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— Prof. David Engelsma in *Remarriage in the Westminster Confession of Faith*

"The fact of the matter is that the office of all believers is the most important office in the church of Christ. It is a more important office than the office of minister of the gospel, of eldership and of the diaconate."

— Prof. Herman Hanko in *The Office of all Believers*

"Partaking of the Lord's Supper according to Scripture helps us to shift our focus from ourselves to Christ and our relationship with Him and fellow believers when we commune at the table."

— Melina Chong in *A Small Member of the Body — The Tongue*



salt shakers
joel 3:16 matthew 5:16

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And let us consider
one another to provoke unto
love and to good works.

Hebrews 10:24

WELCOME TO THE 58TH ISSUE OF SALT SHAKERS!

CONTENTS

2019 – The Year We Didn't Talk?	3
Church Polity (1): The Office of all Believers	5
Homosexuality: What Does the Bible Teach? (6)	6
A Critique of Divorce and Remarriage in the Westminister Confession of Faith (1)	9
Discernment	11
Drawing Near to God	13
The Christian's Calling to be Disciplined (2): Remedies	14
A Small Member of the Body - The Tongue (1)	16
Doon Protestant Reformed Church	17
News from the Churches	19

Dear Readers,

With this issue of the *Salt Shakers*, the last publication of the year is out. The *Salt Shakers* committee is thankful for the opportunity to publish distinctively Reformed articles on behalf of the truth. We hope that by means of the published word, the Reformed faith is promoted and believers everywhere edified.

In this Christmas season, while the world indulges in merry-making, we are reminded that the true reason for celebration is the birth of the Saviour who gave Himself for us. The Reformed church celebrates this joyous occasion for the great Wonder of wonders – Immanuel – God with us.

In this issue, Prof. David Engelsma provides a vital article in relation to CERC's doctrinal position on divorce and remarriage. He examines the teaching of divorce and remarriage in the Westminister Confession of Faith, and explains why the article is wrong to permit divorce and remarriage. Reformed and Presbyterian churches do well to heed his advice on the WCF's erroneous position. In a time where very little is heard about Scripture's condemnation of divorce and remarriage, CERC and her sister churches do well to heed Prof. Engelsma's warning against unbiblical divorce and remarriage.

Another interesting article is provided by a member of our sister church in Doon PRC. The article gives our readers an insight into the history and development of Doon PRC. Most of our readers are probably not acquainted with the life of a congregation in rural Doon, Iowa. It may be of interest to note that Prof. Herman Hanko was once the minister there from 1963 to 1965.

As 2019 draws to a close, we are reminded that our Lord's coming draws ever nearer. Satan and his host continue to wage a violent war against the church, tempting many by the seduction of their lies. The true church rests safely in the arms of King Jesus. Heeding His command, she continues to wage warfare against His foes. She preaches and defends His truth amidst this bloody warfare, knowing that in this way King Jesus is pleased to preserve her in her generations.

We hope that you will enjoy and be instructed by these articles. Remember to pass the salt.

Blessings,
Aaron

2019: THE YEAR WE DIDN'T TALK?

>> Lim Yang Zhi



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

This is an unflattering title. It's a question that ruins the positive vibes of Christmas and the new year. It's... inevitable.

In a congregation that has burst with demographic changes within a single decade, it is inevitable to ask: is 2019 a year you didn't talk to someone? Is 2019 a year someone slipped your radar, because you had no time?

To phrase the question positively: "Did you have a meaningful conversation with [fill whatever name], where you could encourage, comfort, or exhort a fellow believer by your speech and behaviour?"

And I mean to ask, whether we have had such a conversation with a fellow believer *of a different demographic*. Parents, have we spent time talking to our fellow believers who are single (and vice-versa)? Young adult singles, have you spent time talking to our youth (and vice-versa)? Our members in the 40s, 50 and 60s, have you spent time talking to the younger generation (and vice-versa)? Members, have we spent time talking to our office-bearers (and vice-versa)? In a season (4-5 years?) of

drastic changes, it is far too easy to lose rapport and connection with certain members, because either our callings change, or the age-gap is seemingly too big.

Some might say, "But isn't a small church meant to have the advantage of closer relationships?" I have never been a member of a church larger than CERC. All I know (and I'm all for disagreements here) is that a small church can experience closer bonds and become complacent over such bonds. And a small church, with these tight bonds, can become so closely-knit, that it become easy for me to step on your toe, and then for you to tatter-tale about me to others.

Have we lost some of our bonds, readers? Have we lost them over complacency and even bickering in 2019?

Don't let your answer be the final word. Let God's Word be the final word: *let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works*.

To examine how we have measured up to this verse, let's ask three questions.

Have I Been Considerate?

To consider is to understand a brother or sister in Christ as thoroughly as possible. Our English word *considerate* can help us understand this text, as the attitude of considerateness leads to an understanding of another's needs, along with a desire to fulfil those needs.

However, the English word cannot bring us to the force of the word. The Greek word for *consider* has the

strongest-possible connotation of understanding. In other words, when I consider my brother in Christ, I bring myself to know him as much as I can. To know him, I don't just think about him when I see him in the toilet after the morning service; I think about him through the week — when I travel home from work; when I shower; when I sit down with my wife to pray for the church. I want to know how my brother's relationship with God is. How is he in his God-given job? Busy? Consumed? Exhausted? Retrenched? Does he have a place in Christ's instituted church? Does he have someone to talk to? Does he sit alone mostly? Does he have a place to serve? How is he doing in where he currently serves?

This is an effort far holier than being *kaypoh*. Being *kaypoh* is selfishness. Consideration is *selfless*. In considering the member, we become so consumed with the member's good that we want to know the member as much as we can *to provoke the member unto love and good works*. On the other hand, *kaypoh* wants to understand for selfish reasons ("I just want to know"), even gossip at times ("Did you know...?"). The Singaporean Christian ought not to have any business with this cultural attitude. At the same time, the Singaporean Christian ought not to misjudge such consideration to be *kaypoh*.

Readers, have you and I considered?

God calls us to consider, not to assume. Don't assume that sister is doing well, just because you see her in the morning

service. Don't assume that brother is doing well, just because he is part of a committee. Don't assume that young person is doing well, just because he has covenant parents.

Don't assume — consider!

Have I Considered *Others*?

Really, this next heading is the full question. Let's not just be considerate; be considerate *towards one another*.

After all, when we talk about *one another*, that other is not just another husband (if I am a husband), or another adult (if I am an adult). That brother can be and must be a single, a retiree, a youth, a child, an aged saint, an office-bearer, even a saint in Kolkata that I've never seen before!

Readers, may that inspired word, one another, search our hearts. Has it been *one another* in my heart, or *one group*? Let this be clear from Hebrews: we must not narrow our thoughts and consideration to members of the same demographic.

Take a Sunday to widen our thoughts. Return home, dress down, take a nap, have dinner — then talk. Fathers, ask your families: who did you talk to today? Who didn't you see at church? What about these members should we remember through the week?

Have I Provoked?

The member that considers others provokes others to love and good works.

The member lives in a way that brings the other to love and to do good works. Just as a sinful parent can foolishly provoke his child by words and behaviour (cf. Eph. 6:4), so we can wisely provoke one another by our

words and behaviour.

The member communicates in a way that excites the brother spiritually, so that he wants to love and do good works. Here, the first thing that comes to mind is our *speech*. We say something that encourages our brother to love and good works. Is he busy in his work? Encourage him to remain faithful for the Lord in that work *and in the church!* Has he been attending Bible study? Discuss what he has learned and applied (and what you have learned and applied)!

But remember, too, that communication is often *non-verbal action*. Let's not fool ourselves, that our provocation is effective when we talk while using any technological device (smartphone, laptop, baby monitor) — it isn't. Let's also keep in mind, that the way we make time for spiritually-provocative conversations also tells our brother something. If I procrastinate in finding a day to meet with the brother, I'm probably saying, "You're not that important". And if I excuse myself by saying, "I'm busy", I'm probably saying, "I'd rather be busy in other things".

Searching our hearts over these matters, let's keep in mind these facts.

Not included in this godly provocation is *small-talk*. I mean the kind of talk about work, school, politics, sports, cars, fashion, food, and vacations that never moves on to godly provocation of the soul. Looping our conversations around these matters shows how superficial we can be as Christians in Singapore. So superficial, in fact, that one youth remarked to me recently, "The one thing some adults ever ask me is 'When are you getting your exam results?'" And sometimes we wonder

why they would rather use their phones than talk!

Another thing: inevitable in this provocation is *conflict*. I mean this — you and I talk, and I say something in an attempt to encourage you in your callings to walk in the Word. But it didn't come off so well, and the words I spoke discouraged you instead, because I did not understand your situation as well as I should have. You and I will also notice that this conflict can easily occur between two demographics — between single and married, youth and adult, child and parent, office-bearer and member, and the list goes on.

We could resolve this in one of two ways. Either: Stick to your "group". That way, you do not have to deal with the possibility of conversations not going so well. After all, you could still experience Hebrews 10:24 in your "group"! Or: like Nehemiah, pray that conversations may be held in truth, wisdom and love, reach out to those beyond your "group", and experience what Hebrews 10:24 means *more deeply*.

And don't forget, that you won't always do the provoking. There are times we are the provoked — at the receiving end. That is not a bad thing; God puts us in the church mutual *spiritual growth*. What turns bad (even ugly) is that we receive the provocation ungraciously. "Who are you to tell me what to do?" "I can't believe you think this way about me (even though it's partly true)." We do well to find more gracious ways to receive provocation, even provocation that isn't given the best way.

After all, we're all growing to live in unity and peace as a church, aren't we? Not reaching the standard of our Head, Jesus Christ, we do not just stop

at a bad conversation. We part ways; we pray; we read the Scriptures; we pray again — and we *talk again*. That will likely involve apologies on both sides; but we will talk again — and again, and again, and again...

This is a serious question.

Married couples, is this the year we didn't consider to provoke a single? Adults, is this the year we didn't consider to provoke a young person? Members, is this the year we didn't consider to provoke an office-bearer? —

and vice-versa all these!

God will give more grace for 2020, to those that humbly answer this question.

Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works!

WISDOM (5): WISDOM AND HELPING OTHERS

>>Prof. Herman Hanko



Prof. Herman Hanko is a professor emeritus of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary. During his professorship and retirement, he taught and preached in CERC on numerous occasions.

The Staff of *Salt Shakers* has asked me to write some articles on the office of believers. More particularly, they have asked me to concentrate on the relationship between the office of all believers and the special office of elder. I am happy to do this, for I am aware of misunderstanding of these questions.

We must take note of the fact, first of all that the rule of Christ over His church is not the same as the rule of magistrates over people in a given country. The fact of the matter is that the office of all believers is the most important office in the church of Christ. It is a more important office than the office of minister of the gospel, of eldership and of the diaconate. So many people think

that the office of believers is the lowest office: above it is the office of the elders; above that is the office of minister; and the office of deacons is sort of added on, but is really not a part of the pyramid.

Hence, the Session or consistory is a court above the ordinary member of the church; the classical assemblies are above the Session; and the synod is the highest juridical office. The arrangement is thus the system of courts in a democracy with lower courts and higher courts, the higher ones having superior authority. This is not so. We must set the pyramid on its head so that the office of believers is on the very top and synods at the bottom.

The reason for this is the biblical truth that the office of minister is the prophetic office; the office of elder is the ruling office; and the office of deacon the priestly office. But the office of believers is a combination of all three offices. The believer is prophet, priest and king.

This may come as a surprise to many, but it is biblical teaching for all that.

This truth is taught in Scripture in different ways. I will try to show you this as we move through various ideas taught in Scripture.

Here already lies a feature unique to Reformed church polity. Although in the Old Testament all the offices of prophet, priest and king were united in the office of prophet, so also in the New Testament all the offices (minister, elder and deacon) are united in the office of ministry, i.e., ministering the Word of God. Ministers, elders and deacons, following the pattern of the Old Testament, bring God's Word to God's people. But in the Old Testament, it was a great sin for anyone to assume both the office of priest and king. Saul was deposed for being king for doing this, and king Uzziah was smitten with leprosy for trying to do the work of priests. The point is that because office bearers, whether ministers, elders or deacons have the calling to bring God's word — although in their own special sphere. That is, ministers in their calling to preach; elders in their calling to rule; deacons in their calling to help the poor and needy. But, because each office has the calling to bring God's word, each office bearer is a prophet — within his own sphere.

But Moses already prophesied that someday God would send a prophet to His people and all God's people would be prophets (Num. 12:6, Deut. 13). But the most obvious text is the prophecy of Joel, which passage Peter quoted on

Pentecost in his great sermon on that day (Joel 2:28-32, Acts 2:16-21). The exalted Lord ascended into heaven, received the promise of the Spirit and poured the Spirit out upon the church. That, says Peter, is the meaning of Pentecost. All God's people become prophets. John says in 1 John 2:26-27 that God's people need not that any should teach them for they all have the anointing of the Spirit. Hebrews 8:11 teaches the same truth, but as part of the new covenant God makes with His people. Hence all God's people are prophets, priests and kings.

Christ is Himself the one true and only office bearer in the church since his ascension. He is a Priest forever after the order of Melchisedec (Heb. 6, 8; Ps. 110) who was the only one in the

whole Old Testament who held the office of priest-king. Christ poured out His Spirit upon the church so that the believers in Him might partake of the same office (See texts already mentioned in Joel and Acts. See also Lord's Day 12 where all these truths are summed upon and where the explanation lies concerning our three-fold office in the New Testament and our obligations and calling as "Christians"). Christians are prophets, priests and kings. That is the office of all believers.

Christians function as prophets when they meet with fellow saints to discuss God's word; when they come to visit God's people during the sicknesses and trials their fellow saints endure; and as elders or kings when they admonish an erring brother (Matt. 18, Gal. 6:1-2,

James 5:20, and many other passages). They function as deacons when they bring meals to the sick, help mothers who have just gave birth to a baby, give money to the poor and comfort the suffering. While individual members hold the special offices of elders, deacons and ministers, believers hold all three.

And, of course, all this brings up the question of why God has established special offices in the church if believers are prophets, priests and kings; and Scripture even admonishes the saints to submit themselves to the preaching and the rule of elders. But the answer to these questions must be postponed to our next issue of SS.

HOMOSEXUALITY: WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH? (6)

>>Rev. Angus Stewart



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

Homosexuality and the Gospel

Having quoted and exegeted Romans 1:26-27 at length, we now note that these key verses on same-sex attraction and intercourse are included in that part of this great epistle that sets forth the sinfulness of the whole human race (Rom. 1:18-3:20), both Jews and Gentiles. Indeed, Romans 1:26-27 comes in a sub-section especially dealing with pagan or Gentile depravity

(Rom. 1:18-32) — so much for the pro-homosexual claim that these two verses deal merely with a Jewish taboo.

The next major section of Romans treats justification by faith alone in Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:21-5:21). The argument of the first five inspired chapters of Romans is, therefore, very clear and simple: all human beings, including homosexuals, are totally depraved (Rom. 1:18-3:20) and so need the righteousness of God through believing in Christ crucified (Rom. 3:21-5:21). Next, Romans 6-7 teaches sanctification: the promised gift of a holy life and the arduous calling of a fierce struggle by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

The verdict of God's Word, of which Paul is "not ashamed" (Rom. 1:16),

is that lesbianism and sodomy are unnatural and vile judgments of God and manifestations of His wrath (Rom. 1:18, 26-27). The only hope for those snared in those sins — or in any sin — is the gospel of God's grace in the Lord Jesus resulting in our legal pardon and our organic transformation.

The same apostle Paul teaches this truth more briefly in 1 Timothy 1:8-11:

But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully; Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves

with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine; According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust.

Notice, first, that homosexuals, those who “defile themselves with mankind”, are included in this list of sinners (v. 10)¹. Second, this sin and all the others are exposed by the right use of God’s law (vv. 8-9). Third, all this is in accordance with the “glorious gospel” of Christ (v. 11), for the good news of salvation is a precious word to all who see their guilt before the just Lord of heaven: “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief” (v. 15)!

This is the gospel call issued by the Son of God: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). As the prophet declares, “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon” (Isa. 55:7). What gracious and rich promises!

Acknowledging the justice of God’s law and trusting in the cross as their only hope, all regenerated sinners repent of their sins, and come to Jesus Christ for forgiveness and spiritual healing. All true believers, including former homosexuals, are empowered and cleansed (Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 6:9-11) for single, chaste lives as eunuchs in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 19:11-12) or for the lifelong bond of (heterosexual) marriage (Matt. 19:4-6).

However, those who repudiate God’s judgment, in order to excuse their own sins, thereby reject the gospel of Christ, the sole source of divine forgiveness, and the only power to break with the bondage and misery of sin so as to live in a way pleasing to the Triune God. All such people, including impenitent homosexuals, perish for ever because of their sins.

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor *effeminate*, nor *abusers of themselves with mankind*, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10).

For without [the heavenly city] are *dogs*, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie (Rev. 22:15).

But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the *abominable*, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death (Rev. 21:8)².

Those who live in sodomy or lesbianism are not believers, even if they claim to be “Christian homosexuals”. Such people must not be acknowledged as saints, no matter how vehemently they assert it. These men and women ought not be received as members of the church, irrespective of their protestations. A homosexual Christian is an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms, like a

vegetarian who eats T-bone steak or an environmentalist who advocates the wholesale extermination of blue whales.

To accept impenitent sodomites or lesbians as if they were Christians is no service or love to them. Instead, it invalidates the gospel of Jesus Christ to lost sinners, corrupts the church and dishonours the holy God of heaven.

Homosexuality and the Church

There is something worse than homosexuality in the world, and the Western media and state promotion of it. Homosexuality in the professing Christian churches is even more offensive to the Triune God.

Officially, Roman Catholicism is opposed to homosexual activity. However, Rome’s canon law requires priestly celibacy, which Scripture calls a doctrine of devils (1 Tim. 4:1-3; Heb. 13:4) and which provides a fertile ground for sodomy. Many students for the papal priesthood have complained about the homosexual culture of seminary life.

¹ Joe Dallas, a former professing “homosexual Christian,” explains, “When Paul coined the term *arsenokoite* [a compound of two Greek words meaning *males* and *bed or couch*, in I Timothy 1:10 and I Corinthians 6:9], he took it directly from the [LXX] Greek translation of Leviticus’s prohibitions against homosexual behaviour [Lev. 18:22; 20:13]. His intent couldn’t be clearer. Though *arsenokoite* is unique to Paul, it refers specifically and unambiguously to sex between men” (*The Gay Gospel? How Pro-Gay Advocates Misread the Bible* [Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2007], p. 213.)

² Besides the two italicised groups in the first indented Scripture passage, there are also two categories in the last two lists, excluding people from the new creation and assigning them to eternal damnation, that refer to homosexuals: “dogs” (Rev. 22:15; cf. Deut. 23:18) and the “abominable” (Rev. 21:8; cf. Lev. 18:22; 20:13) (cf. Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* [Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001], pp. 104-105, 432, 434, n. 150).

Around the world, the Roman Catholic Church is plagued by the practice of priestly pederasty. It is striking that the vast majority of these sickening cases involve the (homosexual) abuse of boys, rather than girls. This is yet another area in which Rome clearly reveals itself to be a false church because of its grievous refusal to discipline effectively these wicked priests (Belgic Confession 29). Not only has this papal scandal been going on for decades but it has been occurring over many centuries. The only difference is that people are more willing to speak out against it in our day.

To accept impenitent sodomites or lesbians as if they were Christians is no service or love to them. Instead, it invalidates the gospel of Jesus Christ to lost sinners, corrupts the church and dishonours the holy God of heaven.

It is no secret that impenitent homosexuals have been members of various Anglican or Episcopalian churches for many decades and have partaken of the Lord's supper, without any church discipline. Moreover, there have been openly homosexual priests in the Anglican Communion for some time. Scores of lesbian and sodomite priests in the Church of England

have been "married" under the Civil Partnership Act (2005).

In 2003, Jeffrey John, who was openly living in a same-sex relationship, was nominated as the Bishop of Reading but, under pressure, the Church of England withdrew his appointment. Later in 2003, Gene Robinson, another open homosexual, was "consecrated" as Bishop of New Hampshire in the Episcopal Church in the United States.

Not only Roman Catholicism and apostate Anglican denominations, but other churches have also conformed to the ungodly Western world's promotion of homosexuality (Rom. 12:2; 1 John 2:15), and caved in to the pressure from without and within. Such communions share the common, core heresies of liberalism or modernism. It is not difficult to see how these (and other) false doctrines lead to the toleration and (eventually) the promotion of sexual abominations:

1. Higher criticism of God's Word — once the inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures are rejected (John 10:35; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:19-21), can the Bible be trusted to give a sure word regarding homosexuality?
2. Evolutionism — if God did not create the world and humanity as the Bible says in Genesis 1-2, He does not set the rules for males and females, sex and marriage!
3. Unbiblical divorce and remarriage — if the church can set aside the clear teaching of Christ (Matt. 5:31-32; 19:3-12; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18) and His apostles (Rom. 7:2-3; 1 Cor. 7:10-11,

39) in this area, in order to conform to civil law and/or public opinion, why should it be so "bigoted" as to oppose lesbianism, sodomy and same-sex marriage?³

4. Feminism — there are more Scriptures opposing women in church office (e.g., 1 Cor. 14:34-35; 1 Tim. 2:11-15) than homosexual office-bearers!
5. Arminianism — God loves and wants to save everyone (Rom. 9:1-24), and Christ died for everybody (John 10:11, 15; Eph. 5:25), for all human beings are His children in His image (John 8:33-47; Rom. 8:29), including homosexuals, whom He accepts just as they are!

Our own calling is very clear: uphold the truth of the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27; Jude 3), bring the gospel to homosexuals and all outside of Jesus Christ (Mark 16:15-16), walk in sexual purity (1 Cor. 6:9-7:40) and live faithfully in our churches (Eph. 4:1-16) — out of gratitude and love for our Saviour. "Thy testimonies are very sure: holiness becometh thine house, O Lord, for ever" (Ps. 93:5)!

³ For more on the connection between the ecclesiastical approval of unbiblical divorce and remarriage, on the one hand, and homosexuality in the church, on the other, see "Narrow is the Way: The Argument from Remarriage to Homosexual Relationships," chapter 8 of Prof. David J. Engelsma's booklet, "Until Death Us Do Part."

A CRITIQUE OF DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE IN THE WESTMINSTER CONFSSION OF FAITH (1)

>> Prof. David Engelsma



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

The Westminster Confession of Faith (hereafter WCF) is a grand confession of the Reformed faith regarding the revelation of God's truth in Holy Scripture.

Nevertheless, it seriously errs with regard to its permission of remarriage after divorce while the original mate is still living. Therefore, it necessarily errs seriously regarding its doctrine of marriage. It denies that marriage is a life-long bond.

The specific errors are mainly two. The first is the permission of remarriage for the husband or wife whose mate is guilty of adultery — the so-called “innocent party”. The WCF grants this permission in Chapter 24, section 5 (24.5):

Adultery or fornication committed after a contract, being detected before marriage, giveth just occasion to the innocent party to dissolve that contract. In the case of adultery after marriage, it is lawful for the innocent party to sue out a divorce, and, after the divorce, to marry another, as if the

offending party were dead.

Contrary to Westminster's permission of remarriage, Scripture clearly condemns all remarriage while an original mate is still living, including remarriage after divorce on the ground of fornication. Scriptural passages include Matthew 5:31, 32; Matthew 19:3-12; Mark 10:2-12, especially verses 11, 12; Luke 16:18; Romans 7:2, 3; and 1 Corinthians 7, especially verses 10, 11, and 39.

In Matthew 19:9, Jesus permits divorce in the case of marital infidelity. He does really permit divorce in this case. Churches and ministers may not counsel the aggrieved wife, or husband, as the case may be, that she is unspiritual if she divorces her adulterous husband, or that her Christian calling demands taking the adulterer back. Divorce is permitted. It is permitted as a legitimate Christian act in view of the adultery of one's mate. So serious a sin is the fornication of a married person. The offended party *may* take back the now penitent fornicator. She is not *required* to do so. Divorce is permitted on the ground of fornication. But all remarriage after divorce, including divorce on the ground of fornication, is condemned as adultery.

Defense of Westminster's permission of remarriage after divorce on the ground of the adultery of one's mate appeals to Matthew 19:9, the one text in Scripture that might be explained as permitting remarriage. In fact, this defense appeals, not to the entire text, but only to the first part of Matthew 19:9. The

argument is that in the first part of Matthew 19:9 Jesus gives permission, not only to divorce, but also to remarry. The second part of the text, however, makes plain that the exception clause (“except it be for fornication”) applies only to the permission of divorce, not to a subsequent remarriage. It allows a man or a woman to divorce; it does not allow a subsequent remarriage. For, with reference to the woman who was unjustly divorced and whose husband has subsequently remarried — the so-called “innocent party”, the second part of Matthew 19:9 teaches that whoever marries her commits adultery: “whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery”. The “innocent party” may not remarry!

If any doubt remains whether Matthew 19:9 forbids the remarriage of the “innocent party”, contrary to the WCF, 1 Corinthians 7 settles the matter beyond any shadow of doubt. Verse 10 of 1 Corinthians 7 forbids a wife to depart from (divorce) her husband. Verse 11 goes on to *permit* a wife to depart, as the one exception to the rule of verse 10. This exception can only be that allowed by Jesus in Matthew 19:9: “except it be for fornication”. The apostle is teaching the marriage doctrine of Jesus in Matthew 19. There is one biblical ground for divorce. But even in this case, a divorced wife (and, by implication, husband) has two options, and two only: “remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband”. Remarriage to another is not an option. Remarriage to another is forbidden. The implication is that in Matthew 19:9, upon which text Paul

is drawing in 1 Corinthians 7:10, 11, Jesus allows for divorce on the ground of infidelity. He is not allowing for remarriage. The exception clause in Matthew 19:9 applies only to the prohibition of divorce.

1 Corinthians 7 also explains why all remarriage after divorce, (the original mate still living), is forbidden. It does so in verse 39: “The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord”. Marriage is a bond for life. Only death dissolves the bond. God forms the bond. Only God can, and only God may, dissolve it. Even for God, dissolving the bond takes some doing: death.

1 Corinthians 7:39 points out the fundamental error concerning marriage that underlies the false doctrine of the Westminster divines regarding marriage, divorce, and remarriage. WCF, 24.5 calls marriage a “contract”. Contracts can be broken by the contracting parties. But marriage is not a contract. It is a bond, according to 1 Corinthians 7:39: “the wife is *bound*...” The one who forms the bond is God. Only God can, and only God may, dissolve the bond. He does this by means of the death of one of the two who are bound in marriage.

Significantly, the Westminster divines felt the error of their doctrine of remarriage, in light of 1 Corinthians 7:39. They showed this by their foolish

statement at the conclusion of 24.5: “marry another, *as if the offending party were dead* (emphasis added)”. The statement indicates that they were well aware that 1 Corinthians 7:39 limits remarriage to one whose mate has died. The statement indicates also that they were aware that they were teaching the permissibility of remarriage in contradiction of 1 Corinthians 7:39. Therefore, they proposed viewing the divorced, but surviving and, very much living mate as dead.

A divorced man whose body is not in the grave is not dead according to the stipulation of 1 Corinthians 7:39, but alive. He may not, indeed *cannot*, be viewed as dead. To view him so is not only in deliberate opposition to 1 Corinthians 7:39, but also a deliberate nonsense. By “dead” in the text, the apostle refers to a man whose earthly life has ended, actually ended. He is not dead because his wife has decided to view him as dead. But she views him as dead because he is dead.

By its concluding clause in WCF, 24.5, “as if the offending part were dead”, the Westminster divines shouted to the world that they knew that their doctrine of remarriage contradicts, *deliberately* contradicts, the authoritative marriage doctrine of the apostle in 1 Corinthians 7:39.

Scripture teaches marriage as a life-long bond, or union. Adultery can strain the bond to the extent that a full, legal divorce is permissible, although even in

this case reconciliation is possible. But even adultery cannot dissolve the bond so that another bond is permissible, while the adulterous mate is still alive.

Two other considerations bear on this matter. The first is that the permissibility of the remarriage of the “innocent party” in a divorce entails the permissibility of the remarriage of the “guilty party” as well. The remarriage of the “innocent party” obviously implies that the original marriage has been dissolved. Otherwise the “innocent party” may not marry another. But if the original marriage has been dissolved for the one, it has, in the nature of the case, been dissolved as well for the other. Since his original marriage has been dissolved (according to the thinking of the advocates of the right of the “innocent party” to remarry), the “guilty party” also may now marry another.

In fact, the absurd implication of the notion that sexual unfaithfulness breaks the “contract” of marriage is that all one needs to do in order to dissolve his marriage is that he fornicate with one who is not his wife or that she fornicate with one who is not her husband. Lo, the mere act of illicit sex puts asunder what God hath joined together.

The second consideration is that the faulty doctrine of divorce and remarriage in the WCF, which is apparently held and practiced by many Reformed churches and theologians as well, results in, or approves, an

Scripture teaches marriage as a life-long bond, or union. But even adultery cannot dissolve the bond so that another bond is permissible, while the adulterous mate is still alive.

epidemic of divorces and remarriages today. Divorce and remarriage were rare at the time of the Westminster Assembly. Society frowned on divorce and remarriage. The assembly was not motivated by concern for the preservation of the institution as ought to be the case today. Today, a godless society attacks marriage. Divorce and remarriage in evangelical and Reformed churches in the West occur nearly at the

rate at which they occur in the world. This is a disgrace. It is destructive of the Christian home and family. It shames Jesus Christ.

Yet, hardly any church and scarcely any theologian raise their voice to address this disgrace. Rather, churches and theologians exert themselves to justify the disgrace, with vociferous appeal to the WCF. Why? No one subjects WCF,

24.5 to critique. Why not?

(Next time, I offer a critique of the second main error of the WCF concerning divorce and remarriage. I refer to its statement in WCF, 24.6: “nothing but... such wilful desertion as can no way be remedied by the church or civil magistrate is cause sufficient of dissolving the bond of marriage.”)

DISCERNMENT

>> Deuel Teo



Deuel Teo is a member of CERC.

Introduction

The youth in the previous year covered a series of workshops involving discernment in various forms of entertainment under the broad theme of “Antithetical Living”. In this article I aim to summarise the key learning points from the speeches and discussions. In particular, we had four workshops under this series, namely, Antithetical Living in Visual Entertainment, in Audio Entertainment, in Recreational Activities, and in Social Media. All these can be summarised in one word: “discernment”. Why does a Christian need discernment? How is a Christian supposed to discern? How important is discernment to a Christian?

The Christian's Calling to Discern

To clarify, my aim is not to say which types of entertainment are right or wrong, but solely to examine and identify

our calling as Christians to discern. This calling is evident from Scripture. Just to quote a few instances in Scripture: “And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God” (Phil. 1:9-11). “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children” (Hos. 4:6). “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 Jn. 4:1). I could list a lot more Bible passages, but I think you get the point. Our calling as Christians to discern is evident throughout Scripture. Now that we have established that indeed we have a calling to discern, what exactly does it mean to discern?

Discernment, according to Google, is “the ability to judge well”. This definition by itself is not wrong. However, it does

not give the complete understanding of Christian discernment. The Christian's discernment is being able to decide what is right and wrong in accordance with God's Word. This shows that the decisions we make ought to be only on one basis, the Word of God. Another important element is the order of discernment. It is always first to examine God's Word and how it applies to this specific circumstance, and not the other way around. To know God's Word, we need to meditate on and study it fervently (Ps. 119:105; Prov. 9:10). Discernment is a matter of critical importance for us today.

In our four workshops, we addressed the workshops under the outline of: 1. How large a place does this entertainment have in our lives? 2. Proper Use of Entertainment 3. Wrong Use of Entertainment 4. Dangers in Overindulging in Such Entertainment.

For visual entertainment, we saw what was the underlying effect on a Christian who engages in entertainment frequently, which is forsaking our calling to redeem the time (Eph. 5:16). We saw that entertainment in a Christian's

life is to be used to glorify God and to be reenergised to do God's work in the serving of his church and cause. Simply put, it is to be used as a means to the end. We focused mainly on movies and TV shows and the negative impacts they can have on our spirituality. Movies and TV in themselves are not wrong. However, we discussed two aspects which could potentially affect us negatively. We also saw the dangers of overindulging in such entertainment, such as causing us to be spiritually weak, forgetting our calling to work, and making us lovers of men and pleasure. In this workshop, we had a break from our usual discussions to have a hands-on activity of creating a video with pictures from the past CK programme. This gave a practical application of how visual entertainment can be used for God's glory.

For audio entertainment, we saw that knowing the right place of entertainment will help a Christian use his time wisely. This was a common topic re-emphasised in all of the workshops. We discussed the positive uses of audio entertainment, such as listening to sermons and psalter numbers, which all benefit us by giving us constant reminders of God's Word and the need to walk a godly life in the midst of our busy lives. We saw the negative effects of listening to worldly music and attending worldly concerts. Worldly music pollutes the Christian's mind with lies and profanities. A good example is how love is portrayed in such worldly music. In Scripture we see "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love" (1 John 4:8). Does the love which the world emphasises show the love we ought to portray as Christians? This is something that we all can think about.

In recreational activities, sports and games come to mind first, and these

are good and healthy ways to engage in recreational activities. Again, we saw that these activities can be used in a God-glorifying way, such as maintaining fitness and good health and having a break from the regular work routine. The negative temptation arises when we use such means to give glory to ourselves or spend too much time and effort on such activities.

In social media, we saw that the benefits that are derived from the use of social media can be edifying one another through our meditations, knowing the organic lives of our sister churches, and encouraging each other in our walks. The aim was not to discourage using social media completely, but instead to strive to use this man-made tool as a means to edify and encourage one another in our daily walk. However, there are many dangers that can arise from using such a tool, such as overindulgence and seeking the love of self rather than the love of God. Social media can influence the mind to uphold the opinions of others as what is most important, and popularity can be something we yearn for. We must therefore be very careful when engaging in any of these means that may seem perfectly fine and good, but there can be adverse consequences if used in the wrong way.

The World's Attacks Against Discernment

The world often questions us about our use of entertainment. Is it really that bad to listen to worldly music? Why can't you just enjoy a movie or two? How can using something as harmless as social media be bad for you?

I'm sure we are no strangers to such questions, not only from the world; but they can also come from fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. The world attempts

to trick us. They say, "How can something that feels good be bad for you? God surely didn't make something that feels good be bad, right?" However, we are not to forsake our calling to discern. We may have doubts, but one truth stands clear, and that is the Word of God. In it we have wisdom, the wisdom to fight against such remarks. The world wants us to join them in their fun, their mannerisms, their language, and their lifestyle.

An example would be the most obvious lie that the school teaches, evolution; but what about the other subtle lies? We do good so that we receive good — karma. We need to have a big car and a huge house in order to be successful — materialism. These go directly against what God's Word says. We don't do good to get good in return. We love our neighbour because Christ loves us. Our success is not determined by our material goods. Our success is for God's glory alone. These are some of the many examples of how we can be influenced by the wicked world if we do not put up our guard to fight against it.

It is evident that there are many different circumstances and many different ways that the devil will try to pull us away from the truth and to make us believe the lie. We need to stand firm in the truth. The devil is cunning and uses very subtle means to intrude and pollute our walk with God (1 Pet. 5:8). Our calling as Christians then is to put on the armour of God that we may be able to fight against these temptations (Eph. 6:10) and to discern what is good and right for us as we continue in our pursuit for holiness. May God give us the grace, strength, and wisdom to do so.

DRAWING NEAR TO GOD

>> Daisy Lim



Daisy Lim is a member of CERC.

James 4:8: “Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you”.

Dear fellow believers in Christ,
Upon receiving the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, our soul rejoices at the numerous benefits of our salvation:

- Forgiveness of all our sins (Eph. 1:7)
- Imputation of the righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 4:6)
- Indwelling of the Holy Spirit of Christ (Eph. 1:13)
- Made children of the heavenly kingdom of Christ (Matt. 5:9)
- Drawn into the covenant life of God (Heb. 10:16)
- Our Lord Jesus is now our High Priest, Good Shepherd, Redeemer
- Resurrection and Life (Jn. 11:25)
- Hope of eternal life (Col. 1:5)

The list is indeed non-exhaustive. With all these blessings, we should be rejoicing in our Lord daily. But

Why does God seem so far away?

Why are we drawn down by the stress of life?

Have we lost the desire to frequent the house of God to worship Him and to be nourished with His Word?

Have we lost our first love for God?

We are exhorted to draw near to God that we may experience His nearness to us.

But how? God has given us precious promises which enable us to be partakers of His divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). But we need to exercise ourselves in godliness (1 Tim. 4:7). Many a times we slack, and thus experience dryness in our souls.

Let us glean from Scriptures and learn some ways to draw near to God.

1. Worship.

God is GOD. We must constantly remember the excellency and majesty of our God (Ps. 57:5, 11).

He is the sovereign King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tim. 6:15). He is Lord over everything — nature, all human beings (believers and unbelievers), principalities (the devil and the fallen angels)....everything under heaven and earth. Thus our hearts should burst out in praises to the honour and glory of God. It must be our delight to frequent the house of God to worship Him.

2. Prayer

God has given us the gift, privilege and blessing of prayer. Many of us do not have the right to speak with our president or prime minister. Yet we can have the boldness and confidence to come to the throne of grace (Heb. 4:16). We are exhorted to pray without ceasing to our God (1 Thess. 5:17). He hears us at all times and under all circumstances of our life. He cares for us. How can

we maintain any relationship without communication? We need not be in the posture of prayer always — but we have the privilege to whisper our heartfelt desires, cares and concerns, joys and burdens to our beloved Saviour who loves us with His everlasting love (Jer. 31:3).

3. Constant Meditation of Scriptures

We are to meditate and delight in His Word day and night (Ps. 1:2). Wherever you cut the Scriptures, they flow with the blood of the Lamb. Scriptures reveal Jesus, our Bread of Life. If we do not feed our souls, how can we be strong in faith and in grace? Only when we keep His Word, then the love of God is perfected and we know that we are in Him (1 Jn. 2:5).

4. Avoidance of Sin

Our God is a God of truth, righteousness and holiness. He hates sins, wickedness and all form of iniquities. Our sins will separate us from God (Isa. 59:2). But thank God, we can flee to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. He makes us conscious of our sins and promises us forgiveness and cleansing upon our confession and forsaking of our sins. Keep ourselves pure and we will experience His favour and smile upon us. Walk in obedience to all known commandments and God will manifest Himself to us (Jn. 14:21).

5. Humble Service

Many of our problems in life are due to the big “I” in our own eyes. The “I” is in the middle of SIN and PRIDE. God resist the proud and give grace to the humble (James 4:6). Many a times, we think we are self-sufficient without God. We seek after our own pleasures

and treasures. These become the idols of our heart and soul, and God is squeezed out of our life. We need to repent and constantly implore His grace. Ask, and we will receive and our joys will be full. Present ourselves as living sacrifice unto God (Rom. 12:1). Our Lord and Saviour has promised us life and life abundantly

(Jn. 10:10). We must find our delight in loving, serving and obeying Him. Be faithful to whatever your calling — be it as a student, worker or homemaker. Whatever we do, do to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31).

Our Lord first loved us. Let us learn to

love Him with our all. If we love Him, abide in Him. He that dwell in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of His wings (Ps. 91:1). We ought to cleave unto God (Josh. 22:5). Let us learn to draw near to our precious and beloved Lord and Saviour.

THE CHRISTIAN'S CALLING TO BE DISCIPLINED (2): REMEDIES

>> Cheryl Lim



Cheryl Lim is a member of CERC.

Introduction

In the last article, we considered some of the challenges faced by young working adults in maintaining their spiritual disciplines. We saw that by focusing on the earthly, giving in to the temptations of working life or poor time management, we are led to put spiritual disciplines aside. Yet we also noted that at the bottom of it all are the weakness of our flesh and the depravity of our human natures.

But despair not! Scripture and our Reformed confessions have instruction and comfort for us who may be in such situations. In this article, I will first put forth a couple of questions for self-examination, before offering some practical suggestions for maintaining our spiritual disciplines.

Self-Examination

1. *Are we convinced?*

I refer, first of all, to whether we are convinced that we are citizens of heaven, merely passing through this earth as sojourners. We are instructed in Colossians 3:1-2: “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth”.

It is easy to become engrossed in the here and now, with all the pleasures which the world has to offer, or conversely, through with the troubles and sorrows of life. It is almost natural to feel fulfilled when we are successful in the corporate world, and empty when our earthly jobs are unsatisfying.

But the idea of being citizens of heaven is that we direct our thoughts, desires, and wills towards things that are above. While we are not indifferent to things on earth, we are first and foremost concerned with our relationship with God, and thus driven to maintain our spiritual disciplines. Disciplines that help us to know our Father more, grow in love for Him, and understand His will for us. From this relationship ought our earthly work and activity to flow, which are then performed in the service of our Lord and

to His glory.

Second, are we convinced that spiritual disciplines are necessary? The answer to this is summed up well in the Canons of Dort V/4:

“Although the weakness of the flesh cannot prevail against the power of God... yet converts are not always so influenced and actuated by the Spirit of God... they must, therefore, be constant in watching and prayer, that they be not led into temptation. When these are neglected, they are not only liable to be drawn into great and heinous sins by Satan, the world, and the flesh, but sometimes by the righteous permission of God actually fall into these evils...”

Spiritual disciplines are a means of being kept from falling into temptations. When we put on the armour of God, we may stand in the evil day (Eph. 6:11ff). Are we concerned for our spiritual health? Are we desirous to walk pleasing to God? Then let us be diligent in our spiritual disciplines.

2. *Are we committed?*

Let us next consider whether we are committed. Committed first, to living a

holy life and putting away the sins that keep us from diligent use of spiritual disciplines. I do not mean by this that we can accomplish such a great feat simply by making a New Year's resolution. Instead, I refer to the fact that sin has lost its power over us. We read of this in Romans 6:6 (do read the whole chapter): "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin". Sin no longer has dominion over us and we *can* live a life of obedience, small as its beginning may be.

But do we reckon ourselves to be dead indeed unto sin (v.11)? Do we count ourselves servants of Christ and not sin? Do we actively resist the devil such that he flees from us (Jas. 4:7)? Or do we give in to the temptations of working life? Do we succumb to laziness? Fellow saints, we CAN overcome these! Do we believe this and live as such? The power to live such a life comes from none other than our Almighty Saviour.

Second, commitment entails counting the cost. Have we seriously pondered about what it would "cost" us to live as Christians? Are we prepared for that? Read Luke 14:25-33. A disciple of Christ must be willing to forsake all that he has in following Christ (v.33). For Daniel, this meant drawing the line at consuming Babylon's food and drink so as to prevent unconscious assimilation into the world (Dan. 1). For the working adult, we too may have to give up certain legitimate activities or pleasures which could distract us from taking heed to

spiritual disciplines.

Call to Action

If we are convinced and committed, then let us act. I offer here several practical suggestions that I have personally found beneficial. You may adapt these to suit your personality or circumstance, but the key is to start!

1. Select a time, space and plan for devotions and prayer. Figure out what works best for you; mornings on your commute, evenings in your bedroom, a Bible reading plan, or a devotional guide. Plan for it and structure it in your life as an activity of priority.

2. Schedule your evenings. The end of the work day is a common snag for us because we feel drained from work. I have found it useful to plan out how each evening is spent — from dinner to music practice or reading. When thus scheduled, there is less risk for evenings to be wasted doing whatever we feel like at the moment.

3. Prioritise. Spiritual disciplines require time. Multiple evenings out with colleagues may leave one with no time for reading of Reformed literature or quiet time for meditation. As you plan your week's activities, consider if spiritual disciplines have been prioritised or relegated to the use of our leftover time.

4. Cultivate joy in spiritual disciplines. As wisely encouraged by a previous minister of CERC, we should seek to view spiritual disciplines as an activity of

choice, even as a recreation that refreshes and rejuvenates us. And this can only be cultivated by regularly engaging in it, recognising the spiritual benefits gleaned from such diligence.

5. Sleep without your phone. This may seem trivial but it could have wider ramifications for those who find it difficult to stop scrolling through Instagram, clicking the next recommended video on YouTube or ending a WhatsApp conversation. Lost sleep also affects our ability to focus on spiritual disciplines the next day. Furthermore, excessive use of certain technological platforms may reduce our ability to think deeply or read for extended periods of time.

6. Christian Support. Checking in on one another from time to time and encouraging each other in our use of spiritual disciplines may have a greater impact than we think they do. Mutual support and accountability help to spur us on in our spiritual warfare.

7. Pray. Lastly, but most importantly, pray. Pray for the grace of God to help us resist the temptations that draw us away from spiritual disciplines. And pray sincerely, believing, not secretly desiring to still hold on to the things of the world (Jas. 1:6-8).

Fellow Christians, let us walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4), and by the grace of God overcome the challenges that keep us from spiritual disciplines and from growing in godliness.

Have we seriously pondered about what it would "cost" us to live as Christians? Are we prepared for that?

A SMALL MEMBER OF THE BODY - THE TONGUE (1)

>> Melina Chong



Melina Chong is a member of CERC.

The tongue is an organ in the mouth, rough in texture due to taste buds covering its surface. The tongue has many functions, including mixing food with saliva to create a bolus for easy swallowing and digestion. Taste buds are separate sensory organs with taste receptors which respond to sweet, bitter, sour, salty, and umami tastes in our mouths by transmitting this information to our brains. They play a part in guiding humans to determine whether food ingested is nutritive and desirable, and help us to avoid consumption of potentially harmful substances.

Interestingly, these taste receptors have to work in conjunction with other information from our sensory faculties in order for us to derive the taste of something! This means we subconsciously consider other sensory factors such as the smell, sight, and texture of a food to determine its quality in terms of taste. Just think of the times when you tried a familiar meal when you were nursing a cold, only to be disappointed by how it was tasteless because you could not smell the strong aromatic fragrance.

Whatever is swallowed by the tongue undergoes digestion and absorption by the body. It can either be nourishing, promoting good health, or junk. Junk food is what we call “empty calories” because it

does no good to the body. As a nutritionist, I often try to walk my talk by choosing healthier foods often deemed tasteless by my clients. Exploring healthier options with my clients often gets faced with rejection and perhaps even repulsion. After all, healthy is apparently synonymous with tasteless (read: neither sweet, nor salty, nor bitter, nor sour, nor umami; likely to be dull in appearance with hues of brown, green, red, and white; and odourless). Tasteless food is undesirable. Is this not reflective of how the antithetical Christian walk appears to the world? Unappetising yet the best for our spiritual pilgrimage on earth!

Tasting God's Goodness

Scripture does in fact mention taste and meals several times, and meals are frequently used to convey the true fellowship in love and unity in Christ. We need to acquire renewed spiritual taste buds to taste and see the spiritual significance of God's hand in bringing forth ordinary events that unfold in our lives, including meals (Ps. 34:8). An example of a meal which has explicit spiritual overtones is the institution of the Holy Supper of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 11:23-29), meant to nourish and feed a person spiritually through the work of the Holy Spirit when we eat and drink of the bread and wine.

Partaking of the Lord's Supper according to Scripture helps us to shift our focus from ourselves to Christ and our relationship with Him and fellow believers when we commune at the table. Bread is necessary for daily sustenance, and broken bread represents Christ as the Bread of Life who provides His children with eternal life (Jn. 6:32-35); wine makes glad the heart of

man (Ps. 104:14-15) and is a symbol of the blood of Jesus Christ which washes our sins away. This supper allows our faith to be strengthened as we remember Christ's saving work on the cross.

Mealtimes are when God's people get to build relationships by eating and drinking together, displaying the bond of peace. The elders of Israel feasted while dwelling in the majestic presence of God on Mount Sinai (Ex. 24:9-11). A tremendous delight it is to dwell with God in loving fellowship and be graciously preserved by Him. The banqueting table is another beautiful picture of rejoicing, as seen in the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:6-10). We are the church, the bride of Christ, the guests of the wedding banquet, craning forward in eager anticipation for the day of the Lord's triumphant coming.

Inability to Taste God's Goodness

Scripture also records meals which were downright sinful in God's sight. We recall the several instances of the rich and powerful throwing lavish feasts for self-glorification. They live after the flesh and fill up their cup of wrath. They crave the applause of men, and not the praise of God. Recall how John the Baptist was beheaded at Herod's birthday feast at the capricious request of Herodias' daughter for the head of John the Baptist (Mark 6:17-25). This happened in the presence of lords, high captains, and chief estates, in the midst of gleeful dancing and making merry. The cause? Resentment and hatred towards John the Baptist because he rebuked Herod for his marriage to the divorced Herodias.

Prior to John's martyrdom, Herod gladly heard John's preaching, saving John from

Herodias' wicked plotting. However, Herod's dulled spiritual taste buds rendered him unable to feed and chew on the Word of God. Despite feeling exceedingly sorry about the request, Herod chose to preserve his reputation and honour his oath, proving his allegiance to his earthly kingdom and showing how he feared men above God (Mark 6:26-27, Matt. 10:28). Be warned: do not be as the fool who says to himself in Luke 12:19, "And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry", for earthly enjoyments will be cut short, riches heaped in vain, and souls condemned eternally.

Gathering to Taste God's Goodness

Apply this to our lives, and we see that everything leans either towards godliness or away from it. To taste of God's goodness requires maintaining a spiritual posture to know God's Word and actively apply it. The Form for the Administration of the Lord's

Supper can be used as a guide to reflect on whether we show true thankfulness to God and walk uprightly before Him; and whether we lay aside unfeignedly all enmity, hatred, and envy, and firmly resolve henceforward to walk in true love and peace with our neighbour.

When we assemble for meals, we can strive to provoke one another unto love and good works, keeping our eyes on the coming of Christ (Heb. 10:24-25). First, we can remember God's gracious providence in our lives with thanksgiving. We show gratitude by rejoicing in His continual providence and do not murmur when the food served does not suit our taste buds. Second, we have to participate in fellowship meals. Every Lord's Day at CERC, we are privileged to have the opportunity to dine and fellowship at lunch. Face-to-face conversations help to foster stronger relationships. The next time you have your meal, challenge yourself to share a meal

with someone in the congregation with whom you are unfamiliar. Or maybe catch up with the friend with whom you have lost touch. Third, intentionally choose your conversations at the table to point to Christ or to encourage a brother. Discuss your learnings from the sermon, so that your souls can be nourished by the doctrine that shall drop as the rain and as showers upon grass.

Treasure your time at the table, and remember that what constitutes the taste of a meal is not merely "taste", but using all your five senses. Let your sweet fellowship add salt and savour to the meal, and may you be blessed richly through edifying conversation. Did I not mention that being able to converse with one another is directly related to the tongue's ability to flex? More to be covered in Part 2 of The Tongue.

DOON PROTESTANT REFORMED CHURCH

>> Vi De Boer



Vi De Boer has been a lifelong member of Doon PRC. She was a teacher in their covenant schools for over 25 years, and is currently a secretary in Hull Protestant Reformed Christian School. She has been married to Alan De Boer for 44 years and have two married sons (and godly daughters-in-law) and six grandchildren ranging in age from 3 to 16.

Nestled quietly in the very northwestern corner of the state of Iowa which is in the north central part of the United States, is the small village of Doon. Not much to take note of by human standards, but home for 93 years to a small congregation of believers. The Doon Protestant Reformed Church was born out of the Christian Reformed Churches in the area in 1926. The Lord used the weak means of preaching by various Protestant Christian Reformed ministers to bring about the formation of the Doon Protestant Reformed Church. The organisational meeting was chaired by Rev. B. J. Danhof of the neighbouring Hull congregation on March 17, 1926. The congregation numbered a mere fifty-two souls and was organized with

two elders and two deacons as their consistory. In November of 1926 the congregation took on the official name of Doon Protestant Reformed Church. The members were mostly farming families.

The Lord of the harvest sent Doon their first pastor when Rev. J. De Jong was installed on October 2, 1929. Three long years of vacancy finally ended! The congregation purchased a church building on upper Main Street from a disbanded Baptist group. The building required continued stoking of the furnace to keep the parishioners' feet from freezing. The building was remodeled by installing individual padded theater seats and improved heating in 1946, and this building served as their meeting place

until 1975.

The years of the Great Depression hit the entire country and the Doon PRC members were not spared. Rev. Lubbers often had to take his “salary” in the form of meat, or eggs, chickens, or fruit from the family gardens. To feed the furnace at church, the men of the congregation chopped wood from the nearby rivers since coal was too costly.

Rev. H.C. Hoeksema (who would later be Professor in the Protestant Reformed seminary) was Doon’s pastor in the tumultuous years of 1949-1955. The conditional covenant issue devastated the numbers of the Protestant Reformed congregations throughout the country. Doon was one of the few congregations where the majority of the congregation stayed with the Protestant Reformed view which denied the conditional covenant.

A young pastor, Rev. Gise Van Baren, served the congregation from 1956-1962, coming to Iowa saying he hoped to see “a good old fashioned Iowa blizzard”. He got his wish. The winter of 1962 was so severe that many members were not able to attend church for weeks.

Rev. Herman Hanko (later to be Professor) served the congregation for two short years (1963-1965). His “lively” preaching could be heard through the open church windows by the people having picnics in the park across the street.

Rev. Robert Decker (later to be Professor) came to Doon fresh out of seminary and saw the opening of the Northwest Iowa Protestant Reformed School during his pastorate. This school was the result of many years of school society work and the blessing of the Lord on that labour. The doors opened for grades 1-8 in the fall of

1967 with Mr. Fred Hanko Sr. teaching the upper grades and Mrs. Jeanette Van Egdome teaching the lower. The students were driven in by their parents from the Hull and Doon PRC congregations. The school building has been added onto and remodeled several times, but still functions as the school building today with 22 students.

After Rev. Decker left for the South Holland PRC, Doon was vacant for two years.

In 1971, Rev. Richard Moore became the ninth pastor of the Doon PRC. During this time the new church building was built in the northeast corner of town on a lot where the Roman Catholic Church once stood. The building still serves the needs of the congregation today with minimal changes being made.

The parsonage next door was finished while Rev. Marvin Kamps was the pastor (1976-1986).

Rev. Russell Dykstra (later to be Professor) was installed in Doon in 1986 and served the congregation until 1995. These years were the years of the “80’s farm crisis” and several families moved from Iowa for new employment.

Rev. Richard Smit took the call to Doon and was ordained in 1996. Rev. and his wife Tricia arrived in Doon with no children, but left in 2004 with five children to labour in Lacombe, Canada.

Rev. David Overway left the PRC congregation in New Jersey to take up his labours in Doon in 2005.

Our present pastor, Rev. Joshua Engelsma, arrived in 2014 and was ordained in the Doon PRC.

The Doon PRC congregation has had the privilege of overseeing mission work in Singapore with Rev. Arie Den Hartog labouring as missionary and presently in the Philippines where there are three pastors and families labouring; Rev. Richard Smit, Rev. Daniel Kleyn, and Rev. Daniel Holstege. The Lord has seen fit to bless these missionary labours so that the PRC now enjoy sister church relationships with the denominations in both countries. To God be the glory!

At its formation, the Doon congregation was mainly comprised of farmers who worked with their families on the fertile Iowa soil. Today the congregation has very few farmers. Although corn and soybean fields dominate the landscape as in years past, most of the families work in factories or are managers of agricultural related industries. The younger generation is finding more and more positions in technology. The congregation enjoys peace and unity among its 210 souls. The Lord has blessed the congregation with several godly young couples and covenant births in the past few years so there are many little children once again in our midst.

Doon PRC has been blessed with faithful preaching of the Word in its history. Truly and thankfully we give all praise to God for the faithful servants He has provided, and we pray for that continued provision for our congregation and for all God’s people scattered throughout the earth.



News from the Churches

Singapore

CERC celebrated her 32nd anniversary and we give thanks for God's faithfulness in carrying us through many trials in our journey thus far. We pray that we may continue to pray for one another and help one another to remain faithful to what Christ has called us to do.

We thank God that Rev. J. Mahtani has accepted the call to be the Minister-on-loan to CERC. At the time of writing, the application for Rev. Mahtani's employment pass has been unsuccessful. The session of CERC has made an appeal to the authorities, and we continue to pray earnestly that the Lord's will be done in this matter.

We pray also for Rev. and Mrs den Hartog as they prepare to leave us in January 2020. The both of them have been a great blessing to us and we pray that by His Grace, God will continue to grant Rev. den Hartog energy and health to serve Him wherever He is pleased to call him.

USA

Prison Ministry

A few weeks ago, seminarian Marcus Wee gave his first chapel speech at the Holland Rescue Mission. The Holland Rescue Mission is a halfway house for ex-convicts who have just been released from prison or are about to be released. This work of getting pastors and seminarians to lead in the chapel is headed by the evangelism committee of Holland PRC. The chapel format is a 20-minute speech, followed by 15 minutes of questions and answers. Men of various backgrounds come voluntarily for this chapel led by Marcus.

The Southeast Protestant Reformed Evangelism committee has also recently drafted and approved "generic letters" to send to prisoners. One of the fruits of past correspondences has been the request for Protestant Reformed literature by prisoners. The Grace PRC Evangelism committee also is very involved in the Prison Ministry. Members frequently correspond with these prisoners by letters.

Special Lectures by Prof. Dykstra on Sexual Abuse

In recent months, Prof. Dykstra has been giving lectures in PR churches on the topic "Sexual Abuse in Christ's Church". The speech was very sobering and humbling, addressing a very real and present issue. The lectures are recorded and are on the website of the PRCA in the resource section. Do pray that God will preserve us from this sin, that God will comfort those who are abused, and that repentance and mercy be given to abusers.

The Philippines

The PRCP Theological Seminary has begun classes with one full-time student at present. Bro. Jeremiah Pascual and his wife are members of the PRC in Bulacan and were recently blessed with the arrival of their first child. There are also 2 other brethren taking classes with the desire of becoming pastors in the PRCP — Bro. Jethro Ace Flores (who served as a pastor for about 18 years in another denomination and became a member of Provident PRC with his wife and daughter last July) as well as Bro. Emmanuel Jasojaso (a school teacher who also plans to join Provident PRC with his family). Lord willing, they will begin studying at the seminary next year (2020-2021).

India

We are thankful that our missionary pastor, Rev. Emmanuel Singh and his wife Sonali could come to Singapore to visit and fellowship, as well as to give an update on their missionary work in India. We continue to remember Rev. Singh in his work in Kolkata as well as for the recovery of his right eye, as he has been suffering from blur vision for the past three weeks.



Rev Den Hartog speaking at our Reformation Day Conference on one of the topics, "The Synod and Church Life"



Browsing Reformed literature at the book table



Beautiful artwork done by our brethren from CERC Kolkata



Christmas Eve caroling at Bro Ishu's place



Other members caroling at Bro Yoon Chuan & Sis Jee Fung's home



Enjoying dinner fellowship in between Christmas carols

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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