages in internal, divisive war over issues that do not, in fact, warrant, or permit, warfare. James 4:1-2 admonishes against such unnecessary polemics. In addition to the quarreling of a personal nature among members of the church, as, for example, the squabbling of Euodias and Syntyche in the church in Philippi (Phil. 4:2), a church ought not to fight over such trivial, practical matters as sitting or standing for congregational prayer; partaking of the wine of the Supper from a common cup or from individual cups; celebrating the Supper while remaining in the pews or gathering about the table in the front of the auditorium; and baptizing with one sprinkling from the minister’s hand or a threefold application of water. These and similar matters belong to what the church views as the “adiaphora”, that is, indifferent matters.

With regard to doctrinal matters, the church ought not to fight over an infralapsarian or a supralapsarian view of predestination, as decided by the Reformed Synod of Utrecht in 1905.

Romans 14 makes plain that wrong-headed polemics is always a danger to the church. But the main danger today is not that Reformed churches fight unnecessarily. The danger is that there is no fight at all. Love of the truth, the motivation of necessary warfare, is

cooling, or has already cooled (Matt. 24:12). A conviction, usually unspoken, or, if spoken, spoken in secret, keeps the churches from all warfare, and thus concedes the victory regarding these churches to the ancient foe: Satan, who hates the truth.

Failure vigorously to engage in polemics

betrays the conviction that the truth is not worth fighting for. Where the conviction reigns that the truth is not worth fighting for, the truth will be lost. God, who does love His truth, will take it away.

THE STRONG HELPING THE WEAK

>> Ishu Mahtani



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I believe every child of God goes through times of spiritual ups and downs. When a believer goes through trials and temptations, he or she may sometimes have the strength to fight the good fight. But at other times a Christian may find it very difficult due to his weak and sinful nature. Many saints in the past have gone through personal spiritual struggles in their lives. As members of the universal church of Christ, we are all created uniquely, each having our physical, emotional and psychological buildup. God's creation is perfect. He ordained all things good for His own glory. He knows what is good for each one of us, at each time of our life. We read, in Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose". Amen!

Recently, I read in an online article, a mention was made about some bushfires raging in the Amazon forests.

It mentioned how the various types of God's creation were going to be affected by these fires. There were the stronger creatures in the forest, e.g. jaguars, tigers, etc., which were apparently created in a manner in which they could run and escape from the fires easily. However, there were smaller and weaker creatures, e.g., grasshoppers, snails, worms, etc, which could not escape easily during the bush fires, and were therefore killed.

Similarly, when we face such "fires" in our life, whether they come in the form of trials or temptations, there is no doubt that some who are stronger in their faith, will have the ability to face the battles with more strength and vigour. Those who are weak may find it more difficult to face the trials.

In Romans 15:1-3, we read, "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me".

The verse above clearly reminds those who are strong must pray about helping those who are weak. The stronger Christian must no doubt first realise that his strength lies not in himself. It is only

by God's grace that one is able to have a strong faith. Without wisdom, strength, knowledge and understanding which come alone from God, no believer will be able to survive this trial.

In Ephesians 4:15, we read, "But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ". Now this is so important for all who are strong in faith. When the strong in faith decides to share the Word with the weak, if it is not done in humility and in love, then the command given by God is not obeyed and it will not be edifying for the weaker Christian. Even though the stronger Christian may have all the desire to share to help the weaker one, if words of truth, spoken only in love are not spoken, this may in fact cause the weaker brother or sister to become more discouraged or even looked down upon. The stronger Christian ought to pray about all things and seek for God's wisdom on how to deal with his weaker brother or sister.

In Romans 14:1,2,3, we read, "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received

him". This verse further strengthens the command for stronger Christians to be careful in how they behave in front of the weaker ones. God had received the weaker brother or sister, so there is no calling for the stronger Christian to place any judgement on the weaker Christian not do that which cause the weaker brother to stumble.

Finally I wish to conclude with this verse found in Galatians 6:1, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted".

A blessed verse to remind us how we ought to deal with our weaker brethren. Stronger Christians are to be meek and in much humility, pray about helping

the weaker Christian. If the stronger Christian feels proud and boastful about how good he is, this sort of behaviour will not be edifying for the weaker Christian which may result in other brethren avoiding this brother or sister altogether. What is the point of speaking to a brother who is always on cloud nine and looks down upon the weaker one?

How then ought the weaker Christian to behave towards the stronger ones? The answer is in meekness and humility. The weaker Christians may always find themselves on the receiving end. A stronger brother or sister may continuously chide or despise a weaker one. Even as the Word speaks to the stronger Christian (as mentioned above), the weaker brother must learn to receive it all with meekness and humility. If the

weak brother or sister felt there was no need to be spoken to in times of need or encouragement, that may be a sign of pride or weakness in itself. The Word of God is to obeyed. If the weak are brought the Word of God, the duty of every weaker vessel is to obey. Obeying may not be easy. Oftentimes the weak do not wish to obey because they may simply not wish to, or maybe they are not ready to. But oftentimes it is due to pride. The weak must remember to put away their pride and by God's grace, remember that God uses instruments to bring the Word to us.

Proverbs 1:7: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction". May the good Lord give us much wisdom as we obey His commandment each day.

THE CHRISTIAN IN THE WORLD: EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR

>> Bernice Lim



Bernice Lim is a member of CERC.

Introduction

What led me to become an early childhood educator, you may ask. Truth be told, I never considered being a teacher when I was growing up. All I knew was that I loved children and I enjoyed interacting with them.

Fast forward almost 20 years, and I am now a preschool teacher. I started work in August 2017 and have been working for two years. There have been a lot of

uncertainties in these two years, but God has been ever so gracious and merciful towards me (Ps. 116:1-5). Through the storms of my career, He has held my hand and hid me under the shelter of His wings (Ps. 91:1-4; 32:7). He has never given me trials that are more than what I can bear (1 Cor. 10:13) but with the trials, also gives me the strength and grace to deal with them (Ps. 46:1-3, Isa. 41:10). He always delivers me out of them and causes me to see His goodness upon me.

Have I always been content with where I am? No. Do I not complain at all? No. Do I regret this decision of becoming a teacher and blame God for the heavy workload that I have at times? A definite no! I will elaborate more about the benefits and challenges of being an early childhood educator in the next two

points.

Benefits of Being an Early Childhood Educator

There are a few benefits of being an early childhood educator. First, with the growing number of children in our church, there are many young mothers who come up to us preschool teachers to consult on various matters, such as when they should start preparing their children for academic learning or what are some of the ways to encourage their children to interact with other children in large group settings. As trained professionals, we are able to offer suggestions and share our knowledge with them on the different concerns they may have.

Second, my experience is an invaluable preparation for motherhood, if the Lord so wills. If the Lord provides, I hope that

I will be able to use my background and training to bring up my children in a way that is pleasing to Him.

Last, if we do have our own Christian preschool one day, I hope that my skills and knowledge will be of help to the school. According to Church Order Article 21, “The consistories shall see to it that there are good Christian schools in which the parents have their children instructed according to the demands of the covenant”. For those who are considering this vocation, it is worthwhile to remember that this may be a potential avenue of serving the families in church in the future.

When it comes to teaching children, there isn't a one-size-fits-all rule. Every child is unique and different in his or her development and learning pace, as well as likes and dislikes. It takes lots and lots of patience, time, and love to be committed to a job like that. And this can only be done through the grace and strength from Christ alone, as found in Philippians 4:13: “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me”.

Challenges of Being an Early Childhood Educator

With benefits come challenges as well. Here are some challenges that I face in

this line of work. How can I be a godly teacher and bring godly instruction while teaching these worldly children? This is my biggest challenge as a teacher. As we are not allowed to bring religion into the classroom, it is a struggle not to say things like “When you do this, God sees and knows it all, and He is unhappy. Shall we go to Him in prayer and ask for forgiveness together?” or “Do you think what you are doing is pleasing to God? How do you think He feels when He sees you being disobedient?”

With godly parents who heed the calling of Proverbs 22:6 to “Train up a child in the way he should go”, their children bear forth the fruit of the Spirit by God's grace. This is not the case with children of ungodly parents, however. I often tell my children to display kindness and love towards others, but without the grace and strength of God it is at best an external display of works. Moreover, this instruction in the school is of little use when it is not practised or continued in the home.

Another challenge I face is the temptation to work over a Sunday, especially during the peak periods. The workload of a teacher is heavy and burdensome, and there is always work to be done. I have learnt, and am still learning by God's grace

and strength, to obey the commandment to keep the Sabbath day holy (Ex. 20:8). It is a huge struggle for me personally, but God gives me peace when I obey His will and do that which is pleasing in His sight. He has promised us in His word that He will bless those who obey Him, and we hold on to that promise till He comes back again for us! In Luke 11:28, we have that certain assurance: “But he said, Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it”.

With that, I end with these words from Deuteronomy 28:1-2: “And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God.” Despite the challenges that I face at work, these verses serve as a huge encouragement to me, as they remind me of God's blessings upon His people when we learn how to obey His commandments and place Him first in all that we do. Without Christ, our works are as filthy rags (Isa. 64:6), and all that we do is in vain. May this article serve to encourage you in your earthly calling as well.

THE CHRISTIAN'S CALLING TO BE DISCIPLINED (1): CHALLENGES

>> Cheryl Lim



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Introduction

“Not now, I'm in a hurry.” Get to work. Check emails. Attend a project meeting. Rush to meet deadlines. Engage clients. “Brain's fried. Give me a break.” Attend exercise class. Hang out with friends. Check Instagram. Watch YouTube. “I'm tired. Maybe tomorrow.” And repeat.

Have you ever sat down in church on a Sunday morning before the service, reflecting on how quickly the week had gone by, how empty it had felt, how far short you had fallen in your spiritual disciplines, and with a sigh thought to yourself, “I'll try harder this week”? Well, you're not alone.

There are serious challenges to living as a disciplined Christian in this world, and in particular, with regard to maintaining our *spiritual* disciplines. These challenges see us caving in to excuses like those in the opening scenario and keep us from walking close to God. These challenges are a constant, trying reality for the godly Christian.

In recent years, CERC has had a fair number of youths transitioning to full-time working life. What has that been like? How have our spiritual lives been affected? What are some of the obstacles faced? In this article and the next, I hope to highlight some of the threats to our spiritual lives on the work front and draw out of the infallible Scriptures instruction and comfort afforded to those of us in such circumstances.

Spiritual Disciplines

First, a brief note on spiritual disciplines¹. Spiritual disciplines may be defined as “those practices found in Scripture that promote spiritual growth” and that are a “means of blessings for followers of Jesus and a part of growth in godliness” (Whitney, 2014). They include Scripture reading, meditation, prayer, worship, service, and many others.

Spiritual disciplines are *essential* on our earthly pilgrimage. They help us to know and enjoy God, grow in our Christian walk and in Christ-likeness, and mature in godliness and holiness. Conversely, there is great spiritual danger in neglecting these disciplines—we drift in our relationships with God, find ourselves increasingly prone to falling into temptations, bear little spiritual fruit in our lives, and become more earthly-minded.

While spiritual disciplines in themselves do not save us, they are required by God

of a Christian. As we are called to be holy (1 Pet. 1:15-16), so are we to make diligent use of the means of holiness, exercising ourselves unto godliness (1 Tim. 4:7-8; 2 Pet. 1:5-8).

Challenges

What then keeps us from engaging in these all-important spiritual disciplines? A quick poll amongst the young working adults brings up almost a dozen reasons. I summarise them in three non-exhaustive categories.

Lost in Transition

The transition in our calling from being a student to a worker may bring about a sense of loss for some.

The drudgery of 8 to 12-hour long work days week after week raises fundamental questions in our minds. We think, “Really, what is all this work for?” or, “In what does life consist?” An unappealing and trying work environment saps joy from our lives and leaves us discontent. Seemingly meaningless and unfulfilling work makes us feel as if we have lost our goal and direction in life. When attempting to switch jobs, we struggle to determine our true calling and purpose. Trials in our careers raise doubts in our hearts as to God’s ways and dealings with us.

This emptiness we feel in our lives may so consume and distract us that we gradually let go of our spiritual disciplines (a chicken and egg problem, really). In seeking for answers to fill this void, we turn to earthly means—more projects, social activities, self-help books, worldly counsel. Or we become bitter and restless, spiralling into depression.

We may have realised that this is a vicious cycle, brought about by focusing on the earthly. We experience a vacuum because

we draw fulfilment from circumstances and from the temporal. God disappears from view because we walk by sight. We look for things physical to fill our missing connection with God, relieving ourselves of spiritual disciplines.

Temptations of Working Life

Full-time working life brings with it associated temptations. Long hours at work in an ungodly environment provide extended contact time with the anti-Christian worldviews, conversations, and lifestyles of our colleagues. These range from subtle godless philosophies to overtly sinful behaviour, all of which may at first disgust, then puzzle, and finally even lure us.

The sudden increase in disposable income opens up a whole range of previously inaccessible or limited options for pleasure, pleasures that those around us blatantly pursue. They include vacations, gadgets and toys, entertainment services, clothes, fancy dining, etc. While we could agree that many of these are not sinful in and of themselves, they present to us potential gateways of assimilation into Babylon (Dan. 1). Unwise use of them would lead us more and more to identify with the world, to speak their language, to become just like them.

Corporate culture may entice or pressure us to join in the rat race for career success, promotions, bonuses, achievement, recognition, and power; and not merely join in, but to make these the goals of our lives, our all in all.

These temptations are capable of drawing us away from spiritual disciplines. They distract us from giving diligence to things that matter and have everlasting

¹ The interested reader may read more about spiritual disciplines in Donald S. Whitney’s book *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*.

value. They tempt us to make our homes here on earth, in which case spiritual disciplines are useless. They reveal to us “better” uses of our time than devotions and prayer. They draw us away... even as we *lust* after them.

While these temptations are certainly real, James 1:14-15 teaches us that when we fall into them, it is because our sinful natures are enticed by them and our lust draws us after them. And as we pursue more and more the things of this world, we come to see less and less of the need for spiritual disciplines.

Time Management (rather, the lack of)

Finally, an obstacle shared also by other groups of people such as mothers and students, broadly categorised as time management woes. In this category belong compounding factors such as work stress, poor discipline, and fatigue. Stressors at work keep our minds in the office even when our bodies are not. A planned hour of reading at home easily gives way to a social night out. A full, honest day’s work leaves us drained and

devoid of any energy whatsoever.

At the end of a grueling day, the natural choice of activity when we return home is surely something relaxing, recreational, and “brainless”. Read the *Salt Shakers*? Meditate? Attend Bible study? These options are quickly dismissed as being too onerous and taxing on the mind. Instead, we promptly connect to our home Wi-Fi and access the trivial, easy-going entertainment of the world.

When the much-anticipated weekend arrives, it is spent on entertainment, catching up on sleep, exercising, shopping, running errands, and hanging out with family and friends. Spiritual disciplines take a back seat so that we can enjoy our well-deserved break.

Yes, the demands of working life get in the way, and it is hard to juggle all these competing priorities. I hesitate to oversimplify the matter, but do consider, how often are we not giving in to *laziness*? Scripture is full of warnings and admonitions against being slothful (e.g.,

Proverbs, Rom. 12:11, Heb. 6:11-12), and rightly so, because our Lord knows that we are prone to spiritual sluggishness and lethargy. We would much rather loaf than labour, slack than slog, entertain than exert. But spiritual *disciplines* imply work — hard, diligent, sacrificial work!

Conclusion

Indeed, working life brings with it its fair share of challenges that hinder us from keeping to our spiritual disciplines. But these obstacles set about by Satan and the world are successful only insofar as they find an ally in our sinful natures — the old man that walks by physical sight, that says yes to worldly pursuits and yes to laziness. May God give us grace to examine ourselves, to discern our besetting sins and to guard against them.

Next time, DV, we will look at the remedies that Scripture has for us.

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MISCARRIAGES (1)

>> Matthias Wee



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“Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward” (Ps. 127:3).

Indeed, it is a great joy when God blesses

a couple with the birth of a covenant child. I daresay there are scarcely any joys on this earth greater than that of a mother (or father) holding their newborn child for the first time. The Bible records numerous examples of this joy — we think of Hannah’s and Elisabeth’s songs of thanksgiving when the LORD blessed them with child.

Yet, their occasion to rejoice highlights their struggle; for many years, the LORD had rendered them barren, which was a cause for great consternation. The child of God today is no less spared from such

trials of faith as the men and women of old. Rev. Daniel Kleyn in his article “*Childlessness*” (*Salt Shakers*, Aug 2019) wrote about the struggles that married couples in the church face when they are unable to bear children. In this article, we examine another very closely related subject — that of miscarriage.

It is the intention of the editorial committee that a section of this article be devoted to describing medical aspects of miscarriage. The rest of the article will focus on the impact of miscarriage and the Christian’s response.

What is Miscarriage?

Miscarriage refers to unintended pregnancy loss that occurs within the first 24 weeks of pregnancy. Many countries use 20 weeks as a cut-off, but in Singapore this is accepted to be within 24 weeks.

Vaginal spotting or bleeding is the most common symptom. The colour of discharge can range from red to brown and may contain fragments of tissue. Often, this is associated with cramping, abdominal or back pain. The anxious lady (and rightly so!) usually presents herself to the emergency department for evaluation, with concerns that she is at risk of miscarriage.

There is a variety of terms used when discussing miscarriage, which can be confusing for both patients and doctors. It is simpler to think of miscarriage in two ways:

1. Miscarriage is a *threat* but may not necessarily occur
2. Miscarriage is inevitable or has already occurred

In the first instance, though there may be concerning symptoms of bleeding and cramping, the cervix or neck of the womb remains closed and the developing foetus is shown on ultrasound scans to be viable. In these cases, the doctor often prescribes a course of hormone tablets to support the pregnancy.

It is important to note that bleeding in early pregnancy is fairly common and occurs in 20-30% of pregnant women. The majority of these do not result in miscarriage. Some sources of bleeding may also be unrelated to the pregnancy itself. However, all pregnant women are advised to seek medical advice if bleeding occurs.

In the second instance, the heart-breaking news of a miscarriage is given to the expecting couple after a series of tests including an ultrasound are done. The couple would then have to discuss with their treating doctor if further management is needed, depending on whether the pregnancy tissue is retained or has been passed out. In patients with recurrent miscarriages (two or more), special tests would be recommended to determine if there is an underlying medical condition that puts the mother at higher risk of miscarriage.

How Common is Miscarriage?

The successful conception, development and birth of a healthy baby is nothing short of a miracle. It is often taken for granted as a 'natural process'. But if we were to consider how a mere ball of cells can multiply and subdivide into an embryo and develop into a healthy baby with fully functioning organs, four limbs, ten fingers and toes — indeed we are fearfully and wonderfully made!

However, the effects of sin taint even this wonderful process of life. Imperfections in our genetic make-up result in chromosomal abnormalities, rendering survival impossible in some pregnancies. Other external factors like infections, anatomical abnormalities of the womb or trauma also increase the risk of miscarriage. It is estimated that up to 25%, or one in four pregnancies, result in miscarriage. Quite a number may even go unnoticed and present as a delayed or heavier-than-usual menstrual period.

Risk factors for miscarriage include increased maternal age (above 35 years), previous miscarriage, certain medical conditions like obesity, diabetes, thyroid disease and conditions that increase the risk of blood clotting. Stress, smoking, alcohol and some drugs (prescription

or recreational) are also risk factors for miscarriage. In general, it would be advisable to seek medical advice if a couple wishes to conceive, especially if any of the above are present.

The next question that follows would be: is miscarriage preventable? The answer depends on whether there are risk factors in the picture. If so, addressing them may help reduce the risk of miscarriage. But for the majority of women, supplementation with folic acid pre-conception and avoidance of lifestyle risk are the only current recommendations.

I still remember the first patient to whom I had to break the bad news of miscarriage. She was a young lady in her late twenties who went to the emergency department with concerns of bleeding and abdominal pain. This was her third pregnancy; the previous two were miscarriages. Like many other women, tests had not picked up any identifiable cause for recurrent miscarriages. Sadly, this would be her third.

I remember her initial look of apprehension turning into a lip-biting attempt to keep her composure as the diagnosis was made, finally dissolving into tears in the arms of her husband. My heart went out to her as she cried tears of disappointment and sorrow. A few heart-breaking minutes and many pieces of tissue paper later, she calmly steeled herself to decide the next steps to take.

This is but one example of what many women face. Every loss hurts — physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Expectations, hope and dreams crumble. Questions may be asked: Why me? Was it because of something I did? There may be pain, anger and guilt all mixed together.

Miscarriage is sometimes referred to as ‘the loneliest grief’ or ‘the invisible grief’. There are three reasons for this. First, no one else may have been aware of the pregnancy and hence not able to render support. Second, a miscarriage is a very personal event and couples may not feel comfortable to share about it. Third, there is often no body to grieve over, or no physical way of remembrance, especially in early pregnancy loss.

Because of these reasons, the grieving couple may feel they have no one to turn to or confide in. They may feel the need to mask their grief despite the inner turmoil. Seeing the children of other parents in church may create a fresh ache in their hearts. This grief may last for weeks, months or even years. Many women, even those who go on to bear other children successfully, will still remember the pain from years ago.

The Christian’s Response

How should the Christian view miscarriage? There are two different groups that are involved here: the affected couple, and the people around them, specifically, the church.

Miscarriages, as do all things, come from the hand of our Father in heaven. Above all else, God is sovereign. Just as Job, who had just lost his ten children and all his earthly possessions, fell down upon the ground and worshipped God: *“Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD”*, so also does

the couple acknowledge that God, the Creator of life, has chosen to take their unborn child to glory. Submitting to the will of God is difficult, but the couple may draw comfort from the knowledge that their Heavenly Father does all things for their spiritual good and for His glory (Rom. 8:28).

Submitting to God’s will also means that the couple may take comfort that should God be pleased to bless them to conceive another child, He will in His own time. They can wait upon the LORD to provide.

The couple may also rest assured in the covenantal promises of God. As we believe that life occurs at conception, the unborn child of believing parents shares in the covenantal promises extended by God to their children (Ps. 103:17). Indeed, it is comforting to know that God’s love extends to that child, short as his or her life may have been on earth. This unborn child is also spared the sin and suffering that accompanies life on this side of the grave. Thus, difficult as it may be, the couple who experiences a miscarriage may find a measure of comfort in clinging to the promises of God.

Much of this article has been devoted to addressing couples who experience miscarriage. How then can members of the church help and support such couples?

If confided in, church members can be a listening ear, a voice of encouragement

or a practical help in need. Each couple has different needs: some may prefer to speak to others with similar experiences. Others may prefer not to talk about it, or just quiet encouragement from a friend. Some may be hurting and angry, others may be resigned or despairing. The help and support of church members will have to be tailored according to each couple’s needs. Church members should be sensitive and gentle in their manner of approach. However, regardless of the need or approach, prayerfully pointing them to the Word of God and drawing on His promises should be at the forefront.

It is important to note that as indicated in the earlier section, miscarriages are not that uncommon, occurring in up to 25% of all pregnancies. Though statistics are hardly comforting when one experiences it, it is good to bear in mind that having a miscarriage does not necessarily mean there is a problem with, or that the expecting mother has done something wrong. Knowing this fact may help to lessen the guilt that occasionally accompanies a miscarriage.

Miscarriage is a difficult subject to write about due to its personal nature and sensitivity. We have examined this topic at length in this article. It is my prayer that it will be of spiritual benefit to the readers, providing comfort for those who experience it, while helping others understand more about this and how they can help as fellow members of the body of Christ.

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News from the Churches

Singapore

We are thankful for the providence of Rev. Leo Trinidad (Maranatha PRC, Philippines) to bring us the word of God and in the administration of the Lord's Supper on Sep 8, 2019. We are also once again thankful for the faithful service of Rev Arie den Hartog who has been supplying the pulpit since end-September and will do so until the end of the year.

On Nov 3, Rev. Jonathan Mahtani announced his acceptance of the call from Grandville PRC to serve as minister on loan to CERC. We rejoice and give thanks to God for providing us a minister. At the same time, we remember Cornerstone PRC in their vacancy and pray that the Lord will provide them a new minister in due time.

USA

Classis East met at Southwest PRC where pastor-elect Jacob Maatman was examined. He successfully sustained his exam and Southeast PRC (who called him) was instructed to proceed with his ordination and installation into the ministry of the Word.

Rev. B. Huizinga has been installed as the new professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament Studies (in the future replacing Prof. R Cammenga, DV) and has begun on his work on his advanced degree at Calvin Theological Seminary. The seminary's other new professor, Prof. Douglas Kuiper has begun giving instruction for the first time this semester, starting with pre-seminary Greek grammar, among other courses.

The Philippines

The PRC in Bulacan (calling church of the mission work in Albuera, Leyte) has extended a call to Rev V. Ibe (Berean PRC) to serve as missionary / pastor the this field which Rev. Ibe has accepted. This means that the PRCP will have its first missionary as a denomination. We are thankful for God's provision of a man for this work.

India

CERCI recently held their Confession of Faith, Adult and Infant Baptisms. We are joyful to see how God gathers His own in India and pray that God may be pleased to continue to bless Rev. Emmanuel Singh in his labours in CERCI.

Rev. and Mrs. Singh will be travelling to Singapore to attend the Reformation Day Conference on Nov 9. We look forward to renewing our bonds and having a blessed time of fellowship with them.



Confessions of faith during the recent Kolkata delegation:
from left to right - Mr Kaushik, Rajesh Mishal, Rikta Das



Eld Tang, Rev Singh and Eld Leong trying out
malai lassi at the shop of Mr Kaushik



Enjoying a meal in the Pramanick family's home



We rejoice with Paul & Noelene on their
holy matrimony on September 28



New additions to CERC: Joy Koh (daughter of Zong Jie
& Julia) and Paige Tan (daughter of Ywee Ern & Hui Li)



More new additions! Silas Wee (son of Marcus & Tze Yan)
and Hayson Lim (son of Aaron & Iva)



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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