

"Addiction is not only a bad thing; it is a dangerous thing for the soul. At the heart of the matter, addiction is idolatry." — *Daniel Tang in How to Deal with Addiction*

"[Elders] have the rule over the minister and must see to it that the minister brings to the congregation the spiritual food they need." — *Prof. Herman Hanko in The Office of Believers (2)*

"When the church through her elders fails to exercise discipline against the sins of the tongue, God gives the church over to division, strife and warfare. There is no peace in such a church that is consumed by the sins of the tongue."
— *Aaron Lim in Sins of the Tongue*



salt shakers

joel 3:16 matthew 5:16

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Let your light
so shine
before men, that they may see
your good works,
and glorify your Father
which is in heaven.

-MATTHEW 5:16

WELCOME TO THE 59TH ISSUE OF SALT SHAKERS!

CONTENTS

Sins of the Tongue	3
Church Polity (2): The Office of all Believers	5
A Critique of Divorce and Remarriage in the Westminster Confession of Faith (2)	7
Work Ethics: As Seen in the Reformed Worldview	9
How to Deal With Addiction	12
Time	14
A Small Member of the Body - The Tongue (2)	15
CERC India's Church Camp	16
News from the Churches	19

Dear readers,

We are publishing this magazine in a time of confusion and uncertainty. As of now, hundreds of articles, sermons, and videos have addressed this confusion and uncertainty biblically.

And here I am. Why?

Not every church is dealing with a temporary closure for worship/congregational activities, and a lack of ministers to bring the Word. Add to that the reality that you and I do not know when either closure or lack would end.

To our readers outside, this just shows every man has his burden to bear, and we must remember one another in our prayers.

To you, readers in CERC, let Psalm 46:1 roar in your hearts: *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.*

God is our *refuge*—that secure, unmovable, unchanging, Rock-solid fortress. To him we flee! Where is he? Revealed in the sixty-six books, brethren!

God is our *strength*—mighty, powerful, great, sovereign. Over the virus? Yes. Over your lost income? Absolutely. Over your worries? Undoubtedly.

God is our *present help in trouble*—in sheer mercy, bringing us out of sin and into his holy fellowship. What about death—there is no sting. What about financial insecurity—God will clothe us. What about every care and worry—cast them upon the God that careth for us!

God is all three at once. Let this truth fill our hearts and minds at this time. Are you working from home? Begin the day meditating on this Psalm (or any verse referred above). Are you jobless? Find work if you are able, but do not let each day pass without time with God. Are you worried? Hide this word in your hearts, that you do not sin against God in doubt and unbelief.

Let this truth fill our hearts and minds... that we can bring it to others. What you have applied for yourself is equally relevant for anyone else—the mother, the elderly, the child, the youth, and the single (and vice versa). At risk to go out? Make a phone-call. Skype (or Zoom). Text. Did not Jonathan cry with David in his escape from Saul? Did not Jesus need John and Peter to follow him into Gethsemane? Did not the early Christians encourage John and Peter, following their imprisonment?

And do not forget, in such a time, that there are countless others who fear in many ways and need the gospel of Jesus Christ. How you respond today will prepare you to give an answer of your hope to an unbeliever tomorrow.

What about our witness as a church, CERC? Consider the testimony of our office-bearers. They have met almost every week to discuss the urgent needs of our church in this season (on top of other pastoral needs). With all pulpit supply cut off, our elders have undertaken reading sermons (on top of catechism classes and writing our Pastoral's Voice). Our Lord has given our brothers strength and wisdom in these trying times, that, together, we may maintain a Christian witness in Singapore. Let us give thanks to our good King for these efforts, and pray for our office-bearers.

As you finish this lengthy note, do not stop your reading, but carry on. Although our staff will only be publishing four regular issues this year

due to administrative lapses, we are nonetheless dedicated to bringing you faithful expositions and applications of God's Word. Plans to commemorate our 10th anniversary with a fifth issue are underway.

And so, dear readers, here I am, passing the salt to you.

In Christ,
Yang Zhi

P.S.: Here are all the Scriptural references in this note: Psalm 46:1; Deuteronomy 32:4; I Corinthians 15:55; Matthew 6:30; I Peter 5:7; I Samuel 20:41; Matthew 26:36-38; Acts 4:23ff; I Peter 3:15.

SINS OF THE TONGUE

>> Aaron Lim



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

*"In the multitude of words
there wanteth not sin:
but he that refraineth his lips is wise"*
(Pro. 10:19)

Sins of the Tongue

In Proverbs 6:16-19, wise Solomon lists seven abominations before God. Among these seven sins, three involve the tongue: "a lying tongue" (v17), "a false witness that speaketh lies" and "he that soweth discord among brethren" (v19). The sins of the tongue are

grievous to God and to our neighbour. So frequent also are the sins of the tongue that Solomon observes, "in the multitude of words there wanteth not sin" (Pro. 10:19).

Scripture describes the tongue as an exceedingly powerful member of the body. "Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell" (Jas. 3:5-6). The "tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison" (Jas. 3:8).

Although able to wield much good, the tongue is often used for evil. Lies, slander, backbiting and gossip are among the violent wickedness that the

tongue can cause. These sins create "a world of iniquity" — a world of sin. They deceive; they injure the name of others; they destroy relationships; and above all, they dishonour God who speaks only truth.

In its explanation of the sin against the ninth commandment, the Heidelberg Catechism (LD 43, Q&A 112) demands:

That I bear false witness against no man, nor falsify any man's words; that I be no backbiter, nor slanderer; that I do not judge, nor join in condemning any man rashly, or unheard; but that I avoid all sorts of lies and deceit, as the proper works of the devil, unless I would bring down upon me the heavy wrath of God; likewise, that in judgment and all other dealings I love the truth, speak it

uprightly and confess it; also that I defend and promote, as much as I am able, the honour and good character of my neighbour.

The sins of the tongue against a brother or sister are murder at their root. Solomon speaks to this: “A lying tongue hateth those that are afflicted by it; and a flattering mouth worketh ruin” (Pro. 26:28). To speak evil of that brother, whether by way of gossip, slander or backbiting, is to cause irreparable damage to that brother’s name. Words have been spoken; ideas have been created; impressions have been formed; attitudes have been shaped; and actions have possibly been taken against the brother. That which is spoken cannot be unspoken.

Devastating Consequences

Indeed, the sins of the tongue are the “proper works of the devil”, who is the father of the lie. His lie brought Adam and Eve to the fall. His lies operate throughout history, deceiving many unto condemnation. His lies are daily paraded in the world through the advertisements, the internet, social media, and the general philosophies of the world. His lies wreck havoc in the world, deceiving many unto condemnation.

Believers themselves are not immune from the sins of the tongue. They have in them their sinful natures which are attracted to these sins. For various sinful motives, they use their tongues to commit sin. Solomon warns that “a fool’s mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul” (Pro. 18:7).

In our digital age, the sins of the tongue are no longer merely verbal. They can be spread by a few taps of the fingers

on our mobile phones. Even more potent are these sins when they can be communicated to dozens of people in an instant and across different lands. Believers need to be wise and guard against the sins of the tongue scrupulously when they use their electronic devices. If left unchecked, these devices can be used for great evil, and do much harm.

It is important to be warned that the sins of the tongues create scars that often last a lifetime. When a liar spreads his gossip, backbiting or slanders in the church against another brother, and those lies reach the ears of that brother, they leave lasting impressions in his mind and soul. Solomon makes this point when he says, “The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly” (Pro. 18:8). The lies that are spread about a brother wound him deeply, especially when they come from other members of the church. They are not easily healed either.

When the church engages in the sins of the tongue unrepentantly, the Holy Spirit is grieved. He is grieved because He is the Holy Spirit of unity, who binds the members of the church to one another in the bond of love. Where members ought to be united one to another in love, the grievous sins of the tongue separate them. They speak evil of one another; they gossip, lie and slander about one another. Over time, they build walls against one another in the church. The refuse to speak to one another. These grievous sins fester in the church. The church is divided and disunited. They become weapons against one another, as Solomon puts it: “A man that beareth false witness against his neighbour is a maul, and a sword, and a sharp arrow” (Pro. 25:18).

When the church through her elders fails to exercise discipline against the sins of the tongue, God gives the church over to division, strife and warfare. There is no peace in such a church that is consumed by the sins of the tongue. Members wage warfare against one another, either through the blatant sins of the tongue, or through cold isolation from one another. Soon members leave the church, where there is no love and peace.

The Positive Demand

In forbidding the sins of the tongue, God demands of us that we speak the truth to and about our neighbour. He demands that we “defend and promote, as much as I am able, the honour and good character of my neighbour” (LD 43).

The Westminster Larger Catechism in question 144 asks the question: what are the duties required in the ninth commandment?

A. The duties required in the ninth commandment are, the preserving and promoting of truth between man and man, and the good name of our neighbour, as well as our own; appearing and standing for the truth; and from the heart, sincerely, freely, clearly, and fully, speaking the truth, and only the truth, in matters of judgment and justice, and in all other things whatsoever; a charitable esteem of our neighbours; loving, desiring, and rejoicing in their good name; sorrowing for and covering of their infirmities; freely acknowledging of their gifts and graces, defending their innocency; a ready receiving of a good report, and unwillingness to admit of an evil report, concerning them; discouraging talebearers, flatterers, and slanderers; love and care of our own good name,

and defending it when need requireth; keeping of lawful promises; studying and practicing of whatsoever things are true, honest, lovely, and of good report.

It is remarkable that the Westminster Larger Catechism insists that believers must love, desire and rejoice in the good name of their brethren. They are to have “a charitable esteem” of their neighbour, and be willing to cover their weaknesses. Far too often believers are quick to magnify the weaknesses of others, but are slow to cover them or be ready to receive a good report about them.

When a brother’s name is besmirched by gossip, slander or backbiting, believers are duty bound to defend and promote the honour and good character of that brother. When a brother is wrongly persecuted for the truth’s sake and his reputation is in ruins as a result of that wrongful persecution, believers are duty bound to restore his good name in the church. To be silent knowing that the brother’s reputation has been wrongfully harmed is to participate in

harming that brother’s reputation.

There are times in the church when members with seemingly good intentions bring their “concerns” about another member to others. They go about enquiring others about a particular brother or sister in the church. In the course of their enquiry and discussion, however, they hear an evil report about that person and continue discussing that evil report. That evil report damages the brother’s reputation, but they still continue their discussion under the guise of being “concerned”. The Westminster Larger Catechism is right and wise in its forbidding “to admit of an evil report” concerning another brother. Solomon says, “A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter” (Pro. 11:13). He adds later, “He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends” (Pro. 17:9). Refusing to admit an evil report about a brother is like refusing to add wood to a fire: “Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there

is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth” (Pro. 26:20).

Blessed Unity

When believers hate the sins of the tongue and speak the truth in love, God in grace blesses them with unity. They experience unity in the body of Christ. “From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Eph. 4:16).

In the way of speaking the truth and upholding the reputation of my neighbour, God is pleased to bless the church with great unity. The members of the church speak the truth in love to one another; they rebuke and admonish one another in love; they bless one another with their sanctified lips. God is glorified among His saints who use their tongue for the good and salvation of His church.

CHURCH POLITY (2): THE OFFICE OF ALL BELIEVERS

>>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.

In the last issue of Salt Shakers I emphasised the importance of the office of believers and showed from Scripture that it is the most important office in the church. In any congregation the office of believers must be protected and defended, for there is always a tendency in the church for ecclesiastical assemblies to ignore the office of believers, or to minimise its importance, or in some instances, simply to override the office and impose ideas in broader assemblies upon the office of believers.

Yet, the Scripture are clear that the individual member of a congregation must be in submission to their elders. The two classic Scriptural passages that prove this point are found, first of all in Hebrews 13:17: “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief, for that is unprofitable for you”.

The second text is found in 1

Thessalonians 5:12-13: “And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you; and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them highly and in love for their work’s sake. And be at peace among yourselves”.

Those two texts are very clear. They are worth our reading again and again, and we ought regularly to examine ourselves to see whether we walk according to this rule of Christ.

The texts imply that our elders are given by Christ the rule over the entire congregation. They have, by virtue of their ordination into office, given authority to exercise lordship in the entire congregation. That is (and this is historic Reformed church government dating back to Calvin), the rule over the members of the congregation whether confessing members or baptised members. They have the rule over the minister and must see to it that the minister brings to the congregation the spiritual food they need. They must not hesitate to call their minister to task if he does not do this; that if he does not bring Scripture, if he does not spend enough time on his sermons; if he is not in his study for long hours and days working on his sermons. Elders must study before the service what the minister is going to preach on (they know the Lord’s Day, and the text is on the bulletin), and they must understand what is the particular Word of God the minister has chosen so that they are able to judge the sermon properly.

I might add that when I was in the ministry, my elders did take active control of my preaching. If I said something I should not have said, they told me in no uncertain terms. If there was a need in the congregation that I

had not addressed, they instructed me to preach on a text in which that was to be found. They did not ask me about it; they did not give me opportunity to defend myself; they simply told me what they wanted and expected of me.

Interestingly enough, the elders also have the rule over each other. This is precisely the purpose of *censura morum*, which is conducted among the elders before every Lord’s Supper is celebrated.

Ordinarily, this principle means that, generally speaking, the minister ought not to even to enter into the discussion of the elders over certain matters, but permit the elders themselves to decide. Only if he sees them going in the direction of something contrary to Scripture and their ordination vows should he call their attention to their error. While it is true that a minister is also an elder, their primary calling is to busy themselves with preaching — and chair the Session meetings. But the elders have the primary calling to rule, not the minister.

The principle of the rule of the elders means also that, while it is necessary for an elder to be present at the meeting of deacons, the minister should take a turn only rarely. Nor should a minister do all or the majority of the pastoral work. That too is the primary responsibility of the elders. If the minister is serious about his calling, he has his hands full with preaching, teaching catechism and leading societies.

And, sad to say, ministers also often dominate at classes and synods and elders either do not dare to speak, or, if they do, are often ignored or contradicted by the minister delegates. The elders rule in the church of Christ; and when anything or anyone else than

elders dominate, hierarchy is the end of the matter.

But the beauty and power of the relationship between elders (and to a lesser degree, deacons) is one of balancing the authority of the elders with the authority of the office of believers. I have often said and still maintain that the real essence of a proper working relationship between the elders with their authority and the believers with their authority is the simple word “trust”. There has to be trust on the part of believer in their office-bearers. There must be understanding that being obedient to their office bearers, they are obedient to Christ himself, who is their Head and their King.

But office bearers must trust their congregation. They must remember that the church over which they rule is composed of the saints of Christ, His people whom He loves and for whom He gave His life. They must love their congregation and trust them to walk as God’s people in the world. Only where there is what I would call, “a delicate balance” between the offices of elder and deacon and of all believers does Reformed church polity work. When both function in their God-given rule does the congregation flourish.

In practice that means several things.

It means that believers do not have to be present at Session meetings; they trust their office-bearer to do the right things and make the right decisions. Nor should elders quickly divulge what the Session has decided on matters unless the individual who asks for decisions has a good reason why he wants to know. Nor is the Session under any obligation to inform the congregation

of its decisions unless there is good reason why the congregation needs to know.

The “delicate balance” between elders and believers also means that the believers must obey their elders when the Session admonishes them to alter their behaviour. Christ is telling them to change their lives — through Christ elders, and therefore Christ must be obeyed. Family visitation is the time for the Session to inquire into the spiritual lives of the members. They

must not hesitate to do this in a very personal and direct way. They must not worry about “hurting someone’s feelings” or “offending a parishioner”, although they must not inquire into personal matters that are really not within the scope of their authority. And the member of the congregation must open their doors to the elders and speak frankly of their lives as they are called to walk by faith in the world.

I would like to add a sort of footnote. The Roman Catholic Church completely

destroyed the office of believers with its terrible hierarchical form of church polity. The great reformer, Martin Luther, restored the office of believers to the church. He did this primarily in one of his most important writings, *Letter to the German Nobility*. It has been maintained by Calvin and Reformed churches world-wide.

In the next issue I will discuss the office of believers in their relation to the broader assemblies of classes and synods.

A CRITIQUE OF DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE IN THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH (2)

>> Prof. David Engelsma



Prof. David Engelsma is a professor emeritus of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary. He was Professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament Studies from 1988 to 2008, and has been an ordained minister since 1963.

I am presently examining the doctrine of marriage, divorce, and remarriage in the WCF. This doctrine is found in Chapter 24 of the confession. In 24.5, the WCF permits remarriage after divorce on the ground of the adultery of one’s mate. In a previous article in this paper, I subjected this teaching of the WCF to examination and found it to be in error. The Bible does indeed permit *divorce* on the ground of adultery. But it forbids a subsequent remarriage, while the original mate is

still living.

In 24.6, the WCF permits both divorce and remarriage also on the ground of the desertion of a Christian by his or her mate. Section 6 of Chapter 24 reads as follows:

Although the corruption of man be such as is apt to study arguments, unduly to put asunder those whom God hath joined together in marriage; yet nothing but adultery, *or such wilful desertion as can no way be remedied by the church or civil magistrate*, is cause sufficient of dissolving the bond of marriage: wherein a publick (*sic*) and orderly course of proceeding is to be observed, and the persons concerned in it not left to their own wills and discretion in their own case (emphasis added, to mark out the relevant part of the statement).

This element of the Westminster doctrine of remarriage bases itself on 1 Corinthians 7:15, and this text only:

“But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace”. By asserting that desertion is “cause sufficient of dissolving the bond”, the confession clearly implies that a remarriage of the deserted party is lawful. I note again, as I did in the case of Westminster’s permission of remarriage on the ground of adultery, that if the bond is dissolved for the deserted party, it is dissolved as well for the deserting party, so that he, or she, is free to remarry as well. All that is necessary, then, to obtain the right to remarry is that one desert his or her mate.

But my main concern in this article is to demonstrate that 1 Corinthians 7:15 teaches neither the dissolving of the marriage bond by desertion nor the permissibility of remarriage on the ground of desertion. Finding a ground for divorce and remarriage in the sinful desertion of a wife or husband by one’s mate, as the WCF did and as many churches do today, on the basis of 1 Corinthians 7:15 is utter, obvious,

inexcusable error.

1 Corinthians 7:15 teaches nothing about remarriage. In fact, it teaches nothing about divorce. What it teaches concerns a specific, strictly limited instance of marital distress on the part of some believers. This instance was especially a problem in the early church of Paul's day, when men and women who had married unbelievers as unbelievers themselves, but were now converted by the gospel, found themselves married to a wife or husband who had not been converted. Now the believer was married to an unbeliever.

What was the Christian calling of the believer in such a troublesome marriage?

In verses 12-14, the apostle answers this question with the declaration that, if the unbeliever is pleased to dwell with his or her believing mate, the believer must remain in the marital relationship, and not leave, difficult as the marriage will be. The depravity of the unbeliever will not corrupt the believer. But the holiness of the believer will sanctify the unbeliever. And the covenant will still extend to the children of the two. I have explained all this in detail in my book, *Marriage the Mystery of Christ and the Church*, and will not take up valuable space repeating this in this article.

Verse 15 addresses the real possibility that the unbeliever is not willing to live any longer with his or her now radically changed, believing mate. The Christianity, including a holy life, of the converted husband or wife, will be offensive to the unbeliever, as can readily be understood. The unbeliever leaves, or deserts, the Christian wife or husband.

In this specific, strictly limited case, the believer may "let him depart". She must not renounce her Christianity for the sake of maintaining her marriage. She is not to follow him, whether physically, away from the church, or spiritually, by forsaking Jesus Christ. That she is not living with her husband and that, in a way, she is responsible for the separation are not to cause her the slightest twinge of guilt.

"Let him go"!

Hers is only glorious discipleship after Jesus. His is all the blame.

The text says nothing at all even about the believer's action of divorcing the deserting mate. Those who find in the text a ground for divorce suck this out of their thumb. There is no action on the part of the believer whatever. She merely lets the unbeliever go. This is not action, but passivity. If any action of divorcing is even implied in the text, it is the act of the wicked deserter. 1 Corinthians 7:15 offers no ground for divorce on the part of a deserted believer. It simply does not address the matter of divorce. Ground for divorce must be found in Jesus' doctrine of marriage in Matthew 5 and 19.

So important is marriage in the Christian's life that the Holy Ghost must assure the abandoned believer of what He has inspired in the first part of 1 Corinthians 7:15, namely, that she may let the unbeliever depart. This assurance is what follows in the text: "...A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace".

To be "under bondage" is so to be burdened with the guilt of wrongdoing that one is enslaved by this guilt and

its accompanying shame. In brief, it is to live with a guilty conscience. This is a real temptation for the deserted Christian. Every day and night anew, she is reminded that she is not living with her husband, and that, in a way, she is responsible, by virtue of her confession of Jesus Christ that has so offended her mate. Indeed, apart from her special circumstances, living with her husband is her *Christian calling*. In the case of desertion, the Christian woman (or man, as the case may be) is free of guilt. She is not "under bondage".

Note well what the text does *not* say. It does not say that the deserted Christian is no longer "*bound*" — bound to the deserting mate. But this is the explanation of the WCF, as of all churches that make 1 Corinthians say that desertion is the dissolving of the marriage bond and therefore ground of divorce and remarriage. They have Paul teaching that in case of desertion, the deserted Christian is no longer *bound*.

Being "under bondage" is not the same as being bound. If it is, all married Christians are "under bondage", for all are bound to their mate. This is not a happy view of marriage, to say nothing of the Christian view of marriage: "I am in bondage to my wife or husband".

The deserted wife is not *under bondage* in the case of desertion. She is still *bound* to the deserter. The apostle will say so in verse 39 of 1 Corinthians 7: "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..."

That "under bondage" refers to a guilty conscience is further proved by the apostle's statement of its opposite:

“but God hath called us to peace”. The opposite of being under bondage is peace. It is an important principle of the interpretation of the Bible that one can determine the meaning of a word or concept by its opposite in the passage. For example, in Romans 8:33, 34 the meaning of “justifieth” in verse 33 as a judicial act of God is established from its opposite in verse 34, “condemneth”. As “condemns” is a legal act of the judge, so is its opposite, “justifies”, in verse 33. In 1 Corinthians 7:15, the opposite of “under bondage” is “peace”. This proves that by “under bondage” the apostle is describing the state of one’s conscience, not a liberty to be remarried.

If the WCF were correct in its understanding of “not under bondage” as not being bound to the deserting mate, the following words in verse 15 would read: “but God now gives the deserted party the liberty to marry again”.

To summarize, 1 Corinthians 7:15 applies to the desertion of a Christian by his or her ungodly mate, which was a problem in the early church (see also 1 Peter 3:1, 2). The text guards the deserted Christian against compromising her Christian confession and walk in an attempt to regain her cohabitation with the unbeliever. It assures the deserted Christian that she may have a good conscience before God, even though she is not living with her husband. She is called to peace with God.

1 Corinthians 7:15 has nothing whatsoever to do with a ground for divorce and remarriage.

WCF 24.6, like 24.5, is in error. In allowing remarriage on two grounds, the WCF must be repudiated *in these articles* by Reformed and Presbyterian Christians and churches. As important as is marriage in the Christian’s life and in the confession of the church, so

serious is this error. The error very much includes the sanctioning of adultery. So important is the matter that it warrants the calling of an ecumenical synod of Presbyterian churches to correct the error by revision of the WCF. This being unlikely in our apostate age, synods of individual Presbyterian denominations ought to take the error in hand.

I close this examination of Westminster’s doctrine of divorce and remarriage on the ground of desertion, in 24.6, with a question to the defenders of this teaching. My question concerns specifically the phrase, “[desertion] is cause sufficient of dissolving the bond of marriage”. The question is: “Who or what does actually dissolve the marriage in the case of desertion?” Evidently, the act itself of desertion does not dissolve the marriage, for it is merely the “cause sufficient” of the dissolving. Who effects the dissolving? I pose this question in all seriousness.

WORK ETHICS: AS SEEN IN THE REFORMED WORLDVIEW

>>Wee Gim Theng



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It has been a while since many young adults in our church have entered the workforce. Many of these young adults have since gotten married and set up covenant homes. It is thus an opportune time to discuss work ethics from the perspective of the Reformed

worldview.

In this article, we shall discuss what a Reformed worldview and work ethics are; how our work ethics are being impacted and shaped by the kind of worldview we espouse; the difference between Christians’ and the unbelievers’ work ethics; and some applications. Two more articles (regarding unjust employers and idolising our pay cheques) will address specific issues in the near future, Lord willing.

First, what is a worldview?

A worldview can be defined as the

way one views and relates to every aspect of one’s life in this world. As such, everyone has a worldview. The worldview that one has in life is invariably shaped by one’s fundamental beliefs, philosophy/principles of life, experiences in life, the influence of people around, etc. One’s worldview may even change over time, depending on one’s experience and changes in one’s life. The question is: is there a fundamental basis that determines one’s worldview and which one consistently applies to one’s life, regardless of one’s life experience and changes in one’s life? There are many definitions of and approaches to worldviews out there on

the internet and in books, journals, magazines, articles, etc. Each of these definitions has its own fundamental basis that determines its own approach to its definition of worldview.

Professor David J. Engelsma has a very succinct definition of worldview, where he states: “By worldview, or world-and-life-view, is meant a comprehensive, unified view of all creation and history in light either of the knowledge of the triune, one, true, and living God revealed in Jesus Christ, or in light of the unbelieving rejection of this God”.¹ Professor Engelsma’s approach underscores the fact that the knowledge of the triune, one, true, and living God revealed in Jesus Christ or the rejection of this God is the fundamental basis of everyone’s worldview. Everyone’s worldview is either interpreted in the light of the knowledge of this God whom he believes or in rejection of this God whom he does not believe. This cannot be further from the truth. If we reject the one true God of the Bible, our worldview will simply show, in all its entirety, a total rejection of this God and His Word. Every thought, word, or deed of such a person without God would manifest his or her total rejection of this God. The contrary is also true. If our fundamental basis is centred on the true knowledge of God as revealed in Jesus Christ, all our interpretations of events with respect to life, history, and the world will stem from our belief in the one true God in Jesus Christ. This should be how our worldview is shaped, through the working of the Spirit’s conviction of God’s Word in our lives as Christians. The starting point of our worldview ought to be the knowledge of God as revealed in Jesus Christ.

Our knowledge of God must come from the Bible, the Word of God. The

Word of God is the special revelation of God Himself. God gives us His Word as the guiding light that shines on the path that we should take in this world of darkness. Psalm 119:105 tells us that “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path”. The Word of God will help us see all the events that happen in life, history, and the world, especially events that happen to us (to be more personal...to me!), in the light of God’s counsel and purpose. The Word of God has admonitions and commandments/instructions on how we ought to live our lives as God’s people on this earth. For examples: 1 Peter 1:15-16 tell us to be “holy in all manner of conversation” and “Be ye holy; for I am holy”; Hebrews 11:13 tells us that we are “strangers and pilgrims on the earth”; Matthew 5:13-14 tell us that we are the “salt” and the “light” of this world; Matthew 6:20, 24 tell us that we are to “lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven” and “Ye cannot serve God and mammon”; Matthew 6:33 tells us to “seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you”. All these admonitions and many others from God’s Word will require us Christians to live antithetically in this world. Hence, all aspects of our lives, be it playing a sport, reading a book, interacting with friends or colleagues or loved ones, raising children, working, taking a vacation, serving God, etc., we live according to the Word of God. As Christians, we are not to compartmentalise our lives such that it is only on Sundays that we let the Word of God govern our lives, while the other six days we can live as we please, even if it is totally against the Word of God. This cannot be true of serious Bible-believing Christians. The Bible is the rule of our faith and life. We live out our faith and calling in every area

of our lives, 24/7. 1 Corinthians 10:31 tells us, “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God,” and Colossians 3:17 says, “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him”.

Professor Engelsma further states that the Reformed worldview “is that comprehensive, unified view of all creation and history inherent in the Reformed faith. The Reformed faith is the body of biblical truths recovered and developed by the sixteenth century Reformation of the church, especially by the theological work of John Calvin. This faith is officially expressed in the Reformed creeds, the Three Forms of Unity (Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession, and Canons of Dordt) and the Westminster Standards (Westminster Confession of Faith, Westminster Larger Catechism, and Westminster Shorter Catechism)”.²

The Reformed worldview is therefore a worldview as seen through the lens of the Reformed faith. Our Reformed worldview is influenced by what we believe concerning our salvation as the free gift and sovereign work of God in Jesus Christ, that is, salvation by grace alone without the merit or work of man. Our church, as well as our sister churches, have also embraced the doctrines of God’s particular grace and the unconditional covenant as integral parts of our Reformed worldview.

Let us define work ethics and how our Reformed worldview affects our work

¹ David J. Engelsma, *The Reformed Worldview on Behalf of a Godly Culture: Faith/Grandville PRC Evangelism Committees*, 2005, 7.

² *Ibid*, 7.

ethics.

Work ethics is generally defined as a system of moral principles and values which controls one's behaviour, attitude, and how one conducts one's activities at work. Work ethics also governs one's conduct and relationships with others around him/her at work.

Since our Reformed worldview is the framework whereby our entire lives as Reformed Christians view the events of the world and history, the same worldview must therefore undergird all our moral principles and values as well. Our Reformed worldview, therefore, must necessarily affect how we view our work, relationships with colleagues/subordinates and bosses, appraisals/promotions, bonuses, career

Christians must embrace and practise good Christian work ethics of hard work, diligence, obedience, commitment, reliability, honesty, and integrity in our labours.

development, posting, conduct, etc. This is also true for those of us who are Christian employers.

Every company has its own work ethics that it expects its staff to abide by. Some traits, such as a strong sense of responsibility, integrity, hard work, diligence, honesty, professionalism, and punctuality are expected of all workers, regardless of one's belief or worldview. Very often, these work ethics are coded in the company's code of conduct, to which staff are expected to pledge their adherence. The code of conduct spells out the company policies pertaining to good work attitude, acceptable and unacceptable behaviours, company's beliefs (mission statement), values and principles, conduct at work,

productivity, the proper use of employees', customers', and company's information/data, etc. As Christians, we not only uphold the company's code of conduct at all times, but we are to uphold our calling as Christians at our places of work. Our Christian work ethics ought to set us apart from the unbelieving employees so that they can see our godly attitude towards our work and towards our colleagues and bosses, and glorify our Father which is in heaven (Matt. 5:16). We shall consider some aspects of the Reformed worldview that influence our calling and attitude as Christians, as well as some of the pressures and temptations faced by the Christians in our places of work. All these will be discussed from the perspective of a Christian employee.

Christian calling at places of work

Our calling as Christians at our places of work is to obey our masters (bosses) (Eph. 6:5-8; Col. 3:22-24). We are not only to obey the good and gentle bosses, we are also to obey the "froward" ones (1 Pet. 2:18). The reason for our submission to the "froward" bosses is given in verse 19: that God is pleased with such a submission; for the Christian has God's approval when he walks in obedience, submits, endures, and suffers the wrongful actions of the unjust bosses without retaliation. We also may not speak evil, backbite, or slander unjust bosses (Ex. 20:12). It is a difficult calling, but it is commanded of us.

This calling to obey our bosses is

subservient to our higher calling as servants of the most high God. We are to please and obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). Never should we allow our callings at our places of work to undermine our fundamental calling to obey God.

Attitude towards work

Christians must embrace and practise good Christian work ethics of hard work, diligence, obedience, commitment, reliability, honesty, and integrity in our labours. We are to exert ourselves to work hard and always do our best, as unto the Lord. If there are any who shine in good work attitude, it has to be the Christians.

Sometimes we may be given unpleasant and very difficult tasks to do. We are not to perform the tasks with a poor attitude. The Word of God tells us that we are to do them unto God and not unto man (Eph. 6:7). Even in such trying circumstances at work, we must persevere and do the work heartily as unto the Lord (Col. 3:23). We must always remember that in all our labours, we serve our Lord Jesus Christ.

Christians are to be exemplary employees. Our attitudes, behaviours, and actions at our places of work often speak louder than our words. In no circumstance should we be blamed for slothfulness or cheating our employers of their resources, money, or time. Our bosses or colleagues can see for themselves if we "walk our talk". We ought to be mindful of our testimonies at all times and not put the name of God to shame.

Pressures and temptations

If our bosses or supervisors constantly demand of us to work excessively to the extent that we have no time for

our family or church, we will have to reassess our priorities. This is a common challenge for many of us working in Singapore. The demands of work are unending. Very often, they even encroach on our family and church lives and service to God. We end up not having time for our family and to serve the Lord in the church. Those demands may even be detrimental to our spiritual life and calling as Christians. We must, therefore, be vigilant not to be sucked voluntarily or involuntarily into this situation. Sometimes this may be where we have to draw a line, even if it means that we have to forego a pay raise or a promotion opportunity, or even lose our jobs. Compromising our spiritual well-being and that of our family and church is definitely an unwise and sinful thing to do.

On the other hand, work can become our obsession, especially when one is very career-minded and aspires to climb the corporate ladder. We may spend an inordinate amount of time in our places of work to get ahead of our colleagues so as to gain recognition from our bosses in order to have better promotion

prospects or get better bonuses. This can become our preoccupation to the detriment of our souls and that of our loved ones at home.

At times, there are tempting career development offers to work in another country where there are no Reformed churches. To reject the career development offers would affect our growth in our career, but to succumb to the company's pressure to take up the offer would have detrimental consequences on one's spiritual and family's well-being. We must always place our and our family's spiritual well-being as top priority when making such decisions.

There are also pressures to break the Sabbath day and work on Sundays to please the bosses or to advance in one's career or to be in our bosses' good books.

In some instances, your colleagues or even bosses may ask you to lie to get out of a certain sticky situation. You know it is a sin to lie, but you are tempted to give in to the bosses and

take the easy way out by breaking the ninth commandment so as to please the bosses and support the team. The situation is sometimes made worse if there are other Christian colleagues who are willing to compromise.

Sometimes the work culture in the office is to take shortcuts and do the minimum to get by. As Christians, it is not right to follow this kind of work culture, yet there is the pressure to conform or be left out of the group or be ostracised.

There are many more situations that challenge us and put our Reformed worldview at our places of work to a test. The Christian employee often finds it difficult to work and live antithetically in the midst of ungodly company at work where people backbite, gossip, and refuse to submit or are disrespectful to authority. Yet it is necessary for us to work, as this is the means God has given us to sustain our earthly life. May God grant us grace, as we face each unique situation at our places of work, to bear a good testimony for His glory and for the praise of His blessed name. Amen.

HOW TO DEAL WITH ADDICTION

>> Daniel Tang



Daniel Tang is a member of CERC.

When I was asked to write this article, the *Salt Shakers* committee gave me this introductory sentence: *The current situation is that we live in a culture that struggles with addiction to everything except God.* Indeed, this is an apt description of society today.

First of all, let us look at what addiction is. A quick Google search brings me to the online version of the Cambridge dictionary, which gives me two

definitions:

1. An inability to stop doing or using something, especially something harmful.
2. The need or strong desire to do or to have something, or a very strong liking for something.

When we think of addiction, the first definition of addiction is probably what comes to mind. If I asked you

what a person could be addicted to, most of you might say: drugs! This is not surprising. The authorities in Singapore — and Asian societies in general — remain intolerant toward drug use, and the anti-drug campaigns here have drilled into us the concept that being addicted to drugs is a great evil (and it is, although that is not what this article is about).

I believe that few of us — myself included — are familiar with the second definition of addiction. Let's read that again: *addiction is defined as the need or strong desire to do or to have something, or a very strong liking for something*. Not just something *harmful*, but something in general! Anything!

Does this worry you now? You might be able to say with confidence that you will *never* be addicted to drugs, or even to other “evils” like alcohol or gambling or smoking or any other vice. However, can you say with confidence that you will never be addicted to *anything* at all? Search your heart, and let me search mine. What is the thing — or things — that you love so much? What takes priority in your life? To what do you devote your time and energies?

Not everything that we like to do or have is necessarily bad or constitutes an addiction. Students, it is good that you like to study, for that is your God-given calling for this point in your life. Adults, it is good that you desire to work hard and even to excel in your career, for it is your calling to work and to give your best. And you young people, it is not wrong for you to be on Facebook or Instagram or to play games in your free time. However, as Ecclesiastes 3 tells us, *“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven”*.

This is perhaps the first sign in determining if you are addicted to something. God's Word tells us that there is a time for everything. Perhaps you enjoy playing a particular mobile phone game. There is little wrong with pulling out your phone for a couple of minutes after you have just gotten off school or work, to play a few rounds of the game to relax at the end of the day. But if you find yourself opening up the game at every chance you get, including at times when you are supposed to be doing something else, then it is likely that you are now addicted to playing the game. And it is such addiction that must be avoided.

How else can you find out if you are addicted to something? 1 Corinthians 6:12: “All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any”. Again, we see that the things we like to do are probably not “unlawful”, or not sinful in themselves, but we must not be “brought under the power of any”. If our desire to do what we like so consumes us that we must do these things, with no regard for our other obligations or other people, then we are addicted to these things. For example, as a young parent, much of my attention is directed toward the care and upbringing of my child. Deuteronomy 6:7 even tells me that this is an activity that will require a great deal of time (*“when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up”*). However, even our children can become an addiction if our children become the only thing we care about, and if we insist that nothing may get in the way of our dear children — not our friends, not the church, and sometimes it seems, not even God.

Addiction is not only a bad thing; it is a dangerous thing for the soul. At the heart of the matter, addiction is **idolatry**. As Jesus summarised in Matthew 22, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind”. And again in Matthew 6:33, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God”. When we are addicted to something, we are placing that thing first in our lives. It becomes the priority in our lives. God is no longer first in our lives. The addiction is. We no longer direct our energies chiefly to the service of God's kingdom. Instead, our energies are directed toward the fulfilment of our addiction.

Living in Singaporean society, we need to be extremely careful that we are not addicted to *success*, or more accurately, fulfilling society's view of being successful. In an environment where one's worth is often measured by one's education status, career progression, income, material possessions, and all sorts of earthly accomplishments, it is easy to find oneself desiring to achieve the same as our peers and attain society's approval as a successful individual. While there is nothing wrong in climbing the corporate ladder or having a fancy car if God blesses us, we must beware of making the pursuit of such things our life's goal, so much so that we neglect the service of the kingdom.

In order to combat against falling captive to our addictions, we need to make a conscious effort to place God and His kingdom first in our lives. Prayer must be a key component, for we must not assume to be able to do this by our own strength. Like all other sins, we do not overcome our sin by our own might, but by the grace of God.

Nevertheless, let us look at some practical ways in which we can deal with addiction:

1. Discipline and time management: Identify the potential area(s) of addiction, and set aside specific times or durations for these activities.
2. Keep busy with other things: Fill your time with profitable activities so that you are not tempted to pursue your addiction. For example, join a committee (or

committees) in church, so that you can dedicate your time and energy to serving the church instead of serving the addiction.

3. Be separate: Sometimes, it may help physically to remove yourself from that which you are addicted to, so that you are not constantly tempted to return to that which attracts you.
4. Seek help: Addictions are not cured overnight, and it is often difficult

to have the discipline to break a habit. Find some you trust to help you — a parent, sibling, friend, or someone from church — so that you have someone to run the race with you and overcome the addiction together.

Dear readers, we live in a society consumed by addiction to everything except God. The dangers for us are real. May God give us the grace and strength to withstand the temptations that come our way.

TIME

>> Ishu Mahtani



Ishu Mahtani is a member of CERC.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8: “*To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace”.*

I believe that the passage itself speaks about the times we are in right now. It is a season of trials for many and perhaps sadness as well. Some are going through sicknesses, be it through the current coronavirus or through any other forms of sickness. Some may be going through psychological trials as well. Some may be going through personal trials in their lives in other forms as well.

Are you going through a personal struggle or trial in your life? Be ye comforted. The Word of God speaks to each one of us and reminds us that it is all according to His divine plan. Each one of us has to go through some forms of trial in this present life. But during these trials or times of sickness or persecution, God is always present with His people. In the Old Testament, God’s people were led through the desert in the same manner.

We read in Exodus 13:21, “And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night.” Will the same

God who led the people in the OT lead us now? Yes, by His mercy and grace, our holy and righteous One will lead us in the same manner. We only need to put our faith and trust in Him alone. Not in any other person, money or material possessions. We must put our faith and trust in Jehovah alone.

During these times of uncertainty, as far as the spread of the coronavirus is concerned, we may face friends or relatives who are heavily burdened by its spread. News reports daily speak about the harm which the spread of the virus can cause to others. The news reports may have perhaps spread more rapidly than the virus itself. These reports can have both good and bad effects on the people. Good, in the sense that they keep the public updated about the spread, and help advise people to remain vigilant and maintain high hygiene standards to help contain the spread of the virus. On the other hand, the news can have a demoralizing effect on those who are easily affected by such negative publicity. In any case, it is good for us to be kept

updated by recognised authorities, instead of listening to wild rumours and false news out there.

More importantly, I believe the Lord has given us this time to bring the good news to others. As we hear of how the general public is becoming more and more afraid of its spread and of the deaths it has caused, it may also be a good time for the people of God to share the good news. God speaks to us through such times to bring us closer to Him. Those who are His people will open their ears and have the desire to hear the good

news of salvation. We need to bring this good news to our neighbours, friends and relatives, in good times and in bad. Hebrews 4:12, “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart”.

We must do His work now and not fret or wait. We do not have to become discouraged or disheartened if our sharing does not bear immediate fruit.

For, according to His good timing and purpose, His people will come to the true knowledge of His Word. According to His divine plan and will, people will confess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. By His grace His elect will be saved.

Finally, may the good Lord give us the grace and strength to do His good work, to bear a shining light for Him during these times. What time is this? Read Ecclesiastes 3.

A SMALL MEMBER OF THE BODY - THE TONGUE (2)

>> Melina Chong



Melina Chong is a member of CERC.

Before writing on the tongue, I have to put up a frank caveat that being asked to write this article astounded me, as I would not associate myself with using my tongue (words) wisely. Scripture emphasises that despite being a little member, the tongue boasts of great things and has the potential to kindle a great fire, holding the power of life and death (Jas 3:5, Pro. 18:21a). I often sin with foolish words and it is my prayer that you, the reader, might be able to receive this article with grace and we can be sanctified together by learning about the tongue.

One of the main uses of the tongue is

for speech. The tongue is an organ of speech which we flex to shape and form sounds, specifically vowel and consonant production. Speaking engages several muscles, including continuous moving of our lips, jaw, tongue and throat. These changing tongue positions control and change the amount of air which comes out of our mouth, thus affecting the sounds produced. Fun fact: the way we position our tongue causes deformations of the tongue surface, and this happens for both feeding and speech but the tongue deformations used for speech production are much more complex than for swallowing!

Tongues for good and evil

The “tongue” is mentioned 129 times in the Bible, often about speech, and other times referring to the language of a country. The Bible compares just tongues with choice silver and wise tongues with health (Pro. 10:20, 12:18). The mouth of a righteous man is also likened to a well of life (Pro. 10:11). What a glorious picture to have your tongue compared to that which is highly precious or

enriching. Nevertheless, Scripture also paints a dark picture of a wicked tongue which is used for sin. The words we speak are a manifestation of what dwells in our hearts, “for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Matt. 12:34). If our hearts are evil, our thoughts will be sinful and so will the words we speak. The same mouth used to bless God cannot be used to curse men, as this action is inconsistent. “Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.” (Jas. 3:9-12).

Therein lies the importance of using the tongue for wholesome and wise speech — we need our tongues to be living so we might be able to partake of its fruit (Pro. 15:4a, 18:21b). Wholesome speech, in essence, uses pacifying and soothing language to restore and promote health for the soul. It is gentle and wise, meant to build up and not to tear down. We talk in our daily lives, but do we take the time to ponder if our words are used

rightly to heal and to comfort souls?

7 Tests for edifying speech

To keep our tongues bridled and profitable for the soul, God's attributes should shine through our speech. God is holy, pleased and glorified with conversation which highlights His holiness, and because He is also just, He will be the Judge of our words and actions. We ought to examine if our words are spoken in ways that position God rightly. A verse we all should hold dear to our hearts is Philippians 4:8, with seven tests on how we can check if our speech is edifying.

Ask yourself if your words are:

1. **True** - Do my words align with the truth of God?

God is a God who demands perfect obedience to His law, therefore our speech must also show forth His truth not in partiality but in entirety (Jas 2:10). This means no paltering, which is to use truthful facts in part, with the intent to mislead or deceive others.

2. **Honest** - Are my words honourable, worthy or noble?

We should be able to speak honestly and openly without the need to conceal or hide our words. Imagine if you are partaking in gossip, this is not something you will be able to do in the open.

3. **Just** - Are my words fair towards others?

We must learn to speak fitting words at suitable times, avoiding anything that dishonours God or hurts others. We are accountable to God on the day of judgement for every word spoken (Matt. 12:36-37).

4. **Pure** - Is my speech clean and chaste?

Our words must be dignified and kept pure with wholesome language, not coarse nor peppered with vulgarities or sexual innuendos (Pro. 15:26).

5. **Lovely** - Do I speak kindly out of love for others, or is it self-serving?

With every opportunity to speak, we should use it to provoke one another to love and to good works (Heb. 10:24). There are seasons where we are called to encourage others, but also times for admonition when it is due as God hates sin. We do not speak hastily or out of anger, but gently with longsuffering and doctrine (2 Tim. 4:2).

6. **Of good report** - Are others well-spoken of?

The Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 112 brings up the need to defend and promote, as much as we are able to, the honour and good character of our neighbour.

7. **Of any virtue or any praise** - Does what I say have any positive merit, that it is deserving of praise?

While we do not speak to gain the praise of men, we must still speak virtuously in commendable ways.

Fruitful tongues

The tree of life is a fruit of the righteous, and the ability to speak a timely word of encouragement or appreciation is like refreshing dew-drops to those whose souls are parched and wearied (Pro. 11:30, 15:4). Revelation 22:1-5 speaks about the tree of life as an emblem of Christ, reminding us that through the blood of Christ we will be restored to holiness and able to enter into His Kingdom. In the office of all believers, we have the calling as prophet, priest and king to testify for Christ and His love. Prepare yourself and your heart to speak with grace, with words seasoned with salt (Col. 4:6). It takes courage and boldness to speak corrective words, so do it humbly and charitably to cover a multitude of sins (1 Pet. 4:8). Finally, be encouraged to persevere in doing good for the Lord as He has promised that a man shall eat food by the fruit of his mouth and keepeth life (Pro. 13:2-3). Let us learn to display the grace God has shown to us in our relationships, starting from the words which roll off our tongues.

CERC INDIA'S CHURCH CAMP

>> Cheryl Lim, Ishu Mahtani & Lisa Ong

Introduction

Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church, India (CERCI) held her 2020 church camp from 24th to 26th Jan. Rev. Lanning was the speaker at the camp and gave five speeches based on the theme verse, Acts 1:8 "...and ye shall be

witnesses unto me... unto the uttermost part of the earth". Five members from CERC Singapore (CERCS) were able to attend this camp and some of them share their reflections here in this article.

Lisa Ong's Sharing

Attending the CERCI camp was a great highlight of the year for me and I strongly encourage more members in CERCS to visit likewise. If you are wondering what the 3-day camp was like, it is similar our CERCS camp, only much more free-and-easy. I remember that on the first

afternoon, as the Singaporeans and Rev. Lanning stood at the car park waiting for more campers to stream in, I was really itching (from excitement) for the camp to start, but had to take it slow and easy. I realised that Singaporeans are used to a quicker tempo of life, and even our down-times are so packed with activities that it could cloud out time for God-centred work and fellowship.

Over the course of the camp, we had five messages on the theme and Sunday worship by Rev. Lanning, a talk on evangelism by Rev. Singh, two Psalter-learning sessions (where the Singaporeans and Americans — Rev Lanning and his friend Jeff Kotman — taught campers Psalter 197), evening free time for games like cricket and badminton, and lots of time to fellowship in between.

In my interactions with some of the believers, I had come to learn some of their stories.

A retiree of the Indian government who for his career worked in the Insurance Department was the translator during the speeches. While Rev. Lanning spoke in English, the translator had the very important role of translating it to Bengali, which is the home language. He stood for the hour-long speeches despite a bad knee. When I suggested to him to sit, he informed me that in order for him to translate the speaker's words, intentions and nuances well, he had to stand to be at the same level as the speaker. It was a testament of his zeal to do his best for the course of the Kingdom. He also shared that the situation in Kolkata was quite different from that of Singapore, as the Indian democratic government is quite hostile to Christians as they pander to the Hindu majority. Nevertheless, he is thankful that the authorities in Kolkata respect freedom of church worship and

prays that this will last.

A lady with a Masters in Botany is now pursuing her studies in Education to be a teacher. She had travelled across the country to study as there were better education opportunities in Kolkata. I found it stark that she had chosen to join us for the camp despite having several friends of like-origin and language in another group worshipping on the floor above us. They were a young peoples' charismatic group. She struggles with finding like-minded peers but holds on dearly to the Reformed truth.

Another member shared about the challenges that they face, which include financial hardships, and jobs which require church-goers to work on Sundays. However, I saw that these were but little barriers to their love for God, the truth and their fellow brethren.

When a family with a 12-year-old daughter apologised to me that they didn't know English well, I replied, "And I know zero Bengali!" So they became my Bengali teachers. And because our lessons took place mainly in the dining room, I now know that "*cha, pao roti, dim with noon is shuh sha doo*" means "tea, bread, egg with salt is yummy".

There was a young widow who came with her 6-year-old son. We didn't speak much but I could still see the grief in her eyes. She brings her son to church each Sunday.

There is a pair of very musically-inclined brothers who were brought up in another Christian denomination, but have been convicted by the Reformed faith. Together with another member who works as an Uber driver, they amazed me by their readiness to serve their fellow saints.

I went to Kolkata for three days, but came back with friendships to last for eternity. I would like to express my deepest appreciation to Rev. Singh and team for organising the wonderful camp, Sonali for her great support, Rev. Lanning for His faithful work in Kolkata and all the members of CERCI for their endearing love. And I must not neglect to mention, on our last evening, the Singapore guests compelled Sonali to present a song on the harmonium (an instrument that is like a mix between the organ and accordion). She sang "I Am Thine, O Lord". It was so beautiful, and it is reason enough for anyone to go to India! And yes, God willing, I will go back!

At the point of writing, our friends in India are undergoing a three-week lockdown due to COVID-19. Let's keep them in our prayers.

Cheryl Lim's Sharing

Attending CERCI's church camp was a very enriching experience because it placed us in intimate proximity with the brethren for an extended period of time. We were in a position that allowed us to get to know our fellow saints on a deeper level (compared to over a single Sunday) and forge bonds of love and friendship. I share here two short reflections from this camp.

1. *Remember our First Love.* First love for the Lord was clearly evident amongst members of CERCI. They took great pleasure in coming together to learn God's Word and fellowship. They showed up in nearly full force for the camp. They keenly asked questions after each speech, hungry to know more about the truth and how it should guide their lives. As they learned Psalter 197 for the first time, the whole room reverberated

with their heartfelt singing. Do we love our Reformed heritage, the faithful Word preached, the church, and singing the psalms? Or have we taken these for granted? May God keep us from lukewarmness.

2. *Don't Wait to Witness.* It was intriguing that witnessing was chosen as the theme for the camp. Consider: CERCI has yet to be established as a church; they have limited resources; they are young in the Reformed faith; they live in a hostile environment where persecution is real. Surely witnessing can wait? Not at all. They were enthusiastic and ready to go. They wanted to know how to go about it. They wanted to know what the authority by which we witness was. They wanted to know what to say and who to say it to. They wanted to witness with their lives. Have we such a desire to witness? Let it not wait.

Ishu Mahtani's Sharing

This was my 5th visit to Kolkata. It was good to be able to meet the brethren again. The weather ranged from 9 to 15°C but the warm fellowship kept me from the cold throughout the camp. There were some new faces but also many old saints which I had met before. The camp gave me the opportunity to speak to the brethren and come to some understanding of their lifestyles, the challenges they faced, etc. The theme of the camp was, "Be ye my witnesses". Rev. Lanning gave very good messages which reminded me regarding the importance of walking steadfastly and our calling to spread the gospel. The brethren from the Kolkata church also had many good questions for Rev Lanning. Their constant eagerness to learn more showed their desire to grow in the faith and knowledge of the truth. I took some

pictures and you can approach me if you like to take a look at them. I also had the privilege of sharing for the camp's morning devotion, which I append below. Meanwhile, I would also like to encourage more of us to visit this mission field. You will be blessed by the visit.

I began with the greetings "*Shuprobath*" which means good morning in the Bengali language. Here is the rest of my sharing:

My devotion this morning is based on this title: LOVE FOR OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST.

As I was thinking about what to share, many thoughts came to my mind. Then I thought, maybe I'll share what is close to my heart. I asked myself, do I have a deep and passionate love for our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ?

I believe that in order for us to be able to bring the gospel to our neighbours, we ought to first pray about whether we have that conviction and passion for our Lord. Do we only know something about the Lord or do we actually know Him? Do we only have head knowledge? Or do we feel in our hearts and souls that we love the Lord, to whom we come to confess our sins each day. This is very important. Because if we do not love Jesus with all our heart, mind and soul, we will not be able to share the good news with others with our heart, mind and soul.

According to His divine plan, God sent Jesus to die for us on the cross. He suffered for us sinners. What an amazing grace! Because of His sacrifice, we can have the promise of life everlasting. We do not have to doubt this because God says so. What peace and joy we must have in your hearts now, knowing that all our sins are forgiven. I pray and hope

that we feel this sense of peace and joy daily in our lives.

How can we know whether we love Jesus? Perhaps we can pause for a moment and look at our lives. How are we living daily — are we keeping God's commandments? In John 14:15 we read, "If you love me keep my commandments".

That means we will obey His word with deep humility. We will seek His will for all we desire for in our lives. That means we will go before the cross daily to confess our sins. That means we will love our neighbour as Christ loves us. That means we are willing to serve one another. That means we will be ready to give an answer to those who ask us about our faith. That means we will pray to God daily and tell Him how much we love Him. That means we will find time to keep the Sabbath day to worship Him and fellowship with His people on the rest day. That means we will gather together for Bible studies. That means we will continue searching deeper into the truth so that we are not led astray by false prophets. That means we will read the Bible every day. And finally, that means we will have the desire to grow in our faith and love for Jesus.

I myself fail in many ways. So brethren, I pray for each one of us that we may continue to remember the first love which we had for Jesus. May God be merciful to us. May He cause us to love Him more and more each day. To God be the power, and the glory and dominion forever and ever.



News from the Churches

The recent COVID-19 virus has resulted in many of our churches not being able to gather for worship services due to regulations set by the government. Due to travel restrictions and quarantine orders, our missionary pastors in the Philippines and Kolkata are also limited in their work outside of their immediate vicinity. As we honour our respective earthly rulers, may we also remember and reflect on our indestructible unity in Christ as His body and continue to trust the Lord through this period of uncertainty. We are also thankful for advances in technology which allow us to continue to hear the lively preaching of God's Word while worshipping from home.

Singapore

We are thankful once again for help rendered by our sister churches in the PRCA in the form of pulpit supply. Rev. Kenneth Koole was with us from 2-23 February, and Prof. and Mrs Dykstra from 27 February – 9 March. It is always a joy to be able to renew old friendships and form new blessed memories with the ministers. Rev. John Marcus had planned to come during the period of 29 March – 5 April but was unable to due to the COVID-19 situation. We trust that this is all in God's plan and look forward to having him visiting in the future, DV.

Our last appeal to the Singapore government for an employment pass for Rev. J. Mahtani has been rejected. This stems from complications arising from Rev. Mahtani's prior Singapore citizenship and the country's required military service. We trust this to be the Lord's will and pray that God will use Rev. Mahtani and his family mightily in other ways.

USA

The seminary hosted four young men from Covenant CHS in Grand Rapids who show interest in pursuing the ministry. They joined faculty and students for devotions, sat down with the professors to talk about the call to the ministry and visited classes. We are thankful for the opportunity and pray that more may do so in light of the urgent need for more seminary students.

Northern Ireland

CPRCNI has unfortunately ceased its mission field in the Limerick Reformed Fellowship due to falling membership and lack of office bearers. We are saddened by this news but continue to remember them in our prayers that God will uphold them.

India

The Kolkata Church Camp was held 24-26 January under the theme "Ye shall be my witnesses" from Acts 1:8 with Rev. Andy Lanning as the speaker. Some of the brethren from CERC and one brother from the PRCA managed to attend the camp by God's grace. We trust that all were edified by the camp messages and blessed by Christian fellowship of love among the saints.



Rev Den Hartog baptizing Joy,
daughter of Zong Jie & Julia



Baptism of Hayson, son of Aaron & Iva



Baptism of Luke, son of Cornelius & Jemima Joy



Adult baptism of Grandma Sarah



Chinese New Year visiting at Milton & Celina's home,
one out of three homes opened for church members to visit



Dinner fellowship organized by the Follow Up Committee
while Prof & Mrs Dykstra were in Singapore

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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