



# SALT SHAKERS

JOEL 3:16 MATT 5:16

10  
years

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## Chairman's Note

Dear Readers,

As you know, *Salt Shakers* celebrates its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in this special issue. Rather than having this issue filled with new articles, the staff decided to publish articles from past issues. The work we have accomplished in these 10 years is not ours ultimately, but the work of God in us to declare and promote the truth of Jesus Christ.

That truth has worked powerfully in the lives of many readers, here and abroad. In this issue, then, we testify of the work of God in our readers' hearts. Before some of the articles, you would find a note from various readers, sharing how that article has edified them. We hope these personal notes encourage everyone to continue reading, as part of our desire to grow in our knowledge of Jesus Christ.

In addition to these contributions and a regular editorial, Tom Bodbyl from Grandville PRC has contributed an article sharing the benefits of reading widely as part of our walk with God.

So, please, read, meditate on the Word, and pass the salt!

In Christ,  
Yang Zhi

Salt Shakers is a bi-monthly Reformed magazine published by Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore. In each issue, we strive to bring readers quality articles discussing Reformed doctrine as well as practical theology and Reformed viewpoints on recent issues.

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# Editor's Note



**Paul Liu**

*Salt Shakers* advisor and first chief editor from 2010-2016. His Editor's Note from the first issue is reprinted here.

Hello everybody! Welcome to the very first issue of *Salt Shakers*! There are so many things to be excited about in the work of this magazine/publication/ (what else can we call it?)! First, this is a useful medium for us to represent the cause of Christ in this world (starting with Singapore, of course). So many things are fighting for our eyeballs nowadays –entertainment magazines, television programmes on buses, trains, handphones, computer games, and yes, facebook. Hopefully, *Salt Shakers*, as a print medium alternative to all things worldly, can be rest for your tired eyes as it provides Christian perspectives and deliverance from the visual avalanche around us. Second, it gives us an awesome opportunity to serve God in ways that weren't possible before. I thank God for the many hands He has strengthened to make this work possible. Everyone has a part to play in our BIG team, and now even those who normally aren't inclined to write even a short paragraph can make a print production possible by helping in other critical areas! May the Lord use this in ways we can't even begin to imagine (Eph 3:20), and as we prayerfully proceed, may God grant us commitment and perseverance to press on. Third, we can go places! We may not always be able to take a flight overseas to speak of His goodness and love, owing to time and budgetary constraints, but a little magazine in an envelope can do that! As the Lord leads, nudges, and sometimes, though hopefully not often, drags us along, let us be bold to bring His Word wherever the lost may be found!

Why is this work called *Salt Shakers*? First, we are the salt of the earth. (Matt 5:13) Obviously not literally (as in Lot's wife), but we are compared to salt in its effect and function. There's lots to read up on how salt was valuable in that day, how salt preserves, how salt cleanses and heals, but I want to emphasize one thing about salt – it makes the difference. For those who eat food (most of us), we know that there is a great difference between "no salt" and "some salt". It specifically means that our testimony must be in stark contrast to the world! At the hottest parts of the spiritual battle, where God's truth is being attacked the most, there must His salt be found. When our testimony is so similar to what the world preaches, then we are on "mute" and the Bible calls us salt that have lost his savour. So as salt, we must

continuously show forth a testimony true to His Word, that others may experience the unmistakable taste of someone whose life has been changed drastically, who lives only for the service and glory of his great God. What then? Well, a salt shaker dispenses salt. And may *Salt Shakers* dispense the testimonies of all involved that many may be blessed.

We are also called *Salt Shakers* for another reason! We are salt that shake. In Joel 3:16, when Jehovah speaks, the heavens and earth shake. We desire to be used by God to declare His wondrous works powerfully throughout all the earth, and may the LORD use it so mightily, that we confess that indeed, He is our only hope and strength. Before we think that it's only figurative, go to Acts 16:26! The bold and defiant prayers and singing of Paul and Silas were a testimony so great that God brought about a miraculous earthquake! And while it physically broke the chains and opened the doors to free the prisoners, more importantly, God used their testimony to free the prison keeper and his household from the bondage and shackles of sin and death. Can our LORD use *Salt Shakers* to loose the bands of those still in "prison"? So, I hope you have a better idea of our infant magazine and how we align ourselves according to God's Word. Please, read every article inside of here, so that there are no leftovers and nothing goes to waste! And then, pass it on to someone who might need it. Remember, you don't have to wait till someone shouts "PLEASE, PASS THE SALT!"

Christ regardless, paul.

# Editorial: God, Our Goodly Heritage (1)



Lim Yang Zhi  
*Salt Shakers* chairman

Ten years.

Ten years of writers, local and foreign, to fill our columns. Ten years of finances to fund the work. Ten years of biblical, theological, and creedal articles.

All these are the testimony of God's faithfulness to *Salt Shakers*.

Using the inspired words of Psalm 16, *Salt Shakers* confesses: God is our goodly heritage (v. 6)!

A heritage (or inheritance) is something extremely precious passed down to us. That God is our heritage means that He is our God. As our God, He has redeemed us from our sins and brought us into his fellowship to live for Him. That salvation is our heritage. To know, to believe, and to live in thankfulness for that salvation, is our heritage.

"God is our heritage!" is the confession of *Salt Shakers*. In a love for that heritage, our articles must continue to build up our readers.

However, our particular interest is in our readers in CERC.

This magazine was founded ten years ago in CERC, by members of CERC, for the members of CERC. To be sure, our articles aim to edify all believers. But, for our brothers and sisters in CERC, the staff of *Salt Shakers* are especially concerned.

Our concern is that CERC continues to confess, "God is our heritage!" With that concern, *Salt Shakers* must continue to maintain that heritage. In that concern, *Salt Shakers* must continue to remind CERC to maintain the heritage she has received over thirty-three years. As *Salt Shakers* maintains this heritage, it confesses with CERC, "God is our heritage!"

In this and the next editorial, we will meditate on who God is, as our goodly heritage. David, in Psalm 16, describes God as the God who hath given him counsel, and the God who is at his right hand. The former describes God's instruction of His church, while the latter (to be considered next time) describes God's

preservation of His church through her trials.

## Our Heritage

Who is this God, our goodly heritage?

He is the God, *who hath given us counsel* (v. 7). That *counsel* is God's infallible, perfect Word. In that Word, God reveals Himself to us. Through that Word working powerfully in our hearts by His Spirit, God instructs us to know Him, to love Him, and to live for Him.

This God is the heritage of CERC. From her beginnings, God instructed CERC, so that she might know who He is in Jesus Christ and live for her Lord and Saviour.<sup>1</sup> This God first worked in hearts of students and teachers to form a small Bible study. 1962 was the year. Although these new converts did not subscribe to the Reformed faith at that time, through initial contact with the PRCA and doctrinal conflicts within the group, our founding members grew in their understanding of the Word. Through these events, God worked in our founding members to adopt the Three Forms of Unity in 1981.

That same year, FERC was formed. Yet, soon after, it grew numerically through local evangelism efforts in Toa Payoh. "Not a few were directed to our church", says Pastor Lau, and soon, there was opportunity for establishing a second church. Just six years later, in 1987, CERC was formed. From those years, CERC continued to further her understanding of the Word, fully subscribing to the Reformed liturgical forms, and finally to the church order in 2013<sup>2</sup>.

Through these years, the Lord also worked in CERC a

<sup>1</sup> I will not narrate our history in detail, because my focus is our spiritual heritage, not the details surrounding that heritage. Yet, my strong encouragement is to read the sources I have used. They are listed here:

1. *First Evangelical Reformed Church 20th Anniversary, 26th January 2002* (self-published);
2. Lau C.K., *A History of the Evangelical Reformed Churches in Singapore (1962-1995)*; and
3. *A Vineyard of Red Wine: CERC 25th Anniversary* (self-published).

<sup>2</sup> Do not assume that I have forgotten about our controversy with FERC over divorce and re-marriage. That was an important means God used to instruct us who He is, and a catalyst God used for further instruction after the controversy. Because of its significance, we will reserve it for the next editorial in September, DV.

deeper conviction of the truth as her members learned to live according to that truth. Families learnt to instruct their children in word and deed, because, to those parents, *God is [their] God and the God of [their] children*. Members learned to care for one another, *rejoicing together, weeping together, admonishing one another, and serving one another in the love of our Lord Jesus Christ*. These convictions were the fruit of the Spirit's nurturing in our founding members, starting from the very day our church was established<sup>3</sup>.

This history testifies of the work of God, our goodly heritage. What was that work? It was the work of gathering His people and causing them to believe in Him as the God of their salvation. Gathering them, God continued to instruct His people. They grew to know Him, and in that knowledge, to live for Him.

In that new life, God established in our congregation biblical traditions – traditions such as fellowship, local evangelism efforts, and a godly way-of-life, to name a few. (Could you spot their beginnings in the above paragraphs?) These biblical traditions are the life we have in God's covenant, and are therefore part of CERC's heritage.

Yet, these traditions are not in themselves our heritage. You may point to the fellowship that existed from our early days, the fellowship of ordinary students and teachers fervently seeking to know Jehovah God as their God. You may point to local evangelism, an important means God used to gather CERC. You may point to the resolve to walk in the truth; the beginnings of family and personal devotions in the home; the beginnings of committees looking out for young people and members in the church; and the beginnings of faithful leadership. You may point to all these and say, "That's our heritage!", because these traditions certainly are the precious fruits of God's instruction to us.

Yet, my brethren, these traditions *in themselves* are not our heritage – *God is! God*, who (in Christ) is present *where two or three are gathered* in His name, is our heritage, working in us to know Him more as our God through our fellowship (Matt. 18:20). God, who works in us to be *the salt of the earth*, is our heritage, working in us through our witness to behold His power in saving a soul, and to partake in Christ's suffering when others mock us for that witness (Matt. 5:13; 1 Pet. 4:13). God, who by the Spirit of Christ sanctifies us to walk as His children, is our heritage, working in us through faith to know *the breadth, and length, and depth, and height* of his love for us in Christ (Eph. 3:18). *That God*, and the traditions which we maintain in our life with God, is

our heritage!

In other words, these traditions remain as our heritage, only when they are ruled and guided by God Himself. And how would God rule and guide us, except by His holy Word? God is our goodly heritage in *His Word!* Through His Word, God directs to know Him as our God. Through His Word, God establishes what is the life of the church of Jesus of Christ – these good traditions, and many more!

### What About SS?

That goodly heritage, *Salt Shakers* must maintain.

*Salt Shakers* was born in a time when our church, recovering from the controversy over divorce and remarriage, was growing in her knowledge of her heritage.

*Salt Shakers* has not changed from its purpose. In years to come, the contents of this magazine must call upon our readers in CERC to maintain her heritage.

The years that lie ahead for *Salt Shakers* must be filled with articles that call upon CERC to love her heritage. Our articles must call upon members to love fellowship, not because it is always full of zeal and joy, but because God uses fellowship with like-minded brethren to draw us closer to Him. Our articles must call upon members to evangelise, not because many would accept the Christian faith, but because God uses evangelism to show forth His power of delivering his people from darkness into light. Our articles must call upon members to desire a godly walk, not because it is a condition to experience our salvation, but because God loved us so much that He sacrificed His only begotten Son, and what we render to God is thankful obedience.

The years that lie ahead for *Salt Shakers* must address the concerns regarding our heritage. How do we "bridge the gap" between generations in the fellowship of our church? How do we bring the gospel in its simplicity to unbelievers through tracts, social media, and conversations? Not to mention believers from other churches who do not know the Reformed faith – how do we share with them the glory of God in our doctrines? How should we combat against worldliness in a day and age where many Christians have fallen into worldliness?

*Salt Shakers* must address these concerns with nothing

<sup>3</sup> The words italicized are the very words used by our founding members; see their "Covenant of Commitment".

but the Word. As we said earlier, God is our goodly heritage in the Word. If we do not know the Word, and we will lose our heritage. Fail to understand the Word day by day, and we will lose our heritage. Take away that Word of God, and we will lose our heritage.

*Salt Shakers* must insist on knowing, understanding, and believing the Word to maintain our heritage. *Salt Shakers* must insist on that knowledge, understanding, and belief the Word, in all its depth. That depth is always seen in the vastness of our doctrines – the covenant, predestination, justification, sanctification, regeneration, particular grace, amillennialism, and many more. *Salt Shakers* must insist on knowing, understanding, and believing in *doctrine* as taught throughout God's Word.

Therefore, *Salt Shakers* must never fear to insist, that the loss of sound doctrine will always lead to the loss of our traditions. Sound doctrine alone, as the proper explanation of the Word of God, encourages us to maintain our heritage.

Neither must *Salt Shakers* fear to insist that godly traditions are lost because sound doctrine has become mere facts. "What will we do with our covenant God, the God of our salvation?" is the question with which sound doctrine confronts us. Mere facts do not. *Salt*

*Shakers* must continue to remind CERC that we lose our traditions, not because we have spoken too much doctrine and too little about these traditions, but because we have spoken doctrine too often with hearts *far from God* (Isa. 29:13).

What was David's heart in Psalm 16? Was it swelled with self-righteousness, because he had knowledge? Absolutely not. David's heart was *near to God*. So near was David's heart, that it was filled with God's Word. The Word in his heart (reins) *instructed him in the night seasons*, that is, when he was alone, in private meditation and self-examination.

In these ways, *Salt Shakers* must maintain the heritage of CERC.

More must be said about our goodly heritage. As we said in the beginning, through the afflictions He sends, God preserves us in our heritage. Those afflictions served to strengthen our love for that heritage.

What were those afflictions? How did those afflictions strengthen us as a church? What troubles lie ahead? Most importantly, what is SS's role through these troubles? More on that, next time, DV.

***Salt Shakers* must never fear to insist, that the loss of sound doctrine will always lead to the loss of our traditions.**

**Sound doctrine alone, as the proper explanation of the Word of God, encourages us to maintain our heritage.**

# Biblical Reconciliation



## Prof. Herman Hanko

Emeritus professor of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA and frequent contributor to *Salt Shakers* since its inception. This article was one of the first he wrote for *Salt Shakers*.

Congratulations to the young people on starting a new magazine for the covenant youth. It is certainly a very worthwhile venture. May God put His blessing on this venture and use it for building up the young people and strengthening the bonds of the communion of saints.

The subject of reconciliation between those who have been alienated from each other is an important one. We are, after all, a part of the church of Christ; and we live together in the communion of saints. If some in the communion we enjoy are angry with each other, will not speak to each other, and avoid fellowship with others, the communion of the saints suffers. It suffers because the communion of the saints is possible only where there is love for God and love for each other.

The Lord demands of us that we live in peace with each other. He demands of us that we bear each other's burdens (Gal. 6:1, 2; 5:13, 14), enjoy each other's fellowship and seek each other's good. If we do not do what he demands of us, we sin. And sin is always the one thing that breaks up communion and fellowship. The communion of the saints means that we live in peace with each other (Psalm 122:6-9).

But in the communion of the saints we are all sinners. And it is a fact, as we all know, that we sin all the time. Not every sin requires reconciliation to restore fellowship. It may be, for example, that a group of people are together, and one of those present says something unkind about another person. Most of the time we can let these things be as they are with perhaps a short reprimand. We assume of each other that we are all children of God, and that we confess our sins to God. We do not make a big issue out of every sin that our fellow believers or fellow young people commit. There would be no end to that, and it would be very foolish.

But there are other kinds of sins that cannot simply be overlooked. Maybe someone is our group and fellowship

has gone to a movie and is now bragging about it; we are offended by that, because we believe that movie attendance is not pleasing to God; and we especially are troubled by the fact that one of our fellow saints brags about it or talks about it as if he or she has done something that others ought to do as well.

Such a sin is, of course a public sin, and the whole group has heard what was said. There are others in the group who are also offended. All are witnesses to a sin in one of our fellow saints. What now must be done?

Or maybe someone has committed a sin of which one of us is the only one who knows it. Supposing, for example, we see someone entering a movie house, although this person does not know that we have seen it. It is a secret sin, for nobody knows except the person sinning and the one who saw that person enter a theatre. What must be done?

But maybe someone has said or done something to us personally so that we are badly hurt. Maybe someone has called us a liar; or maybe someone has poked fun of something we did. Maybe it was done when others were present; or maybe it was done when we were alone with that person. The one was a public sin, for others witnessed it; the other was a secret sin, for only I and one other person know. What Ephesians 4:26 says is important. When someone sins against us, it angers us. But we must not remain angry. We must cease being angry before the end of the day. What must be done?

These questions need answering.

First of all, there is one principle that is so important that we must know it and observe it. In all matters of sin that require reconciliation, the fewer who know about the sin, the better. It is easier to be reconciled when only two are involved than when 13 or 14 are involved. It is easier to be reconciled when only some of the saints are

involved than when the consistory must get involved. It is easier for reconciliation to be accomplished when only some in the congregation know about the sin rather than when the sin becomes public knowledge.

This principle is so important that we must all do everything we can to carry it out. I have found, in my own ministry how true this is. I have found this principle to hold for any sin. I have learned this when only two people were involved and when people and a consistory were involved.

I have found it to be true when and if the whole matter finally goes to a classis or even to a synod. There is almost no hope of reconciliation when other ecclesiastical bodies become involved – even though sometimes they must become involved, for that is the only way to settle a problem.

And so: Keep sins of others secret! Do not get on your hand phone to text messages to others about it; or talk to others: “Do you know what so-and-so did?” We are always eager to tell others about somebody’s sin because by telling someone else what so-and-so did, we mean also to say, “We are not that kind of sinner; we would never do that. Look how holy we are.” That is exactly the way not to reconcile. That makes all problems of sin worse than they ever were.

Another point is that we must be very sure a sin has actually been committed. I recall once that someone said to me, “So-and-so was very cruel to me. I wanted to greet her cheerfully and she would not even talk with me. What must I do?” Obviously the answer was: “Go to her and ask her about it.” This was done, and it turned out that the other person was preoccupied by problems at home, did not mean to be curt and cruel, and felt very sad about it that she had left that impression.

We must be careful in this matter of reconciliation that our concern with sin and the breach it causes in the church of Christ is not concern for ourselves. We do not see another’s sin as a splendid occasion to parade before others our own holiness, but we seek the welfare of the church. So often when someone hurts me, my concern is my feelings, my hurt, my reputation, my honour. If we seek reconciliation for our own sakes, we might just as

well not seek it at all. We are only trying to salvage our own pride, regain our own reputation and shown how pious we are. This is damnable in the sight of God. We want our fellow saints to be saved and will do anything to save them.

How then are we commanded to seek reconciliation?

Let us look at it from our own individual viewpoints. That is, I am going to speak in the first person; if I try to keep all the “hes” and “shes” straight and try to explain what happens under different circumstances, I will get hopelessly tangled up in pronouns, and so will you.

If I am witness to a sin of one of my fellow saints, I must go to that person to admonish him/her to repent. This is my solemn obligation before God. To fail is to make myself guilty of sin, for the one who sinned is my fellow saints and has threatened his salvation by his sin.

I must be sure, however, that the person I saw was indeed guilty of a sin. And I can be certain only by talking with the person who, I think, sinned. I recall that two men once came to me for advice. They had been fishing in Lake Michigan and were on shore in a town quite a bit south of where they lived. They had seen one of their fellow saints in town with a strange woman, and were certain that their fellow saint was guilty of adultery. They went to this man and told him what they had seen and called him to repentance. But the man said that he had a boat docked in the marina of that town and was talking to a lady about selling it to her. They could not prove that he was lying, although they were sure he was. They wanted to go to the consistory and charge the man with adultery.

I told them they must not do that, because they had no certain proof, but that if what they suspected was true, sooner or later the sin would come out, as it did. It is easy to misinterpret someone else’s actions and we must be careful that we do not charge anyone falsely or unheard (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 43, 112).

The reaction of the person we go to see may be either that he claims what he did is no sin, or that he did not do what I am claiming he did, or that, although he did what I claim he did, he is not sorry for his actions. Whatever



the reason, he refuses to confess the wrong of what he did.

In the case he refuses to repent and confess his sin, I must go a second time, but this time with a witness. This witness need not be a witness to the sin; if the sin is secret, most likely there is no one else who witnessed the sin. But a witness must go along in order to be able to testify that I truly did go to my brother and seek his repentance.

This is what Jesus meant when He outlined the procedure we are to follow in reconciliation (Matthew 18:15-21).

It is clear from Jesus' words that the same procedure must be followed if someone sins against me. Jesus particularly refers to this: "If thy brother shall trespass against thee . . ." (verse 15). In a way, any sin of my brother, even if I am only a witness to it, is "against me," for it is against the communion of the saints, and I am a part of the communion of the saints. Yet there are times when no others are aware of the sin, but only I know.

How we go makes all the difference in the world. I must not go in a better-than-thou spirit, and leave the impression with my brother that I would never do anything like that. I must not go to my brother with a whip to lash him with my tongue and angrily tell him how devilishly wrong he is. I must go in a spirit of meekness, showing a true heart-felt desire that he repents, and, if he does repent, not send him to the cross, but to kneel there with him and confess my own sins as he confesses his.

But if the one I go to see will not confess his sins even after going with a witness, then I must report it to the consistory, and they must make the matter a matter of discipline. Even when this happens, the sin must be kept as secret as possible. I must tell no one, not even my own wife. The witness must speak of it to no one, not even his closest friend. The consistory must tell it to no one, not even the wives of the elders. If a sin becomes public knowledge, reconciliation is all the more difficult and the congregation is guilty of violating the ninth commandment, that is, guilty of backbiting and/or slander.

But there is another side to this matter. Jesus speaks of it in the Sermon on the Mount: "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Matthew 5:23, 24). This is an important text and is often forgotten.

Jesus is talking here in the context of a serious warning not to be angry with our brother under any circumstances, nor to speak evil of him – even if we think he deserves it (Eph. 4:26). Let me go back to the use of first person pronouns. I may be angry with my brother because he has said to others that my preaching was lousy, or too doctrinal, or always talking about how great are our sins. Or he may write in "Facebook" (a blog I refuse to go to, read or use: it is only a good excuse for some people to pour out their venom against others) that I do not do myself what I say in my preaching. All this comes to my attention. And I become very angry with the one who wrote it. I say to myself or to others, "That rascal; he doesn't know what he is talking about. He ought to mind his own business and look at his own faults. I won't have anything to do with him until he comes to me to apologise." If that is what I do, I sin as much as he does.

So on Sunday I go to church to worship God with my other fellow saints. This is what Jesus means by bringing our gift to the altar. In the old dispensation the saints came to worship God with a gift – a cow or sheep or dove, to be sacrificed. While I am in church I am still thinking about what so-and-so said or wrote about me; and maybe I even see him sitting six rows ahead of me. As long as there is this problem, I cannot worship. There is disharmony, anger, and trouble between me and a brother. The communion of the saints is broken. Something must be done. Reconciliation must take place. And so Jesus instructs me to go to my brother and be reconciled with him. Now I have an obligation placed on me, and I may not simply sit back and wait for my brother to come to me. I may not tell someone else about what my brother has done to me. I may not ask someone else to go to this brother and tell him how angry I am. I must go to him. Jesus puts the obligation on me.

And once again, I may not go in a spirit of anger. I must

not come to him and start raving to him about my hurt and about how dreadfully wicked he acted. I seek his salvation, and I desire reconciliation. Maybe I was partly to fault; and I ought to be ready to admit it. But in any case, we are both sinners.

Troubles among young people are probably the most common problems among young people. They say or do things that hurt others. And sooner or later, if they are true covenant young people, they will want reconciliation. If I have hurt someone, I ought to go to confess to the other my wrong. If I do not go to the one whom I hurt but that person comes to me, I ought to confess my wrong with sorrow. If I hurt someone in the presence of other young people, I ought to confess to them all and tell them all that I have been reconciled to the one I hurt. If confession is made, the sin is forgiven by God and He will once again bless the communion of the saints. If God forgives, we must also forgive each other. How could we do any different?

It is very difficult for any of us to express sorrow for our sins. I have said it a dozen times and now I say it again: The two hardest words in any language to say are, "I'm sorry." We are too proud, too ready to condemn

our brother, too insistent on our own position and reputation. Yet it must be done. James is very specific about it: "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed" (James 5:16). And by "healed" James means reconciled to each other and the spiritual wound healed.

Sometimes, for one reason or another, we do not want to go to our brother when we remember he has something against us. In case we do not want to go to see our brother, there is only one course of action to follow: Forget it! We must forget it completely. We must not hold what our brother has done against him. We must so completely forget it that we do not even remember what our brother has done. If we do not do this, there is a wound in the body of Christ, a breach in the communion of the saints. Such terrible things must not happen in the church.

Paul admonishes us to think others to be better than ourselves (Phil 2:3). The whole passage is worth reading at least once a month. When we live in the church by these principles, we follow Christ who was our Servant that He might save us. And the result is peace and unity in the church.

## Meditation



### Pastor Lau Chin Kwee

The late Pastor Lau was pastor emeritus in CERC from 2006 to 2013 and wrote regularly in the early issues of *Salt Shakers*. This meditation was one he wrote for the second issue of *Salt Shakers*.

Death has struck the Evangelical Churches in Singapore again. Brother Soon Kiah was taken home in the afternoon of May 7, 2010.

In this meditation we relate our deaths to Christ's unique death.

How can you and I be so sure that a death that took place about 2,000 years ago has merit meant for people of all times and ages, including ours? No, we are not talking about such a death being a good example for people of all times and ages to emulate and thus benefit from. Rather, we are thinking of a death that was designed and

planned deliberately to secure a certain merit meant for a specific people down through the ages. Such a time-transcending purpose involves the Fall of man into sin and misery under the judgment of the Holy God and the Redemption plan of God.

It was true that wicked men (some of whom were in holy offices) persecuted Christ unjustly and had Him executed as a criminal. But in the eternal counsel of God, something else was taking place as well, at the same time. Christ, according to God's plan of redemption, would have to be the substitute for God's people, bearing the penalty of their sins, as He suffered and died the

accursed death of the Cross. "They persecute him whom thou hast smitten." (Psa. 69:26)

Scripture clearly reveals that God's plan was in the execution while men were doing their wicked deeds and being responsible for them. Jesus, the Lamb of God, was also fully aware of God's plan all along, as He suffered and died the atoning death. "It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come! – Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain. – They did spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands, saying, Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote thee? – Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross. – Of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done." (Luke 17:1. -Acts 2:23. -Matt. 26:67,68. -Matt. 27:41,42. -Acts 4:27, 28) This

awareness of Jesus concerning God's eternal plan in what was happening in the crucifixion, is crucial in the nature of His death and the benefits we derive from it. If He was not aware of it, then He could not have gone through it for our sake, but for some other reason. Then also, the benefit of His death can be anything but He being a substitute for us. But...

"Surely he hath borne our grief, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted." (Isa. 53:4) This unique death in time has eternal significance. It was that moment when the death of God's people died - an event celebrated by God's people throughout their history!

What have become of your and mine deaths, if they had died on the Cross of Christ? (2 Cor. 5:8) If Soon Kiah is a child of God, his death died on the cross. His death had no condemnation upon him. His death was but a passage way to his heavenly home.

If the Lord so will, we too will experience death by and by. What will be our death to us? A gateway to glory or one to eternal condemnation? What makes this great difference?

## History of Salt Shakers



Jemima Lee

Member of CERC and *Salt Shakers* staff

It could be said that *Salt Shakers* was born out of necessity.

It was the year 2010, and only a few years prior, CERC had experienced a split in its denomination of the Evangelical Reformed Churches in Singapore (ERCS) due to the divorce and remarriage controversy. The burgeoning group of young people in CERC was perhaps starting to feel restless and lost trying to make sense of all the hurt resulting from the painful split. Some of them started thinking that the whole controversy was but a trivial matter. Others were of the view that there was no point in trying to understand the truth, because even the adults could not agree on it. There was thus

a need for a medium in CERC from which the young people could learn their church's history and also have instilled into them the realisation that standing for the truth is really what it means to be a Christian.

Moreover, there was a sense within the congregation that members did not read and meditate on Christian literature enough. Having only a shallow knowledge of God is not sufficient. Hence, there seemed to be a need for CERC's own magazine that would hopefully encourage and goad CERC as a congregation to read together, to dig deeper, and to commit to memory the truth of God's Word.

In addition, there was a lack of a platform for CERC to examine herself as a church. The church is indeed the apple of God's eye. However, while she is on this side of the grave as the church militant, she is always going to have glaring weaknesses, sins, and even errors. Therefore, there was a need for a magazine in CERC to be a constant "check and balance", a platform where it is not only polemical against the lie outside the church, but will also unashamedly examine and deal with the personal, sensitive, and unique issues of CERC. Painful as it is, CERC cannot be a church that pretends it has been perfected. Rather, CERC has to be a church that acknowledges she is filled with sinners saved by grace and sees the perpetual need to self-examine and reform.

These were some of the reasons that inspired and compelled Josiah Tan and Paul Liu – who became *Salt Shakers'* inaugural chairman and chief editor respectively – to start a Reformed magazine in Singapore. Working together with a group of about ten other young people in CERC, *Salt Shakers* was thus conceptualized, and its very first issue was published in March 2010. The name *Salt Shakers* encapsulated the vision of the founding committee:

- 1) To be the salt of the earth (Matt. 5:13); and
- 2) To be the salt that *shakes*. In Joel 3:16, when Jehovah utters His voice, the heaven and earth shake.

Similarly, the *Salt Shakers* Committee desired to be used by God to declare His wondrous works powerfully throughout the earth.

The first issue of *Salt Shakers* saw contributions by both CERC members and foreign writers from sister churches, such as Prof. Herman Hanko, who became a regular writer for the "Prof's Corner" column of the magazine. To date, *Salt Shakers* has maintained its practice of having articles contributed by both members of CERC and her sister churches in every issue, so as to provide content from diverse writers for its readers.

In addition to addressing CERC's needs, the *Salt Shakers'* founding committee envisioned the magazine to be used as a medium to spread the Reformed faith locally and abroad. Thus, the committee wasted no time in publicising *Salt Shakers* beyond CERC and Singapore's

shores with help from local contacts and CERC's sister churches, such as the Protestant Reformed Churches of America (PRCA). While *Salt Shakers* started out only distributing hard copies, e-copies of *Salt Shakers* became available (for free!) by its third issue in July 2010 to anyone that had subscribed, making the magazine more accessible for readers outside of CERC. A Facebook page was also set up to reach potential readers locally and abroad.

On *Salt Shakers'* second anniversary in March 2012, it published its very first special issue. Special issues are meant to be additional publications to the usual bimonthly publication of the *Salt Shakers*. The first special issue was titled "A Comparison of the Liberated Churches and the Protestant Reformed Churches" and was written by Prof. Hanko.

That same year, the 16<sup>th</sup> issue of *Salt Shakers*, published in September 2012, saw the introduction of rubrics to enhance the structure and content clarity of the magazine. The rubrics included Prof's Corner, Family Happiness, Guidance for Youth, Our Father's Handiwork, Christian Living, and Church Polity. These rubrics have been a mainstay ever since.

Exactly five years after the inception of *Salt Shakers*, Josiah stepped down as chairman. Josiah's final editorial as chairman was published on March 2015 in the 31<sup>st</sup> issue of *Salt Shakers*. Chua Lee Yang succeeded Josiah as chairman.

During Lee Yang's tenure as chairman, he oversaw the creation of *Salt Shakers'* very own website and blog, which were up and running in June 2016. The website ([https://www.cerc.org.sg/ss\\_home.php](https://www.cerc.org.sg/ss_home.php)) gives readers access to all previous and current issues of *Salt Shakers*. The blog (<https://cksaltshakers.wordpress.com>), on the other hand, allows readers to search for specific *Salt Shakers* articles by categories. This was a breakthrough for the *Salt Shakers* Committee, in particular the publicity team, as the blog allowed them to post weblinks to very specific articles on its Facebook page once every few days to encourage the reading of the magazine.

In September 2016, Paul stepped down as chief editor of *Salt Shakers*, and Aaron Lim was elected to replace him.

Two more special issues of *Salt Shakers* were published during Lee Yang's tenure. The first was a Reformation Day special published in November 2015. It was titled "The History of Reformed Covenant Theology", written by Prof. Hanko. The other special issue was published in September 2017 and saw the republication of Rev. Arie den Hartog's series for *Salt Shakers* titled "Lessons from the History of the Beloved Church of Jesus Christ Now Among Us". This special issue was published to commemorate CERC's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a church.

In March 2019, Lim Yang Zhi succeeded Lee Yang as chairman. Under Yang Zhi, *Salt Shakers* has looked into increasing the readership of the magazine and also producing content that continues to be both relevant and spiritually edifying for its readers.

It has not been and will never be easy work publishing a magazine that strives to represent the cause of Christ and declare the truth, especially in this wicked world. Therefore, past and present committees of *Salt Shakers* can only humbly confess that it is through God's grace alone that the magazine is still in publication a decade after it began. All thanks and praise be to God for His faithfulness! May God continue to grant strength and wisdom to the present and future committees of *Salt Shakers* so that this important work of Christ can continue for years to come, God willing.

"Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake" (Ps. 115:1).

## Jean Lim on "The Need for and Urgency of Reading" by Rev. den Hartog



Jean Lim  
Member of CERC

*Salt Shakers* has been my good companion.

It is a comfort and joy to read articles written by our young people confessing their love for and desire to walk in God's truth (3 John 1:4).

It also helps me greatly to learn from like-minded brethren who expound the Word from different perspectives.

Reading is such an important daily exercise for a child of God. I recommend the committee to re-publish these articles written by Rev. den Hartog on "The Need for and Urgency of Reading I and II".

Especially in this crucial time of the coronavirus epidemic, when there is so much information flying around seeking our attention to read it, we need guidance and wisdom to discern.

These articles have encouraged me to keep up the habit of reading in my "golden age". Rev. den Hartog mentions in his first article that Christians who do not read, walk

their lives according to their flesh and not according to the truth in the Scriptures. "A profound knowledge of the truth is necessary for enduring the trials of the Christian life...They cannot resist the temptation of sin confronting us from all different sources. They do not know how to judge right from wrong. Their life is directed much more by feeling and experience rather than by God's truth".

This is indeed very true and real in our Christian lives and especially when we are aging and many physical ailments and trials in our lives may weaken our faith. Therefore take heed and persist in our daily reading and meditating on God's Word in order to be wise and not to grieve the Holy Spirit.

# The Need for and Urgency of Reading

First published in July 2018 (Part 1) and September 2018 (Part 2). Part 1 is reproduced here.

You have probably heard it said before that we are living in the age of the explosion of knowledge. The meaning of this statement is that never before in the history of the world has the average person been able to access an almost unlimited amount of knowledge on almost any subject of interest and significance in life. Access to the world-wide internet makes this possible. New devices are appearing continually. There is the constant need for updating your devices if you want to stay abreast of all this. Tragically, however, for many Christians, at a time when so much knowledge is available to them, they are so shallow and superficial in their knowledge of the truth of the Word of God.

Because of the accessibility of knowledge, there are some who imagine that personal reading and study is unnecessary today. There are those who think this way also about the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ and the doctrines of salvation. All one has to do is look it up on the internet. Whatever question you want an answer for, just look it up on the internet. There is no need of retaining a lot of knowledge in your head as long as you have a computer.

There are some very serious fallacies of reasoning in the above thinking, however. The modern world wants to have knowledge in little bite-sized formats. We imagine that knowledge can come quickly and almost without any effort. The knowledge that we seek has to have immediate and obvious practical value for Christian living. The fallacy of this reasoning is that the truth of the Christian faith cannot always be learned with little effort in such bite-sized formats.

The Word of God is deep and wide and profound. The knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ is so high that it is always greater and more wonderful than human understanding. As Christians we need to be willing to ascend higher and higher and search deeper and deeper to learn the amazing, wonderful truth of God and the doctrines of our salvation. Appropriating the truth of God and the Christian faith requires the activity both of the mind and the heart. Truth that will remain in our hearts usually comes through careful study, prayer, and

meditation. Sad to say, many Christians do not realise this.

A Christian can never hope to be strong in the knowledge of God and sound in the doctrines of salvation unless he or she is ready to do a great deal of reading and careful study. We are called as Christians to know and confess and love and defend the truth. This requires devoted and careful study of the Word of God. "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). Paul wrote these words to admonish Timothy as a minister of the Word of God in the church. Not all of us are called of God to be ministers. There is nevertheless application for this admonition to every believer, the more gifted especially, and those who are called to be leaders and teachers in the church especially. There are Christians who should be ashamed because even after many years of being Christians they have so little knowledge and understanding of the truth of God.

The inspired writer of the book of Hebrews admonishes Christians who after many years of being Christians are still like little babes. They are still in need of being fed with the milk of the Word and are not able to endure the strong meat of the Word of God (sound doctrine) that is so necessary for the Christian to be strong. A profound knowledge of the truth is necessary for enduring the trials of the Christian life. Without this knowledge, many are easily led astray, because they are unable to discern the truth from the lie. They cannot resist the temptation of sin confronting us from all different sources. They do not know how to judge right from wrong. Their life is directed much more by feeling and experience rather than by God's truth. "Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to

discern both good and evil” (Heb. 5:11-14). How many of those who are reading this article are mature Christians, having a good understanding of the truth? Most of the time, those who have become such are those who have done a considerable amount of regular reading in their lives.

In Ephesians 4, the inspired apostle warns against those who have not, after many years as Christians, arrived at years of maturity in the fulness of the knowledge of Christ. These, he warns, are in grave danger of being “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Eph. 4:14). There are many deceivers in the world that lead many astray. This can have very serious consequences for Christians themselves and for their families.

One of the evidences of the above-discussed situations is Christians who belong for a time to good Reformed churches in the providence of God. But they wrongly become offended with something or someone in the church they belong to. They then go “shopping” for another church to belong to and after a time join themselves to a church holding to many and serious false teachings. Sometimes they return to a church which they once left because of false teachings, with little concern that these churches continue to maintain

those wrong teachings. They should be ashamed of themselves.

One of the urgent reasons why we need to be mature in the faith and in the knowledge of the truth is because we need to be able to defend the truth of God against many false teachers in the world. God’s Word repeatedly warns us that such false teachers arise even in the church itself. Paul told the elders of Ephesus that “grievous wolves” would arise from the midst of the church, not sparing the members of the flock of God. Christians need to be able to defend the truth for themselves and for the welfare of their dear families. If they love their children at all and are truly concerned about them, they will be concerned about their future. False doctrines maintained in the church will inevitably lead also to compromise in Christian living. Also the members of the church must stand together to know and defend the truth, for the love and glory of God. Holding to the truth is not merely an individual matter. We have a corporate responsibility, together with the true church where we are members by the grace of God. We need to do a great deal of reading to be able to be faithful members of the church and active in our calling and fulfilling our God-given responsibility as church members.

*To be continued...*

## Monica Koole on “Conveying the Gospel to a Non-believer” by Rev. van Overloop



**Monica Koole**

Member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan, USA

I have been reading the *Salt Shakers* magazine since its beginnings, and it has been a rich blessing to me. I have enjoyed reading through many past series, which include, but are not limited to, “Scripture’s Covenant Youth”, “Are Unbelievers in God’s Image”, and “Music”. If I had to choose just one specific article, that is where it gets harder, because each article has salt that shakes forth, giving savour. There is an article that I recently read again, though, that was very helpful for me personally. It was an article by Rev. Van Overloop called,

“Conveying the Gospel to a Non-Believer”. I needed to be reminded of the four biblical principles he laid out in conveying the Gospel to any neighbour God places in my pathway. Briefly, those four truths are

1. Scripture is the source of all Truth, and our faith must be reasoned out of it.
2. I am to have as my supreme goal to glorify God.
3. I am to have a genuine concern for the salvation of my neighbour.

#### 4. The power to save belongs to God alone.

My focus is to be on God and His worthiness; to reveal to others Jesus Christ, who is the evidence of God's love for His people. These basic truths are so simple, yet so deep, and must all be present in my thoughts for me to have the right spirit in conveying the gospel to others.

## Conveying the Gospel to a Non-believer

First published in September 2013

The request for an article under this title was expressed as follows: "What would you say if you had twenty minutes or less to share the gospel to a non-believer? Often in colleges and in work we have many people asking us all sorts of questions on sin, religion, purpose of life. Sometimes the person seems ready to talk about it and expects for us to give 'our case,' but we find it hard to phrase the gospel in a coherent manner. In the Singaporean context these people have heard very little of Christ. They know that Christians believe in Christ and that Christians do not approve of homosexuals, and that is about it."

Before we give a specific answer to this question, it is important that we understand clearly that there are some basic principles which the Bible gives for all witnessing. It is essential that we understand and remember these Biblical truths and hold them as pre-suppositions for communicating to others concerning the faith God graciously has given to us.

1. An unashamed presentation of the Scriptures as the source of truth.
2. The supreme object always is to glorify God, not to save souls.
3. The communication of a genuine concern for the individual.
4. The only power that can enable a non-believer to understand and believe is the Holy Spirit – not our own brilliant presentation, convincing method, or charming personality.

First, we have an objective standard: the Bible. It is to be used to determine truth. Only it provides answers.

When we speak to an unbeliever, then it must be

If I am truthful, I often fall short in balancing these principles in my heart, emphasising one principle to the neglect of the others. This article puts things back into perspective for me. I am thankful to God for the work of the *Salt Shakers* magazine. I pray God continues to use it to shake forth salt that gives savour.

communicated that what we believe is not a matter of personal opinion. It is not a matter of each of us having an opinion, and we each have the right to our own opinion. Nor is it a matter of feelings. Nor is it a matter of one's past experience. We are to let the non-believer know that the Bible is our objective standard.

In this connection, we can tell the non-believer that they do not have to believe us unless we can give proof of what we say from the Scriptures. This implies that the manner in which we communicate is with humility. We do not convey that we are right and they are wrong (as if we are better). Rather we are believing and bowing to God's Word, and they are called to do so also. We all must bow to the God of the Bible.

When Paul addressed people with the gospel, then he made it clear that he unashamedly used the objective standard of the Scripture. He reasoned "out of the Scriptures" (Acts 17:2,3). When Paul was before non-believers in Athens, then he immediately and unashamedly confessed his faith in God as the Creator of heaven and earth who must be worshiped (Acts 17:22ff). In any communication with a non-believer we want to set clearly before them that we are presenting them with the truth of Scripture, the standard for faith and life.

Be clear about what you believe and why you believe it. We are to know the Scriptures (and confessions, which so well summarize the Scriptures), so we communicate clearly what the Scriptures say. Speak about Christianity as factually true by citing Scripture as much as possible. Let us be clear that our calling is not about winning an argument, but a proclaiming of God and His demands. A discussion may become intense, but the purpose



is not to show why you are right and they are wrong. Communicate the truth of Scripture. The message is to be the offence, not us.

In this connection it is important to remember that we do not need eloquence (I Cor. 2:1). But God does require a genuine desire and effort to communicate the truth of God's Word concerning God and His Christ. Our calling is only to present the truth. In our minds, we ought to have the truth of Scripture prioritized – some truths are more important and pressing than other truths when first bringing the gospel. It is good to follow the priorities set forth in our confessions. Always be aware of the warning to avoid foolish questions and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law, for they are unprofitable" (Titus 3:9; cf. I Tim. 1:4-7; II Tim. 2:16).

Secondly, the supreme object of proper conveying of the gospel to a non-believer is the glory of God.

The object is not to save a soul. It is not to add members to our congregation. And it is not to demonstrate that I am right or better. When His word is set forth as the only standard for what must be believed by all men, then God is glorified. When His word is set forth as the only standard for how all men must conduct their lives, conforming themselves to Him and His standard, then God is glorified.

The clear message to be brought to non-believers is that God is to be feared, given glory and worshiped. "Fear God, and give glory to Him; for the hour of His judgment is come: and worship Him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters" (Rev. 14:7). God is worthy of glory, honor, and power, for He created and sustains all things according to His good pleasure (Rev. 4:11). The focus must be on God and His worthiness; and on Jesus as the evidence of God's love for His people.

We must always be careful that we do not emphasize ourselves and how Christianity impacts our lives. Non-believers must be told of their call to glorify their Creator!

Thirdly, there must be a genuine concern for the spiritual well-being of the non-believer.

We may not want to answer the questions of a non-believer for many different reasons. However, our Savior and Lord does not give us a choice. He gives us a command not only concerning the duty to give an answer, but also He commands us concerning the attitude we are to have in answering: "love." The love required is a genuine concern for the individual's spiritual well-being, which love is to be a reflection of and an extension of our love for the Lord our God. This brings glory to God.

Our Savior gives us the duty to love the Lord our God with our all, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. My neighbor is anyone God puts in my path. Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan instructs every believer in God's Word to see that non-believer is in a spiritual condition more serious than the physical condition of the man found by the Samaritan (Luke 10:29ff). Never are we excused from the commandment to love our God and our neighbor. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Matt. 22:37ff). Consider the fact that by exhibiting a genuine concern for them, we will be evidencing to them what we believe they must do: lovingly obey the God of the Scriptures.

A part of this love for the neighbor is that we see each person who questions us as one who must be dealt with as an individual object of concern, not as a case, not as a statistic, and not as someone to be defeated. This genuine concern for the spiritual well-being of the individual person to whom we are speaking must take them into consideration. Remember that Jesus proclaimed the same gospel in different ways to different people. He knew His audience and spoke accordingly: using parables with some people and expounding all things to His disciples (Mark 4:33,34). Paul communicated the same gospel differently to the Gentiles (Acts 17:22-31) than to the Jews (Acts 13:16-41).

"Walk in wisdom toward them that without." "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man" (Col. 4:5,6). "We are in no wise to conduct ourselves towards them with haughtiness, as if we had made ourselves to differ" (Canons III,IV - 15).

Fourth, we must realize that the only power that can

do the work of converting a soul is the Holy Spirit. We cannot!

Along with our proclaiming and talking, there must be constant praying. God alone is able to give us the ability to communicate, to open a heart (Acts 16:14), to add to the church (Acts 2:47), by His Spirit (Zech. 4:6) and Word (Isa. 55:10ff). We are to be praying to Him Who alone is able to bring about changes of heart before we talk to the non-believer, while we are talking with them, and after we talk with them. With regard to those “who have not yet been called, it is our duty to pray for them to God, who calls the things that are not, as if they were” (Canons of Dort, III,IV - 15).

When we confess complete dependence on the Spirit, then we will patiently trust the Lord to supply the increase (I Cor. 3:6). This knowledge keeps us from pushing the truth down one’s throat and from thinking that a response must be immediate. Our responsibility is not “success” but faithfulness (I Cor. 4:2). We can only sow, we cannot make the seeds to sprout or grow (Mark 4:26-29). And sowing we must with patience wait on Him Who alone is able.

Specifically the message which must be brought to those who are apparently non-believers is that there is a God Who must be worshiped, thanked and obeyed. The focus must be on God and His worthiness. And Jesus is to be shown as the evidence of God’s love for His people. In this connection consider carefully how Paul

addressed the unbelieving crowd in Athens (Acts 17:22ff). He began by speaking of God as the Creator and Sustainer of all (24,26,28). He is a Spirit, to be worshiped (25), Who is unlike all other gods. Thus superstitions (22) and physical worship (29) is to be rejected. All men are called to repent (30). Because an historical Adam (our first father and representative head) plunged the human race into sin and death through his willful rebellion against his Creator, no one is innocent before God. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). Everyone is born to die, for a corrupt stock produces a corrupt offspring (Heb. 9:27). Total depravity with the loss of all original righteousness means the total inability to come to God if left to ourselves (John 44,65). The many difficult problems faced by the human race come because of human sinfulness. There will be a day of judgment, conducted by the resurrected Jesus (II Cor. 5:12), in which judgment all men will give an account of all the things they did in their life-time (Rom. 14:12).

Faith in Jesus Christ as God’s only begotten Son is necessary. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved and thy house” (Acts 16:31). Those who believe shall not be condemned but have everlasting life. He that believes not is condemned already, because he does not believe in the name of the only begotten Son of God (John 3:16-18,36).

May God bless the witness and testimony we give!

## Emily Chua on “The Golden Rule” by Marcus Wee



Emily Chua  
Member of CERC

In this article, Marcus writes about Matt. 7:12 and Luke 6:31 as the “Golden Rule” that is both a standard and a commandment that we ought to live by. It is based on the principle of love according to the attributes mentioned in 1 Cor. 13:4-6.

He brings to our attention the false and prevalent interpretation of the Rule: “Do unto others as others do unto you”, i.e. the rule of reciprocity where the treatment we receive from others becomes the standard in deciding how to respond. The practice of this rule is most evident when others do evil unto us and we

respond in a similar manner without love. Conversely, the “Golden Rule” requires us to consider what should be done with respect to the other person, only from the perspective of a new, regenerated man. It also requires us to seek the spiritual good of the other by loving the truth and hence loving him/her truly.

As selfish sinners, we are continuously tempted to practise the rule of reciprocity, often thinking that the person does not “deserve” to be treated with love in exchange for the evil they show. We struggle hard to uphold the Golden Rule. This article serves as an

## The Golden Rule

First published in August 2019

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

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

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

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

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

**Negatively, the Golden Rule is not: “Do unto others as**

important reminder for us to examine ourselves. We need to look to Christ as our perfect example and our power against our weak flesh. We need to make a conscientious effort to consider the neighbour before ourselves, as Christ did, to treat others with love that is humble and forgiving. Furthermore, as the salt of the world, it is even more crucial that we live pursuing the standards of God and not that of the world, to truly reflect His love and righteousness.

I strongly encourage you to read this meaningful article if you have not!

**others do unto you”.**

We can call this other rule the “Rule of Reciprocity”.

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

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

The Rule of Reciprocity uses a standard which is entirely different from the standard of the Golden Rule. The Golden Rule is: “Do unto others as you would others do unto you”. The Rule of Reciprocity is: “Do unto others as others do unto you”. The words “you would” or “you want” are missing from the Rule of Reciprocity.

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

*The Rule of Reciprocity is to be rejected.*

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

The Rule of Reciprocity is to be rejected because it is essentially selfish in nature. Even when we do good to those who do us good, we are being selfish: we are doing what best suits ourselves and gives us the greatest advantage. Instead, as a principle of love, the Golden Rule requires us to have charity, which “seeketh not her own” (1 Cor. 13:5).

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

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

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

### **Positively, the Golden Rule requires me to:**

*Put myself in the shoes of others.*

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

We may even reason in the following ways: “I don’t

care what others say about me, so I have the right to say whatever I want about others”. “It doesn’t matter to me what tone of voice others use, so I don’t have to watch my tone whenever I speak to others”. Or, “When I struggle with sin, I appreciate people rebuking me directly, so I am always going to rebuke others when I see them struggling with sin”.

Obviously, these lines of thinking are wrong; yet, if we are honest with ourselves, how often don’t we act that way? What I prefer, what I think is right, is what I am going to do to you.

Putting myself into the shoes of others means that I carefully consider my action with respect to the other person. Who is the person involved? It is not this: what would I want, given who I am, with my particular personality and preferences; but, what would I want, *if I were that person, in that situation?*

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

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

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

Putting myself in the shoes of others looks like this: even though I don’t care what others say about me; even though I don’t care what tone of voice others use towards me; even though I prefer others to rebuke me directly when I struggle with sin; I will be sensitive towards the preferences of others, and treat them accordingly.

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

*Seek the spiritual good of the neighbour.*

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

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

Sometimes, then, because what my neighbour prefers is from the point of view of the old man, and thus sinful, I will not do that action which lets him continue in sin, for his soul is in peril.

To apply the Golden Rule in deciding what to do to my neighbour, I still must consider what I want to be done to me after putting myself in the shoes of the neighbour, yet *only from the point of view of the new man*, the one that desires only what is spiritually good.

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

This consideration does not undo everything else that we have said earlier. We still need selflessness not to live according to the Rule of Reciprocity; we still need humility to put ourselves in the shoes of others. These requirements are not things in addition to the truth, but are part of the truth.

### **Conclusion**

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

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

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

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

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

Christ showed us the perfect example.

He did not follow the Rule of Reciprocity when we were His enemies and wickedly crucified Him on the cross. Instead, he put himself in our shoes. The divine Son of God, while remaining sinless, took on our sin-weakened nature and was touched with the feeling of our infirmities, experiencing the same struggles which you and I face. And He sought our spiritual good, dying on the cross for our sins and giving us all the blessings of salvation in Him.

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

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

# Hadassah Grace Vencer on “Scripture’s Covenant Youth (14): A Nameless Girl” by Prof. Herman Hanko



**Hadassah Grace Vencer**

Member of the Protestant Reformed Church in Bulacan, the Philippines.

We live in a world where the heart of man is obsessed with competition. Everyone wants to have more influence, fame, beauty, pleasures, and achievements than others. They want to be known and be admired by others so they use social media to tickle their sinful hearts.

As a covenant child of God, conforming to the pattern of this world is enticing. Will I lose connection to this world if my works remain unrecognised? Should I, who stand under the banner of Prince of Peace, go along with the current of the troubled hearts of men which are never satisfied? What is it to serve God without aiming to be recognised by others or compete with one another?

What Prof. Hanko wrote in his article "Scripture's Covenant Youth (XIV): A Nameless Girl" struck me. Why would God, in His providence, choose not to name

this girl, whom He uses as a means for the salvation of Naaman? As Prof. Hanko mentioned, this girl was made a slave and taken far from home. There should be every reason for her to hate these Syrians, especially her master. By a wonder of grace, despite her miserable situation, she proved herself a covenant girl by still upholding God's prophet and seeking her master's healing. Her faith shines against her dark circumstances. Why? She showed a complete surrender to God's will in her life. She is saying, so be it. Something that makes me ponder, feel my guilt, and seek repentance.

Why did God's providence choose this story this way? So that all things work together toward the goal of Jehovah's praise and not hers. God is absolutely good. Even when our corrupt mind thinks that God does evil, that evil is in good hands. Everything serves the glorification of God's name.

## Scripture's Covenant Youth (14): A Nameless Girl

First published in November 2018

Read: 2 Kings 5

The girl I want to write about is considered by some to be a poor object about which to write an article. After all, what did she amount too? The Bible tells us nothing about her to speak of and does not even give us her name. She is only briefly mentioned in a few verses of 2 Kings and the broad context of these few verses has nothing to do with her, but narrates in detail the astounding work of the prophet Elisha. No little maid who lived today in CERC or PRCP or elsewhere could possibly be envious of her, and some might even suggest that she is not worth mentioning, even in the Bible.

Nevertheless, I am sure her name, known to God, is written on the passages of the Book of Life, and that we shall see her in heaven. Rather than even talking about her, we ought to be ashamed of our faith and

contentment in comparison with the faith and contentment with the Lord's way that she showed.

What do we know about her?

Well, very little.

She was a "little maid", which means that she probably had not yet reached her teens. What is told about her is that she had been born and raised in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, probably on the east side of Jordan in that area called Gilead. At any rate, that is the area where the Syrian marauders, Israel's worst enemy, were most active. The little bit that Scripture tells us amounts to a thimble-full of information. She had been taken captive by a band of Syrian raiders who prowled in the land of Gilead, burning houses, looting, killing and taking captive the inhabitants. This little girl had been taken

captive and sold to the wife of the most famous man in Syria, Naaman by name. She learned that Naaman had leprosy and she told her mistress that she knew of a prophet in her homeland that could cure Naaman of his leprosy, which information prompted Naaman to go to Samaria, the capital of the Northern kingdom of Israel. At that point, Scripture turns away from her and concentrates on Naaman, the king of Israel, and on the prophet Elisha.

Whatever are we to make of this?

It is a remarkable instance of God's providence.

God tore her away from her family in a most cruel way using a band of Syrian raiders to burn her house, do what we do not know to her family, and carry her off far from her home to a strange country of idol worshippers! **Because** there was an elect child of God in Syria that God wanted to and did save. And she became the means to save him.

We may put her under the list of covenant youth mentioned in the Old Testament. Surely she came from a covenant family in which she had been taught by covenant parents the true worship of God.

These parents were faithful in covenant instruction even though the Northern Kingdom of Israel had become very wicked. They were among those 7000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal, of whom God had spoken to Elijah.

She was certainly a true covenant child, for she knew of the prophet Elisha and his ministry and believed that he, as a servant of God, could perform miracles of healing – when King Jehoram knew nothing of Elisha and did not believe his power to perform miracles (2 Kings 5:7- 8).

In these few statements of Scripture about this maid, we can tell that she was indeed a covenant child.

What would an ordinary young girl do under the circumstances in which we find her? And perhaps what would you do? And what would I do? Her home was destroyed. Her parents – she knew not what had happened to them. She would never see her homeland

or family and friends again. She had to worship her God secretly while refusing to worship the gods of the Syrians. In this environment she had to grow up and live the rest of her life – as a slave!

But what did she do? She saw that God had put her in the house of the second most powerful man in Syria (verse 1). God, she knew, must have put her there for a purpose. Now it became clear what that purpose was: God had one of His own elect in this pagan land who had to be saved. And God was to use her to save him. She had to witness of Israel's God and of God's prophet so that that this pagan man would be saved.

What a remarkable faith! In a young girl! How wonderful are the works of God! Unfathomed and unknown! Psalter versification of (Ps.118: 23).

What happened to Naaman?

Jesus takes the time to mention him by name, recorded for us in Luke 4:27. He is mentioned by the Lord in connection with the widow of Sidon in whose house Elijah was fed.

The reason why these two people are mentioned, along with the inhabitants of Nineveh, was because these people were the only foreigners in the Old Testament who were never a part of the nation of Israel and yet were saved. Many foreigners, over Israel's history, were saved, but they all were incorporated into the nation of Israel and became Jews. Some were even in the line of Christ: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, maybe Bathsheba, for her husband was a Hittite.

The ones saved who never became Israelites were not saved in their generations. Not believers and their seed – just believers, lost again in their generations.

But they were, as Jesus explains, Old Testament types who, in a unique way, pointed ahead to the time when Jesus would come, whom the nation of Israel rejected, and the gospel brought to the Gentiles.

It was a little girl of greater faith than most adults in the Northern Kingdom whom God used. May we think

that perhaps this little girl and Naaman worshipped together from the time of Naaman's return?

Would our faith do what that little girl did? I hope so. By God's grace, I know so.

We are brought up sharply to confront the question:

## Ishu Mahtani & Jemima Joy Boon on "2019: The Year We Didn't Talk?" by Lim Yang Zhi



**Ishu Mahtani**  
Member of CERC

I concur with the writer that communication is a very important aspect in our lives. Whether we wish to have some serious conversations, make jokes, or perhaps play some board games with each other, communicating with each other is a crucial element of our being. Our

Lord Jesus showed us a very good example. He spoke continuously and prayed for many. We ought to do the same. Let us be Christ-like and start showing that we care for our brothers and sisters. Thank you Yang Zhi for this blessed article.



**Jemima Joy Boon**  
Member of CERC

An amazingly straightforward, heartfelt article that starts us thinking. It was a thoughtful article that makes us question our love for fellow-saints and caused me to reflect on whether I see God's people as brothers and sisters-in-Christ, and whether I treat them as such. We can be very caught up with ourselves and our own pool of friends in church such that we sometimes forget that we are members of one body – Christ's.

at everything and walking pass people without noticing their looks/expressions? Am I making an effort to look out for people whom I have never communicated with? Am I doing my best to reach out to those who I don't see every Sunday? Am I trying to bring God's Word into my conversations and be courageous to discuss the sermon and about the week's activities in light of our spiritual walk?

This article really motivated me to think again how I should start thinking of the people I see in church every Sunday. Am I really looking out or just glancing

Thank you for such a reflective article. It was to the point and heart-searching indeed.

**This article really motivated me to think again how I should start thinking of the people I see in church every Sunday.  
Am I making an effort to look out for people whom I have never communicated with?**



## 2019: The Year We Didn't Talk?

First published in December 2019

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...

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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 a 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!

## Matthew Overway on “Fellowship with God” by Rev. Nathan Langerak



**Matthew Overway**

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When I was asked to write about an article in *Salt Shakers* that affected my faith and life in the church, there was one such article series that immediately came to mind. This article series was a two-part instruction regarding fellowship with God written by Rev. Nathan Langerak in Issues 52 and 53. Discussions on these topics have had a profound influence upon my family’s faith and life in our churches. But what made these articles especially memorable was their use and explanation of James 2:23.

James 2:14-26 is a very important passage of Scripture to understand. This passage teaches us that if we say we have faith and are justified by that faith, but do not perform the works of one who has faith, then our profession of our faith and justification is a lie. We must rather have works to justify our profession of faith and our claim that we are justified in our heart by that faith only. Right in the middle of this instruction regarding our need to justify our profession by our works, we find the classic passage used throughout the Bible to teach justification by faith alone.

This passage is originally found in Genesis 15:6. Then Paul uses it in Romans 4:3 and Galatians 3:6 to teach justification by faith alone. Finally, we find this same passage used in James 2:23 teaching the same justification by faith alone as Paul. But in James we have added “and he was called the Friend of God”. James 2:23 explicitly establishes our friendship with God in our justification in Christ through faith.

Since our experience of justification is by faith alone, and those who are justified are called the friends of God, then our experience of friendship with God is also by faith alone. Friendship with God is by faith alone without our works, but those who are the friends of God may not be and are not without their works of love whereby they show they truly are God’s friends. I found that these articles by Rev. Langerak, especially in regard to James 2:23, to be the clearest explanation of these truths to date. For this, I am thankful to *Salt Shakers* for their clear trumpeting of the truth within our churches.

## Fellowship with God

First published in November 2018 (Part 1) and February 2019 (Part 2). Part 2 is reproduced here.

The editorial staff of *Salt Shakers* asked me to write on the subject of fellowship with God. The last instalment established that fellowship with God is grounded on the believer's justification before God. Fellowship with God is the essence of the covenant of grace. The covenant of grace is the gracious relationship of fellowship that God establishes with His elect people in Christ. To be a member of the covenant of grace is salvation. The fellowship that God establishes with his elect people – the covenant – is based objectively on the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Jesus Christ accomplished by Him at the cross. By the cross of Christ, God confirmed His eternal covenant of grace. All His promises are yes and amen in Jesus Christ. Fellowship with God is also based exclusively on the cross of Christ in the believer's own mind and conscience. This is the lovely experience of justification. By God's gracious act to forgive the sinner his sins and to impute to him the righteousness of Jesus Christ by faith alone, God also assures the believer of His grace and eternal life. Fellowship with God is in no sense based on the believer's works, especially works done in faith.

How, then, are the works of believers related to fellowship with God? That is the subject of this article.

At the outset it is necessary to state that insistence – uncompromising – on the truth that justification is by faith alone wholly apart from the consideration of the believer's works does not in itself imply that the believer does not have a calling to do good works. This is always the slander by those who do not believe justification by faith alone against that doctrine. Against that slander the believer must double down on the insistence that works are not part of his righteousness and thus not part of the basis of his fellowship with God. In justification God justifies the ungodly. Where sin abounds the grace of God much more abounds. In justification there is no calling, no ability, and no necessity for the believer to do good works. A man must damn his own works in the judgment of justification, otherwise his conscience will always be tossed about with doubt, and he will be condemned before the tribunal of God. To condemn

works as of no account toward righteousness with God is exactly the power of faith. True faith casts off all confidence in one's own works and clings to Jesus Christ and His perfect righteousness alone as the only ground and foundation of salvation and righteousness before God.

Because the subject is fellowship with God – the covenant – and in light of the fact that Christ's righteousness is the only ground of the believer's salvation, it is important to connect the doctrine of justification and the doctrine of the unconditional covenant.

The doctrine of justification by faith alone is the truth that guarantees salvation without conditions. Because the believer's right to eternal life – now and forever – is based solely on the imputed righteousness of Christ, the believer's works cannot contribute to his salvation. Since the faith by which the believer is justified is natural to no man, but is the free gift of God given to the elect alone, justification by faith alone means that salvation is unconditional. To say that the righteousness of Christ is the only ground of salvation is also to insist that fellowship with God is grounded on that righteousness alone, since the covenant is salvation. So also because fellowship with God is based solely on the righteousness of Jesus Christ merited at the cross and imputed to believers by faith alone, the covenant cannot and does not have any conditions – works that believers must perform in their own strength or by grace – upon which the covenant of grace, fellowship in the covenant, or any benefit of the covenant of grace depend.

When the discussion turns to the subject of works in the covenant, justifying faith – the faith that refuses to work for righteousness and cleaves only to Christ for righteousness – is the starting point again. It must be the starting point because apart from justification it is impossible for a man to do good works. Apart from justification he only works out of self-love or fear of damnation, motives that are abominable to God and thus make all the man's works wicked.

The Belgic Confession in its treatment of good works in article 24 begins with justifying faith: “This true faith, being wrought in man by the hearing of the Word of God and the operation of the Holy Ghost, doth regenerate and make him a new man, causing him to live a new life, and freeing him from the bondage of sin”. The confession uses the word “regenerate”, in the sense of conversion and sanctification, not in the sense of the first work of God in salvation to make the dead sinner alive. So the subject of article 24 is sanctification and good works. The confession says sanctification is by faith. Faith makes a man a new creature. Faith causes him to live a new life. Faith frees him from the bondage of sin. What the confession means by “this true faith”, it explains later as “this justifying faith”. The faith that refuses to work in justification and for righteousness is the same faith that causes a man to live a new life. As righteousness is by faith only, so sanctification is by faith only.

Faith makes a believer a new creature because by faith God sanctifies the believer. Sanctification is God’s gracious act in the heart of the justified believer to break the dominion of sin and to cleanse him from sin’s

**The fellowship that God establishes with his elect people — the covenant — is based objectively on the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Jesus Christ accomplished by Him at the cross.**

pollution. The sinners, who in justification appear as ungodly and as ungodly are declared perfect for Christ’s sake and worthy of eternal life, must also be made saints. In justification God declares ungodly persons worthy of eternal life. In sanctification God makes ungodly persons saints.

The fruit of the act of God to sanctify the believer by faith is that out of faith he practices good works. True faith works by love. Faith is the root out which come the fruits of good actions of love of God and love toward the neighbour. The same faith that condemns its works in justification is the faith that works those works as the fruit of God’s work of sanctification. The believer, then, is not sanctified by his works any more than he is justified by his works. Rather, because God cleanses his heart by faith from the guilt of sin in justification and by sanctification from the dominion and pollution of sin the believer brings forth the fruit of good works. To put that very simply: he is not a saint because he does good works, but he does good works because God made him a saint.

This sanctifying act of God is closely related to and dependent upon justification. An illustration will show this. Two acts are involved in jailing a criminal. The first is the declaration of his guilt by the judge. The second is the act of the bailiff to lock the guilty criminal in prison based on his sentencing. So there are also two acts involved in freeing him from prison. First, the judge must declare the criminal not guilty. Second, the bailiff must release the acquitted criminal from prison based on the judge’s verdict. In justification God releases the believer from guilt. In sanctification God frees the believer from the prison and filth of sin.

The sinner by nature and on account of his guilt is the slave of sin and Satan. He must sin because he is guilty. He must be given over to sin because he is guilty. He must be destroyed by his sin and eventually perish in hell for his sin because he is guilty. By justifying His people God frees them from guilt. As a necessary consequence He also releases them from bondage.

The righteousness of Christ that is imputed to the believer in justification is worthy of life, blessing, and freedom from sin. In sanctification God gives that life,

blessing, and freedom from sin. The justified believer is also the sanctified saint whom God frees from the dominion of sin and cleanses from the pollution of sin.

Just as the guilty criminal lives a filthy life in a dungeon, so the guilty sinner lives a filthy life in bondage to sin. When God releases the sinner from sin's guilt, God also releases him from the filthy bondage to sin, makes him clean and holy, and causes him to live a new life.

Relating sanctification and its resultant fruit of good works to the fellowship of the covenant of grace follows from this. In the gracious and wonderful work of sanctification, the believer experiences God as his God, who for the sake of Christ's perfect righteousness given in justification frees the believer from the power and dominion of sin in sanctification. Sanctification is a work of God no less wonderful and no less gracious than justification. In justification the believer experiences God as the one who frees him from guilt, liability to punishment, gives him the right to eternal life, and grants peace in his soul. In sanctification the believer experiences God as the one who cleanses him from the terrible dominion and pollution of sin and causes him to live a new life.

This sanctifying work of God belongs to the gifts of the covenant of grace and is part of the believer's fellowship with God in Christ. Because God is his God in Christ, God not only justifies him but also sanctifies him. Because God sanctifies the believer, he does good works and walks with his God over against the world. The believer does not have fellowship with God by works any more than he has salvation or heaven by works. The believer does not experience fellowship with God by works any more than he will experience heaven by his works. Rather, because he has fellowship with God, he experiences God as the God who frees him from the dominion of sin and causes him to live a holy life in covenantal fellowship with his God. Good works are fruits, fruits that God gives to him by the gracious work of sanctification as his covenant God.

This work of sanctification, with its resultant fruits of good works, are inseparable from justification but must be sharply distinguished from it. The sanctification of the believer and the works that are the fruits of

sanctification are in no sense to be considered part of his righteousness before God or as the ground or foundation of any benefit of salvation. The Reformed creeds teach this simply by saying that works do not *merit*. Because clever heretics avoid the word *merit* but teach the substance of the term, it must be said that works do not gain, obtain, or work any part of salvation. After we have done everything that is our duty to do, we remain unprofitable servants. This must necessarily be the case not only because the doctrine that works obtain with God robs God of the glory of His salvation, but also because the works that the believer performs by the power of God's grace and Holy Spirit are still in this life polluted and defiled with sin. That which is tainted with sin is worthy only of punishment.

**Godliness, good works, and thanksgiving...are the works of God that He graciously gives and in which He causes believers to walk.**

Because good works proceed from the good root of faith and are all sanctified by God's grace, they are good and acceptable in the sight of God, but they are not of any account toward justification and thus cannot be the ground or reason for any benefit of salvation or blessing from God. Since Christ's righteousness is perfect and obtains all salvation and every blessing of salvation for the elect, there is simply nothing for works to gain.

What place then do works have in the covenant? The lives of good works that God causes believers to live are testimonies of gratitude that God requires of those whom He has redeemed and reconciled to Himself by Christ Jesus. In light of the truth that God sanctifies

believers and causes them to live new lives – He works in them both to will and to do of His good pleasure – God gives them their thanksgiving too. Godliness, good works, and thanksgiving are not works of men any more than election, the cross, and regeneration are works of men. They are the works of God that He graciously gives and in which He causes believers to walk. In their lives believers become active, and all their activity is to be attributed to the grace of God. To those thankful lives they are called, and all their obedience to that call is to be traced and attributed to God’s gracious work in them.

It is only in light of this understanding of good works that the reward of grace, about which Scripture speaks, can be considered properly. God rewards the works of

His people. The reward, though, is of grace. Put plainly this means that while God rewards the works of His people, that reward is not obtained or gained by those works. Rather, the reward given to the works has the same basis and foundation that the works themselves have. God’s people are sanctified and as the fruit of that they do good works on the ground of Christ’s cross alone and because of His righteousness alone. He is made unto them wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Such is the value of the righteousness of Christ imputed to believers that His righteousness not only merited for them lives of good works, but also rewards for the good works. The works are gifts, and God also graciously crowns His gifts with His reward.

## What's there left to read?



**Tom Bodbyl**

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I am sure this question has crossed your mind when thinking about good, spiritual reading material. “Where can I find something worthwhile to read?” Perhaps you have read all (or most) of the books published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFPA) and you are wondering where to turn for more good books. The question is, are there other good books to read besides what we get from the RFPA? And if so, how do we find these books.

### Other Good Books

I believe it’s always good and wise to be reading in the tradition of the fathers, especially the Reformed fathers. After all, we are Reformed. Authors like Calvin, Luther, Kuyper, and Bavinck are the ones we should be reading and studying. Of course, we don’t accept everything these men write, (e.g. Kuyper’s view of common grace) but we can benefit greatly from their writings. When reading the Reformed fathers, we see that what we confess today has been the confession of the church throughout the ages. It’s always amazing to me, when

reading what these men believed and confessed, that I find myself saying, “I believe that”. Our spiritual forefathers confessed the, “common salvation” and “earnestly contend[ed] for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 1:3). A steady diet of reading in the Reformed tradition helps strengthen us in our faith and walk.

There are also many good books in the Presbyterian tradition. American Presbyterian theologians Samuel Miller and J. Gresham Machen come to mind. Miller has an excellent book entitled, *The Ruling Elder*, where he discusses the “Warrant, Nature and Duties of the Office of the Ruling Elder”. Another book by Miller, entitled, *Doctrinal Integrity*, emphasises the importance of the creeds for the church and also warns against a false ecumenicity. Machen’s *Christianity and Liberalism* is very relevant to our church age, where doctrine is minimised (if not rejected) and Christian living receives all the emphasis (if not exclusively) in the Christian’s life.

Good books have also been written by those outside the Reformed and Presbyterian traditions. If you are looking for practical guidance to grow in your spirituality, consider, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* by Donald S. Whitney. *Preaching and Preachers* by D. Martyn Lloyd Jones is also highly recommended, whether you are a person who listens to sermons or delivers them. And of course, there are countless other good books.

### **But how do we find these books?**

A great place to start is the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*. The *Journal* always has book reviews. In a quick search of the last dozen journals, there were a total of 107 book reviews. My latest purchases based on these reviews were, *Fatal Discord: Erasmus, Luther, and the Fight for the Western Mind* by Michael Massing and *Honey from the Rock* by Abraham Kuyper.

Massing's book is a dual biography in which one sees how God used both Erasmus and Luther (one man heterodox, the other was orthodox) to preserve the church in the truth.

*Honey from the Rock* is a collection of meditations Kuyper wrote in *De Heraut* (The Herald), a religious weekly paper published in the Netherlands. James a De Jong, (who translated the work into English) has this to say about the themes and topics, "Emphasis on personal assurance based on God's covenant promises is prominent. So is God's patience and long suffering with his often-indifferent people. The power and glory of the Christian life are frequent motifs. Endurance and perseverance in the face of hardships appear consistently. The responsibilities of Christian parenting are regularly treated, as are the sad consequences of neglecting them. Formal, empty, powerless religious practice is often denounced, as are hypocrisy and religious practice for social recognition. The meditations are equally emphatic against cultivating subjective religious experience as the basis for assurance". Or as Kuyper himself tells us in a meditation (found in the book, *To Be Near Unto God*), "By means of these meditations we are bent upon opening the eyes of as many as possible to the need of making communion

with, knowledge of, and love for God, more than ever before, our daily concern". *Honey from the Rock*, is an excellent daily devotional and will definitely enrich your spiritual life. I recommend both of these books very highly!

Another way you can find good "leads" is by paying attention to the footnotes in the books you are reading. Many authors reference other works, and it's especially a work cited as the grounds for a solid biblical position that can be a source for new reading material.

The Standard Bearer also has book reviews and you can access many of the reviews that were included in the Standard Bearer by visiting the RFPA's website.

Then there is the more common way of referrals asking others what they have been reading and what they have found to be helpful in any given area of theology.

### **How should we be discerning in our reading?**

We need to have a good foundation regarding the truth of God's word. All religious books are purportedly based on the scriptures. But if we are to read religious books, we need to be sure they are indeed faithful explanations of the word of God.

Having a right understanding of doctrine is necessary to help us discern what is truth and what is the lie. In a speech addressed to young people about the forming of the religious character, Samuel Miller said, "It is of the utmost importance that the foundation be laid in clear view of divine truth. Doctrinal knowledge is apt to be undervalued by private Christians, and especially by the young. They imagine, according to the popular prejudice, that if the heart be right, and the conduct correct, the doctrines embraced are of small moment. This supposes that the heart of any one may be right, while his principles are essentially wrong; or that practice may be pure, while his religious opinions are radically erroneous. But nothing can be more contrary both to scripture and experience" (from Miller's "Introductory Address" in *Lectures to Young People* by W. B. Sprague, xix).

To assist us in our understanding of the doctrines that are taught in Scripture, we need a good understanding



of the creeds. We need to be doctrinally sound. The Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession and Canons of Dort are the fruit of the “Spirit of truth...[who] will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). Christ by his Spirit has led the church throughout all history in her understanding and growth in the truth. Recognising this, we honour the work of the Spirit by studying the creeds. These creeds have been given to serve as “walls” around the church for her safety and our spiritual profit.

The RFPA has excellent commentaries on these three creeds to help us understand their respective doctrines. If you haven't read these commentaries on the Three Forms of Unity, I would suggest that you do that before you do anymore reading. Understanding the truth that is set forth in the creeds is an absolute must. The creeds are foundational to our spiritual understanding and discernment. For example, if we are reading a book and come across statements about God's love for and offer of salvation to all men or assertions that man can do good apart from the grace of God, then we can immediately reject these statements as erroneous. We know they have been settled already in the church, in her creeds. With a good grasp of the creeds, we will be in a great position to discern much of what is written today. Our Reformed “antenna” will inform us when things aren't right.

In our calling to be discerning, I am reminded of Luther's characterization of Erasmus's book, *On the Freedom of the Will*: “Your book,... struck me as so worthless and poor that my heart went out to you for having defiled your lovely, brilliant flow of language with such vile stuff. I thought it outrageous to convey material of so low a quality in the trappings of such rare eloquence; it is like using gold or silver dishes to carry garden rubbish

or dung” (*The Bondage of the Will by Martin Luther – translation by J I Packer/C R Johnson, 63*). Some books can be beautifully written like the *Freedom of the Will* but nevertheless contain serious doctrinal errors.

What are some benefits to reading these and other good books?

Here are a few.

1. *We will grow in our knowledge and love for God.* Our overwhelming desire in our life, is to be God-centered in our thinking. God gives a serious warning to his church in Hosea 4: 6, “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”. Being a reader of Scripture and other good books will make us know Him more and more. We should study to see God in all our life and in all things around us. Could one be better characterised than by what has been said of John Calvin? He was a “God-intoxicated man!”

2. *As we read about and study God's Word, we experience communion and fellowship with our God.* Our reading helps us meditate on the wonders of our God. The Larger Catechism of the Westminster Standards puts it beautifully: Q. 1. What is the chief and highest end of man? A. Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy Him forever. Reading about His mighty acts in salvation and in creation, we cannot help but glorify His name, and thus as God's elect children (sons and daughters) we confess that, “truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3). Or, as our Lord taught us in the High Priestly Prayer,

**We need to have a good foundation regarding the truth of God's word. All religious books are purportedly based on the scriptures. But if we are to read religious books, we need to be sure they are indeed faithful explanations of the word of God.**

“And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3).

3. *Reading equips us to do battle for the truth’s sake.* We are called of God to “try the spirits whether they are of God, because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1) And the Apostle Paul teaches us that, “The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds” (2 Cor. 10:4.). 1 Peter 3:15 requires us to be “ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you”. Reading helps us to give that answer in meekness and fear.

4. *For those of us who may be office bearers one day, there is an enormous benefit for the church of Jesus Christ when we are well-read;* these office bearers are much better equipped to fulfil their duty than non-readers. Having a good understanding of Scripture, the creeds, and the Church Order are minimum requirements for the elder or deacon. Reading theology only strengthens him for his work in the church. I am reminded of that humbling and sobering third point regarding the elder’s duties in the installation of elders into office. “It is also the duty particularly to have regard unto the doctrine and conversation of the ministers of the Word, to the end that all things may be directed to the edification of the Church; and that no strange doctrine be taught, according to that which we read, Acts 20, where the apostle exhorteth to watch diligently against the wolves, which might come into the sheepfold of Christ; for the performance of which, the elders are in duty bound diligently to search the Word of God, and continually be meditating on the mysteries of faith”. Continually mediating on the mysteries of faith? One may rightly ask, “Who is sufficient for these things?” Reading theology and studying the Scriptures strengthens one in this calling.

May we all be readers “approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).

**A few additional recommendations:**

*Absolute Predestination* by Jerome Zanchius

*Martin Luther* by Eric Metaxas

*Bondage and Liberation of the Will* by John Calvin

*On the Incarnation* by St Athanasius

*The Family* by B. M. Palmer and W. Alexander

*The Complete Works of Augustus M Toplady*

*History of the Reformation* by Merle D’Aubigne

*When Thou Sittest in Thine House* by Abraham Kuyper

*To be Near Unto God* by Abraham Kuyper

Reading equips us to  
do battle for the truth’s  
sake.

# COVENANT LIFE IN PICTURES



March 2010: *Salt Shakers* was born!



Browsing the inaugural issue of *Salt Shakers*



*Salt Shakers'* first Secretary, Huiqi; and one of our many eager readers :)



2012: Current SS chairman Yang Zhi with Josiah, who served as the first chairman of SS from 2010-2015



Ruth, one of our past committee members, gives out *Salt Shakers* at the 2012 Reformation Day Conference



Photo taken to advertise the first (and probably only) competition the magazine ran in 2014

# COVENANT LIFE IN PICTURES



The first *Salt Shakers* committee



Vetting articles is hard work!



*Salt Shakers*' second Secretary, Joanna, and second Chairman, Lee Yang



Members and visitors browsing the magazine at the 2016 Reformation Day Conference SS table



A reader stops by to browse, with one of the committee's longest-serving members, Jemima, always promoting *Salt Shakers* with a smile ;)



Don't forget to pass the salt!

