

SALT

JOEL 3:16 MATT 5:16

SHAKERS

"Wherever doctrine is not lived out in our lives, it is nothing; akin to a body of water in a still pool, algae and sediments building up and choking it. Eventually, we lose grasp of its vitality and, unsurprisingly, our interest in doctrine as well."

– *Dislike for Doctrine*

"By nature, we would rather have a life of ease and comfort. Affluence often feeds the desire for such a life. Giving into that desire, we shy away from the Word of God when it sharply points out our lawlessness."

– *Last Days*

"In response to fearing others' opinions of us, society advocates messages of self-worth and taking pride in who we are. But the word of God lifts our eyes to Jesus, our Elder Brother, who has gained for us perfect acceptance in God's sight."

– *Reflections: Idols of a Mother's Heart (2)*

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Chairman's Note

Dear readers,

Welcome to the sixty-fourth issue of *Salt Shakers*! There's not much to say about this issue's articles—we invite you once more to mediate on the Word of God with our writers.

The committee would like to update our readers on a few changes. Firstly, the leadership has changed slightly. Our brother Aaron has served as the chief editor of the magazine for a few years and has decided to step down. Taking his place is brother Lee Yang, who was once the chairman of the committee. Lee Yang's role in the committee this time will be different, as I will now explain.

In a standard periodical, the chief editor is responsible for the content and direction of the magazine. In addition, the chief editor writes regularly and edits all articles to be published. This norm was not *Salt Shakers*'s. In *Salt Shakers*, the chairman took responsibility on the content and direction, while the chief editor was responsible for editing the articles.

Recently, the committee decided to change this arrangement. The chief editor (currently Lee Yang), responsible for editing the articles, would now be "assistant editor," while the chairman (currently myself) would be "chief editor." Lee Yang will be responsible for editing the articles (and consult the chief editor as and when necessary). Meanwhile, the chief editor will focus on writing the editorials and heading the planning of each issue throughout the year, with Lee Yang working closely with the chief editor.

These changes do not bring any essential changes in our magazine. At the same time, I ask our readers to approach either Lee Yang or myself regarding the content and direction of the magazine. *Salt Shakers* will thrive only when readers are willing to comment on our articles (even to criticize them in love!).

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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Last Days



Lim Yang Zhi
Salt Shakers chief editor

In our last editorial, we reflected on our fellowship. Is our fellowship centered on the Word? Is our fellowship a united response to the gospel of Jesus Christ? In that editorial, we examined ourselves with the Word of God, and to resolve in 2021 to strive for the same fellowship that the shepherds had.

In this editorial, I would like to draw our readers' attention to 2021 again. Not to fellowship in specific again, but to an overarching reality of 2021. In directing your attention this way, I use the Word of God from Matthew 24:12, where Jesus was teaching his disciples the signs of the last days.

I am curious whether you would turn away from this editorial, because it appears so negative. *Last days. Lawlessness. Cold love.* How different from the previous editorial, where we meditated on the good tidings of great joy! My urgent call is to read and consider these sobering words of Jesus Christ at the beginning of 2021.

The first word of Jesus Christ: *Abounding lawlessness.*

Jesus describes the last days this way: *Man abounds in iniquity.* Man so abounds in iniquity, that man's love for God, for his Word, and for his church will wax cold.

What is iniquity? A better translation of the original word would be *lawlessness*. We know what the *law* is. The law, most narrowly, refers to the Ten Commandments—the Word of God teaching us how we ought to live before God in thankfulness. Upon that law and the prophets hang the two greatest commandments to love God with our all and to love our neighbour (Matt. 22:37-40).

But the law more broadly refers to the entire Word of God. The word *law*, used by itself (as it is in Psalm 19), refers to the entire special revelation of God to man. The entire Word of God reveals to us how God has delivered us with a mighty hand and an out-stretched arm. The entire Word of God reveals to us how miserable and helpless we were without God, but that now we have

been lifted up into his fellowship by Jesus Christ. The entire Word of God shows us that the only way of life for us now is the way of thankful obedience to God.

But man is lawless. In these last days, mankind takes the law—the Word of God—and disregards it. Rather than believing in and walking according to that Word, the entire world is bent on satisfying self and living for self. Certainly, we see this total disregard for God in the lifestyles of homosexuals, party-goers, and those who simply hold on to a pleasure-seeking way-of-life. At the same time, that total disregard has become more subtle. Children and youth are taught in the public school to study hard for self, because in the future, those grades and skills acquired will bring big bucks and a successful career. Men and women are taught that a fulfilling life is one where men and women explore the world and all its foods, fashion, infrastructure, adventure, and pleasures in their desired ways. Parents are taught that a family-life can be satisfactory so long as you can maintain a comfortable standard of living, or post glamorous pictures and nicely-written stories on Instagram, or ensure your children get the education the parents most desire. All these are subtly taught as good, acceptable, and satisfactory. In no way is the Word of God honoured.

And so, as the world abounds in lawlessness, the Christian is also increasingly steeped into lawlessness. In these last days, he does not hold the Word in faith that cherishes the salvation of Jesus Christ. He is unthankful. Rather than having a zeal unto good works, he returns to the lawlessness from which Jesus Christ had redeemed him. The Christian might still look upon Jesus and say, "Lord, Lord!"; yet, as a worker of iniquity (lawlessness), his confession is hypocritical. Moreover, the church member *abounds* in that lawlessness. He regularly excuses himself for his sin. He does not "fail" or "slip" just this once—he returns to the sin again and again. That *abounding* can also be understood as an *abounding* in the sins committed. In the church, in the home, in his personal communion with God, that man disregards the Word of God.

And as the Christian falls into such lawlessness, the official and organic life of the church finds itself battling with lawlessness. In these last days, lawlessness is found in false doctrine—in fact, Jesus speaks of the overwhelming presence of false prophets deceiving the church, so that the church abounds in iniquity. Lawlessness in the church of Christ is also any failure to uphold the Word of God. The church is lawless when members refuse to reconcile, or perhaps fail to admonish one another for any sin. The church is lawless when office-bearers neglect their supervision of the preaching (so that it becomes shallow and fails to confront members with their need for Christ) and the sacraments (so that they are not practiced in the church and lose their significance in the church).

We, CERC, live in these days filled with lawlessness. It might be, that CERC and her members do not abound in iniquity in the ways described above. But it is certain that CERC and her members are threatened increasingly with such lawlessness. Young people, are you studying for those big bucks? Singles, are you working for that life of endless earthly freedom? Parents, are you striving for that pretty portrait of parenting the world paints? As a church, are we failing to walk according to the Word? There is great urgency in this text to examine ourselves for such wicked lawlessness.

The second word of Christ: A cold love.

This cold love is the fruit of the abounding iniquity. Love for God, his righteousness, holiness, and truth will grow cold. Love for God, because he has loved us first in Jesus Christ, even to deliver him to the death of the cross, will grow cold. Love for God, because he hears our voice and inclines his ear unto our cry for help, grows cold.

Our love for God grows cold, because the lawlessness of the world and of our hearts turns us away from God. All the outright rebellion against God, all our desires for a prosperous, pleasure-filled life, all the failure the deal with any form of sin in our lives and the church, work in us, so that we would say “No!” to loving God with all our being, and “Yes!” to sin.

Taking the place of that love is a love for the things of this world. Jesus speaks of this love later in the chapter. As the love for God weakened in the church of Noah’s day, men and women feasted in the pleasures and entertainment of this world (Matt. 24:36-39).

The days of Noah are the pattern for the last days of 2021. It might be, that CERC is not wholly corrupted with such carnal pleasures. But it is certain that on every side, CERC is threatened to be consumed with such carnal pleasures.

Most first-generation members are financially stable. The second-generation young adults, for the most part, are getting along in their jobs and earning a sizeable income. Families, though sacrificing much to raise a covenant home, are still well-to-do. Such affluence, though not evil in itself, leaves CERC in her third generation entirely vulnerable to lose her love for God. Our children’s faith will be vulnerable to confusion—the wants, easily attained through money, are seen as needs. The wants, so accessible, appear to be a comfort more immediately available than the Word. Furthermore, though nurtured in the biblical doctrines of the confessions, our children’s faith can easily be shielded from earthly hardships, simply because they have such comfortable lives.

Besides our children, our entire congregation is left vulnerable by this affluence. By nature, we would rather have a life of ease and comfort. Affluence often feeds the desire for such a life. Giving into that desire, we shy away from the Word of God when it sharply points out our lawlessness.

Perhaps that is why we seem rather slow to deal with sticky issues. We procrastinate our study of the Word and confessions regarding biblical witnessing. We bear with our long-standing ignorance in church polity. We are tempted to shift the blame of these issues (and any other issue) to other members (“troublemakers”), maybe to our office-bearers (“aren’t they in charge, after all?”), or maybe even circumstances (“We don’t have a minister to deal with all this”) when the calling to seek total conformity to God’s Word is upon every one of us. All this blame-shifting in our hearts, because we just don’t want trouble for ourselves! Is that who you and I are? Those who grow cold towards God because we don’t want trouble?

I ask, especially, my fellow brothers who would soon lead the members of CERC: Does such a cold love toward God characterize us? It ought not. The overwhelming temptation to lose that love is no excuse. The overwhelming physical restrictions of COVID is no excuse

Look into your hearts, dear readers: Has our love for God waxed cold?

The third word: The promise of salvation

Amidst these sobering words of Jesus Christ is the promise of salvation. Jesus declares this promise after humbling us with the reality of our lawlessness. Jesus declares this promise, after breaking any hope that there is any good in this present evil world. Notice, too, that Jesus declares this promise to his disciples after breaking their hopes in an earthly Jewish kingdom (see Matt. 24:1-3).

This is the promise: But he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.

Jesus speaks this promise to us, not to have us look at our strength to endure. How can you and I be inflated with pride, after hearing the preceding words of Christ? Neither does Jesus speak this promise to have us consider first of all our calling to endure. Certainly, that calling is implied—Endure! our Lord Jesus commands. But that command is not what Jesus speaks here, chiefly.

What Jesus speaks here is a promise—the man that endures will be saved. It's certain! How can it be true? How can it be true, that the child of God that endures, that perseveres, that does something good, be saved? Is it that he is saved because he has endured? Absolutely not! Even that enduring, persevering—that good work—is a filthy rag. Tainted with sin! Tainted with lawlessness! Tainted with a lack of sincere love for God!

The man endures. Not by his strength, but by faith. After all, endurance (patience) is a fruit of our justification by faith alone (Rom. 5:1-5). Just like faith, true endurance does not look at self and say, "Look at what I've done!"

Just like faith, true endurance looks to Christ and says, "Not I, but Christ preserves me!" As the fruit of faith, true endurance clings to Christ, the one who has endured the cross to secure for us our salvation (Heb. 12:2)!

Only by faith, do we endure. Only by faith, Christ strengthens us to endure.

Therefore, Jesus, in speaking this promise, calls us to his disciples and us to believe on him. How are you and I going to stand against such abounding lawlessness and cold love? How is CERC going to remain as a true church of Christ, warding off lawlessness and that loss of our first love? Only by clinging to Christ. Only by believing that he will strengthen us in these last days.

Believe that! Believe that when you read the Word daily.

Believe that when you hear the preaching of the Word twice on Sunday (Don't you sense the urgency of our session's call to the preaching, when they withhold the livestream link from us, unless we truly need it?).

Believe that when you study that Word with one another (Don't you see the connection between the abounding lawlessness of these days, and the need for proper, spiritual fellowship?).

Jesus Christ will strengthen us to endure every temptation to walk in lawlessness at home, at work, and in the church.

Jesus Christ will strengthen our love for him and his truth.

Jesus Christ will fulfil his promise and save us from these last days!

Jesus Christ will strengthen us to endure every temptation to walk in lawlessness at home, at work, and in the church.

Lessons from God's Letters to the Churches (3)

Letter to Smyrna (Revelation 2 : 8 - 11)



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.

The second letter of Christ to the seven churches of Asia Minor is Christ's letter to the church of Smyrna (Rev. 2:8-11). The city was located on the western coast of Asia Minor, not very far north of Ephesus. Its location made it an important port and a trade route ran through its warehouses, market places and business establishments. A Christian church had been established there, probably during Paul's work in Ephesus when through Paul and his fellow evangelists, the word had spread through the whole province of Asia (a smaller Western province in Asia Minor). It was a church in a fabulously wealthy city that was of considerable size. The church had been there less than forty years.

Smyrna was only one of two churches among the seven to whom Christ wrote letters against which the Lord himself had no complaints. The other church was in Philadelphia.

Smyrna, popular and wealthy city that it was, also was the site of what the text in Rev. 2 calls "the synagogue of Satan." From another reference in the letter to the Jews, we may well conclude that the Jews were the source of the persecution the church endured. This hatred of the Jews against the Christian Church was characteristic of the entire history of the church during the apostolic era. The persecution was severe. The text speaks of the fact not only that some were imprisoned, but that the church was very poor. That is, the church was **materially** poor, but the Lord himself says that the church was "rich." Spiritually, the church was rich: Christ was with the church and the saints had the consciousness of Christ's presence in the preaching, the love of the saints for each other, the happiness of the small group and the joy of suffering for Christ's sake.

Apparently, this persecution continued for many years for in about AD 155, the minister of the church in Smyrna, a man by the name of Polycarp, was burned at the stake for his confession of Jesus Christ. (See his biography in my *Portraits of Faithful Saints*. See there the poignant prayer he prayed as his body was being

charred by the flames). The wicked Jews, inspired by Satan, had made life miserable for the church over a long period of time. The reference in the text to "ten days" must not be taken literally, but symbolically as referring to the full measure of time God had ordained that the church suffer for the cause of Christ.

The church of Smyrna endured persecution. The persecution was quite severe. It was begun and driven by Satan himself who worked through Jews as they made their blasphemous plans in their synagogue. As a result of this persecution, the church was small and materially poor – although spiritually rich! No one likes to join or remain in a poor church in which the police are always putting some of them in jail.

But the Lord does not have any criticism of them; he could find nothing wrong in their church life. This does not mean that the members were all sinless saints, but it does mean that the small and poor church preached and confessed the truth. The fellowship of the saints was rich and warm. Those that needed help were helped. All shared in the meager food that they could afford. The prisoners were visited and their families cared for. The minister preached the gospel to comfort his flock. The elders ruled tenderly with constant encouragement. The deacons were extremely busy helping the poor.

There is an important point that this letter to Smyrna makes. A church that is materially wealthy is often spiritually weak. History has shown this to be true, and our own churches, wealthy beyond anything they have ever been, are not spiritually strong. A persecuted church is faithful: it would not be faithful if it was willing to compromise due to lust for riches and a desire for the things of this world. It would be too ready to compromise to keep intact its wealth. But a church that is poor because of persecution is a church that is faithful for it looks not at the things of the world, of which things they have been deprived, but it looks for that "City which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God."

My father, a man of vast experience in the ministry, once said to me: After a person has been away from church for a long time, often for a serious illness, but for other reasons as well, finds it very difficult to go back to church again when he/she is able. Such a person finds reasons not to go back.

This Covid plague is a case in point. Government restrictions keep us from church for long periods of time. When the restrictions are lifted and we are permitted to return, we often find excuses not to return. We might, for example, fear we would contract Covid if we go.

Such a person does not sing from the heart Psalms like 42, 84, 122. But the one who does not fear persecution knows that Christ cares for him: he longs for heaven, and is eager to go to church, which is as close to heaven as we can get while here on earth.

Soon, persecution will come our way. Will we still sing Psalm 84 when our presence in church may very well mean a jail cell? Are we ready to endure Satan's hatred out of love for Christ? Are we, as a church, willing to give up what we have for the sake of our love for God's house?

The letter of Christ to Smyrna makes us all examine ourselves. May God give us grace! Christ's admonition is: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life." (My father preached on that text in June of 1953, the first evening service in First PRC after over 60% of the congregation left us.)

The promise is that we need not fear the second death, which is hell. The first death is our total depravity. The second death is hell.

Right and Wrong Motivations for Seeking the Office of Elder or Deacon (2)



Rev. Angus Stewart

Pastor of Covenant Protestant Reformed Church, our sister church in Northern Ireland

The offices of elder and deacon were appointed, and are used greatly, by our Lord Jesus Christ, the sole king and head of the church. Thus, it is a good thing for a man to desire to serve Him in these ecclesiastical positions (I Tim. 3:1).

However, just as one can err through evil motivations, as we saw last time, so too there are illicit methods of seeking church office. Often those who desire to be a deacon or an elder for the wrong reasons resort to unlawful means to obtain their end.

Four Sinful Examples in Scripture

1) Numbers 16 records the first instance in God's Word of people trying to obtain church office by wicked ways. Korah the Levite, and Dathan, Abiram and On who were leaders in the tribe of Reuben, used two main arguments. First, they criticised those already in office. Moses and Aaron, they claimed, exalted themselves over the Lord's congregation (v. 3). Second, the rebels perverted the office of believer (v. 3). One could say that Korah, Dathan, Abiram and On were "levellers," seeking

to bring Moses and Aaron down, and the people of Israel up. However, their goal was not really equality but self-exaltation!

When these four thought that the time was right, they went public and directly confronted the two brothers whom God had appointed as the principal leaders of His people. They engaged in a show of power, bringing with them 250 prominent Israelites, in order to intimidate Moses and Aaron (vv. 1-3). Numbers 16 states that the Almighty swallowed up (vv. 30-34) and burnt up (v. 35) these wicked men, before slaying 14,700 sympathizers with a plague (v. 49).

2) If these rebels in the wilderness sought a *higher* office, King Uzziah in II Chronicles 26 sought an *additional* office, the priesthood, by burning incense on the golden altar before the veil in front of the holy of holies (vv. 16-20). Significantly, his attempted usurpation of the Aaronic privilege came "when he was strong" (v. 16) through military victories, tributes from his vassals, impressive building projects, agricultural prosperity



and equipping the army (vv. 2, 5-15). These successes in his lengthy reign (v. 3) occasioned the proud overreach (v. 16) even of believing Uzziah (vv. 4-5)!

3) Impostors used many wiles to gain acceptance as prophets in the Old Testament. In Zechariah 13, they alleged that they were the recipients of divine visions (v. 4) and claimed that their wounds were the result of suffering for the Word of God (v. 6). They even wore the rough clothing (v. 4) which was associated with Elijah (II Kings 1:8) and other true prophets.

Other Scriptures speak of false prophets using props (I Kings 22:11; Eze. 13), performing miracles (Deut. 13:1-2), claiming revelatory dreams (Jer. 23:16, 21, 25-26, 32) and telling people what they wanted to hear (I Kings 22:6, 11-13; Isa. 30:10; Micah 2:11). Their purpose was to intrude into the prophetic office in order to gain prestige and financial support.

4) The classic example in the New Testament narratives is Simon Magus (Acts 8)¹. Simon's method to obtain the ability to give the Holy Spirit to others—an apostolic privilege (vv. 17-18)—was offering Peter and John money (vv. 18-20). Simon's infamy has been underscored by the coining of the term "simony," the giving of bribes to attain ecclesiastical office. This sin has been rife in (false) churches for many centuries and was developed to a high degree of institutionalization in the late Middle Ages, when it was fiercely denounced by John Wycliffe and Jan Hus, among others.

Attempted Usurpations of David's Royal Office

After Saul's various efforts over many years to kill David (I Sam. 18-II Sam. 1), and the civil war with Ishbosheth and the northern tribes (II Sam. 2-4), finally, David became ruler over all Israel (II Sam. 5). Not only did Jesse's youngest son face the longest and fiercest opposition of any biblical character before entering into public office but, even when installed as king, three men wickedly sought to usurp his position.

The earliest was David's handsome but murderous third son, Absalom (II Sam. 15-18). Especially the opening verses of II Samuel 15 reveal his cunning methods for obtaining the regal office. First, the prince assumed royal dignity by riding in a chariot with 50 men running before him (v. 1), doubtless flaunting his beautiful hair (14:26). Second, he pretended to be interested in advancing justice in Israel (15:2-4, 6), while criticising

the working of King David's legal system (v. 3), though Absalom's only care was to promote himself. Third, he flattered and kissed those who came to see him (v. 5). Thus he "stole the hearts of the men of Israel" (v. 6). In effect, he got the votes of many church members by schmoozing them. One could add, fourth, that Absalom won over not only many of the people but also some of the leaders in Israel, like Ahithophel (v. 31).

The second ungodly aspirant to Israel's throne in David's day was Sheba, the son of Bichri (II Sam. 20). Though this Benjamite's rebellion is not as well known as Absalom's, at one time it looked to be even more dangerous than that of David's third son (v. 6). Sheba seized upon the church divisions between Judah and the other tribes (19:41-20:2) to make his bid for the kingship over Israel.

The third would-be usurper of David's crown also saw his opportunity in the weakness of Israel's second king (I Kings 1). The son of Jesse was now elderly and frail (v. 1), and largely ineffectual (v. 6). Prince Adonijah copied aspects of his older half-brother's template for rebellion: he paraded with chariots, horses and 50 footmen (v. 5), and he enlisted the support of leading figures in the kingdom (vv. 7, 9). Unlike Absalom, however, he did not raise an army to fight for the throne; he simply proceeded to his public coronation with a large feast (vv. 9, 19, 25).

A significant part of the explanation for the numerous attacks upon, and attempted usurpations of, David's royal office, both before and after his coronation, lies in the fact that this man after God's own heart (I Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22) was an illustrious type of King Jesus, our crucified and risen Saviour, whom some, even in the professing church, do not want "to reign over" them (Luke 19:14, 27; Acts 4:25-27). Instead, they and all the ungodly prefer to follow the Antichrist (John 5:43; Rev. 13:8; 17:17), who sets himself up as if he were the rightful ruler of the world.

Wrong Methods Used in Our Day

Even a brief reflection on the many scriptural examples referred to above will suggest sinful schemes used in our day in order to obtain church office. Some of the

¹ In the New Testament epistles, one thinks especially of the impostors who claimed to be, and were received by many as, apostles (e.g., II Cor. 10-13; Rev. 2:2).

ways included in the above instances or other scriptural passages may well be too crude for anyone to get away with in a fairly solid or well instructed church ². Other methods are peculiar to Old Testament days and institutions and/or to biblical periods when God was giving direct revelation.

One ploy is to cultivate or “suck up” to existing office-bearers in order to get nominated. This may involve wining and dining the elders and/or minister and/or the deacons. Shame on those who try this and shame on those who allow themselves to be flattered and manipulated!

Second, a would-be elder or deacon may claim that God told him that he would become an office-bearer or that He gave him a dream to this effect. Such is not only foolish self-seeking but also contrary to the sufficiency of the 66 books of the Bible for Jehovah no longer communicates directly with anyone on earth (Heb. 1:1-2; Rev. 22:18).

Third, some will perform tasks that are often done by elders or deacons merely to be seen of men in order to gain church office.

A fourth tactic is to criticise existing office-bearers or the other men on the duo or trio for elder or deacon.

Fifth, a man may even descend to electioneering, so as to get the male confessing members not to vote for his “opponent(s)” but to vote for him. He may even enlist his wife or children or parents or friends to canvas for him. This is to treat the church like a political institution and is far from fitting behaviour “in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (I Tim. 3:15).

Sometimes one sees bad signs in a man who starts visiting or attending the church. He wants to “feel out” the church: “If I became a member, would they let me preach or ‘bring a word’? How soon could I get to be a deacon or an elder?” Such people often talk about their gifts and achievements, what they have to offer the church. In reality, they do not so much want membership but leadership in the church. The former is a means to the latter. Such people, with the wrong motivation, indicate that they would be likely to use wrong methods in seeking church office.

Right Way to Seek Church Office

The right way to seek to become a deacon or an elder fits perfectly with, and flows from, the proper motivation: honouring the Triune God in Jesus Christ by serving His body, the church. People who have a good spiritual attitude do not have to manipulate or take things into their own hands because they are confident that “promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another” (Ps. 75:6-7). Faithful men walk in the fear of the Lord. They are content with the biblical principles and ecclesiastical steps outlined in *Belgic Confession* 30-32, Church Order 22 and 24, and the “Form for Ordination of Elders and Deacons.” Here is the opening section of *Belgic Confession* 31:

We believe that the ministers of God's Word, and the elders and deacons, ought to be chosen to their respective offices by a lawful election by the church, with calling upon the name of the Lord, and in that order which the Word of God teacheth. Therefore every one must take heed not to intrude himself by indecent means, but is bound to wait till it shall please God to call him, that he may have testimony of his calling and be certain and assured that it is of the Lord.

Notice the very practical argument in the second sentence against using unlawful methods to obtain church office. He who is patient and truly believes in the sovereignty of God will not resort to using “indecent means” to become an elder or deacon. Instead, if it pleases “God to call him” to church office through “a lawful election by the church,” such a man will possess a good conscience, having the “testimony of his calling and [so being] certain and assured that it is of the Lord”—something that ecclesiastical schemers and intruders never enjoy.

² E.g., Athaliah murdered her own grandchildren to gain the throne in Jerusalem (II Kings 11:1-3).

Salvation is of the LORD: Introduction to the Book of Jonah



Marcus Wee

Member of CERC and student at the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA.

“Salvation is of the LORD.”

Is there a theme more magnificent yet succinct in the pages of Holy Writ?

Is there a truth more grand, which extols the glory of the sovereign God, in whom alone is salvation, and who alone saves whom He will?

Is there a principle more pertinent, the intimate knowledge of which is life eternal? Jehovah saves! Jehovah alone saves! What truth could be more precious to us, sinful wretches in need of salvation?

“Salvation is of the LORD.” This is the theme of the book of Jonah (Jon. 2:9), around which revolve all the events of the book. God called Jonah to cry out against Nineveh, in order to demonstrate this glorious truth. Jonah’s sinful disobedience was a refusal to acknowledge that salvation is of the LORD.

The mighty tempest and the great fish that swallowed Jonah whole was the necessary preparation for Jonah to learn, from experience, the lesson that “salvation is of the LORD.”

The repentance of the Ninevites in response to God’s word of judgment was the crescendo in the mighty chorus: “Salvation is of the LORD.” And when Jonah was hardened with anger at the salvation of the Ninevites, God would prepare a gourd to provide shade and then a worm to destroy that gourd, to remind Jonah: “Salvation is of the LORD.”

That salvation is of the LORD means that God is sovereign in salvation. God alone chooses whom He will have mercy, and whom He wills to harden. God’s sovereignty in salvation is seen in converting the hearts of men, even such unlikely sinners as the Ninevites; nay, even such unlikely sinners as you and me. God’s sovereignty in salvation is seen in His use even of rebellious means to fulfill His saving will.

Historical Context

Apart from the book of Jonah, the only other OT reference to the prophet is II Kings 14:25: “He [Jeroboam II, king of Israel] restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of the LORD God of Israel, which he spake by the hand of his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, which was of Gath-hepher.”

Jonah was a prophet in Gath-hepher, a city in the northern kingdom of Israel. The nation of Israel had been divided into the northern and southern kingdoms. The ten tribes which made up the northern kingdom had sinfully rejected Rehoboam as king, and had followed Jeroboam, who promptly led them astray in the worship of golden calves. About 150 years had passed since that time, and Jonah found himself growing up in a clime steeped in wickedness and idolatry, during the reign of King Joash (or, Jehoash) of Israel.

Quite possibly, Jonah was trained in the school of the prophets, perhaps even at the feet of Elisha the prophet, who died during the reign of Joash. Jonah would follow in the footsteps of his mentor, a faithful prophet in the midst of false prophets, bringing a word of judgment upon a disobedient nation.

II Kings 14:25 tells us of an expansion of Israel’s coast during the time of King Jeroboam II, an event which had been prophesied by Jonah. Verse 26 goes on: “For the LORD saw the affliction of Israel, that it was very bitter: for there was not any shut up, nor any left, nor any helper for Israel.” The northern kingdom of Israel had been in a most miserable state under King Joash, and would only make a comeback towards the end of his reign and prosper under Joash’s successor, Jeroboam II.

Time and time again, God had judged the nation of Israel for her wicked idolatry. While the house of David kept unbroken rule in the kingdom of Judah, the royal history of Israel was filled with tragedy and bloodshed. The line

of king after king had been violently ended on account of their wickedness: first the house of Jeroboam; then, the house of Baasha; the hapless murderer Zimri would reign for a mere seven days before killing himself; the house of Omri, which introduced Baal worship, would be exterminated by Jehu; Jehu's house in turn was on a timer set to expire by its fourth generation. Yet, all this while, Israel had not turned from her wicked ways, even after God had given her victories under the reigns of Joash and Jeroboam II. She was filling up her cup of iniquity.

God's Judgment Upon Israel

Hence this Word of the LORD which came to Jonah the son of Amittai: "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me" (Jon. 1:2).

Before we jump right to Jonah's disobedience to God's call, we must see God's Word for what it is: a word of judgment upon the wicked nation of Israel. That Jonah was to arise and go to Nineveh meant that he was to leave the nation of Israel. God was uprooting the ministry of a faithful prophet from Israel, and transplanting it into Nineveh, the capital of the heathen nation of Assyria.

What greater judgment could God have sent upon Israel?

God was not merely sending Israel another distress like war, famine, or drought; He was removing the preaching of the Word, the chief means of grace, from Israel! For years, Israel had despised God's Word. She had lived in idolatry. She had turned a deaf ear to the cries of the faithful prophets. She had persecuted the faithful and shed their blood. Even after the reforms of Jehu, Israel had persisted in her worship of the golden calves.

Now, God was escalating His judgment upon Israel. No more would Jonah be a shining beacon in the darkness of that sinful nation, showing her the blessed will of God. No more would the voice of Jonah cry out against the idolatry and excesses of the land to bring her to repentance. God was sending Israel a famine of the Word of God (Amos 8:11-12), a famine far more severe than any other.

God does this still today. God sends a famine of His Word upon churches which despise that Word, which embrace false doctrines and tolerate sin. These churches

may yet maintain the truth for a time, but because they do not love that truth, God Himself causes them to believe the lie (II Thess. 2:10-12). God removes from their midst the faithful preaching of the Word and replaces it with the lie, and so they are lost in their generations.

No, let us not look outside of us at other churches, but let us look first of all at ourselves. Thanks be to God, we are not as apostate Israel was during the time of Jonah. We do not worship the golden calves of moralism and works-righteousness. Thanks be to God, that the Word faithfully resounds in the walls of our sanctuary, in preaching and also (in the recent past) in the reading of sermons. God has not sent us a famine of the Word.

But let us never think that we are immune to God's judgment of a famine of His Word. Let us never think that we will never descend into such depths as apostate Israel descended. The very inkling of it suggests a complacency that often characterizes the beginning of a church's slow decline into apostasy. "We have the truth! We know the truth! We are not like other churches!" We might be tempted to say. But our Lord comes to us, as He did to the church of Ephesus, and asks, "But do you love the truth?" And if our first love be found wanting, our candlestick will soon be wrenched from us.

We must not be complacent, but must be constantly examining ourselves. Do we love the Word of the LORD? There is no better time to examine ourselves than now, during an extended time when we have been without our own minister. How have we responded to the Word of the LORD, as it has been preached and read from the pulpit? Have we been full of criticisms about it? Dry? Too difficult to follow? Too doctrinal? Lifeless?

Our present situation is not ideal. We have not had our own minister for three years now, and counting. The wait has been long, weary, and disheartening. Yet, we should ask ourselves, What is God teaching us during this time? Many things, for sure.

But, surely this is one of the lessons: to esteem the Word of the LORD as it is faithfully brought, even by imperfect means.

No, it is not ideal to have ministers come for a short time and then leave; it is not ideal to have elders read sermons. But even in these less-than-ideal circumstances, we have been receiving the Word of the LORD, faithfully

proclaimed. And we must esteem that Word.

For, if we adopt, retain, and justify the attitude of criticism, we can be sure that such an attitude will persist, even when we have our own minister. If we do not learn to esteem the Word of the LORD, now, under less-than-ideal circumstances, we will not esteem it under “normal” circumstances.

And when we do not esteem the Word of the LORD, when we despise it, then the same judgment that fell upon Israel will also fall upon us. God will remove the faithful preaching of the Word from our midst. There may still be preaching, even interesting preaching that tickles our ears, yet such preaching will be the word of man and not the Word of the LORD.

Instead, let us esteem the word of the LORD highly, because of whose it is: the LORD's. The LORD, of whom is salvation. The LORD, who determines His Word to be the means of salvation. The LORD, who determines that for Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in AD 2021, the means of salvation is His Word, now preached to us by Professor Dykstra, and perhaps, in the future read to

us by elders once again.

Let us not hear the Word of the LORD and then gripe about how imperfect is the mode and the messenger. Instead, let us, hearing the Word and recognizing the less-than-ideal circumstances, esteem that Word.

We esteem the Word when we meditate upon it throughout the week. We esteem the Word when we talk about it to one another in our families and as friends. We esteem the Word when we apply it directly to our own lives, letting the Word expose our sinfulness as it comes to us and says, “Thou art the man.”

Granted, we as a church live in less-than-ideal circumstances. But let us, learn, even in these circumstances, to esteem God's Word, and to confess, together with the prophet Jonah, “Salvation is of the LORD.”

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Dislike for Doctrine



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In the late 1940s, the English novelist Dorothy Sayers observed a wide-spread, prevalent sense of apathy in her fellow churchmen towards doctrine who dubbed doctrine “dull dogma.” Sayers countered this sense of dismissiveness with her weighty phrase, “the dogma is the drama,” defending Christianity as the most exciting and fascinating story ever told. Why does such disparity between Christians exist? In this article, I will attempt to identify some causes of, and reasons for, the disparity between the common valuation of doctrine and its sheer intrinsic worth, a disparity that warranted Sayers's observation and sharp rebuttal. I'll conclude by offering a few suggestions to foster a proper attitude we should possess towards God-given doctrine.

The word *doctrine* often brings to mind either the doctrinal statements of our confessions, the Ten

Commandments, or, perhaps, the five points of Calvinism. Doctrines these certainly are. Yet, doctrine involves a breadth that extends beyond what we might too easily assume. “Doctrine” means “teaching,” or “instruction.” It lies in what the Bible has to say and teach. Simply put, doctrine is what God is pleased to reveal to us in His word. It tells us about Jesus Christ, the nature of God, and the relationship God forges with His people. Doctrine is God's truth for us. It acts as a mirror that shows us who we really are and what our identity is truly grounded in. In defining and fleshing out God's revealed truth, doctrine forms the basis of our worldviews, giving us both direction and purpose to our earthly sojourn.

Thus, in some ways, doctrine serves as an “identity card” of sorts, for it articulates the beliefs we hold to and

openly assures us of who we are. With this assurance, it establishes our purpose and destination in life, acting as a roadmap that aid us as we navigate through the moral entanglements of life, to make daily decisions that honour and please God. Doctrine also reminds and reassures us of our victory in Christ, and points us to our destination, the crown of glory awaiting us when our saviour appears. Therefore, rightly understood, doctrine is indispensable to every child of God. For what traveller would embark upon his journey having yet to establish the destination and purpose of his travels. What traveller, in the right frame of mind, would leave his roadmap and identity papers at home?

Yet this description seems somewhat rosy. We clearly do not always relate to doctrine in this manner. Why is this the case?

To begin with, the sin of pride can distort our understanding of the role doctrine should have in our lives. Our fallen nature often tempts to overwhelm us when we revel in feelings of superiority to others in every opportunity we can take. Bigger houses we live in, academic institutions we belong to, and jobs we hold to sometimes take the centre of how we identify ourselves and relate to others. Likewise, when we wield the doctrinal knowledge we have as a measure of our superiority, we, at the same time, ironically discard and dismiss its centrality to our lives as the free and gracious revelation of God. Perhaps we turn the study of doctrine into a pursuit of arguments, asking hypothetical questions that but fuel and prolong endless debates (2 Tim. 3:7). Instead of speaking to others in love to draw closer to the truth, we become judgemental, taking doctrines as but a badge of achievement and exclusivity. Instead of humbling us and guiding us, doctrinal knowledge becomes our chief source of pride and a stumbling block to ourselves and others (1 Cor. 8:1).

Perhaps, too, we falsely assume that we have already reached a high level of knowledge in various doctrines when we, in fact, know very little, having great room for improvement and development. How many of us can honestly say that we have read the Bible from cover to cover? While it is certainly true that God, in his infinite wisdom gave us His word that even the young amongst us can understand the basic truths of the Bible, the study of the doctrines of Scripture will never be exhaustive, even to the most gifted of theologians. An assumption of our possession of a complete, or even

satisfactory, knowledge can hinder further, deeper interest and efforts in the pursuit of His truth.

Further, a dulling sense of familiarity can be another reason why we have failed to give doctrine its due role in our lives. There is a real tendency among us to take for granted the things we are used to. A familiarity with what we assume as doctrinal easily usurps a real desire for understanding. This is a particular threat to reformed churches, where covenant children who have been introduced to truths at a young age can easily slip into spiritual complacency in adulthood, switching off mentally when hearing about doctrines in and out of the church.

Yet sometimes we err in the contrary. If not complacency and over-familiarity, an over-emphasis on particular bands of doctrines, such as the doctrine of salvation and the five points of Calvinism, can be equally detrimental to our relationship and approach to God's truth. To begin with, a distorted fixation on a particular set of doctrine affects and hinders the much-needed preaching and instruction of other doctrines in the Bible. A reading of any Bible passage through a fixed lens of a band of doctrines can warp or blind our perspectives on the actual sayings and meanings intended by the Holy Spirit. Such a reading, over time, can take hold of us, stunting our capacity to develop and grow in knowledge of other important teachings of the Bible. It is not hard to observe the connection between this error and the error before. Repetition, systematic over-emphases, and a fixation on a band of doctrines can easily foster complacency – one could believe that he knows everything simply on the basis of knowing only one facet of it all. If the church is to be a pillar of truth, she ought to be equipped holistically with the whole counsel of God's word.

Flawed or skewered approaches to doctrines have one fundamental feature in common: a failure to appreciate and comprehend the usefulness, value, and importance of doctrines. More specifically, a failure to draw the connection between doctrines as our roadmap as we sojourn as strangers in this world. When we fail to live out the doctrines that we hold to be true and God-given, we are approaching doctrines in a truncated, disjointed, siloed manner. Doing so renders our take to the study of doctrines to be merely an intellectual exercise, an exercise that stays only in our heads or worse, swells in our heads, but fails to make its way into our hearts. Wherever doctrine is not lived out in our lives, it is

nothing; akin to a body of water in a still pool, algae and sediments building up and choking it. Eventually, we lose grasp of its vitality and, unsurprisingly, our interest in doctrine as well.

In one of his lectures, the late John Gerstner explained the apathy or stagnated growth in doctrine this way: it is because we look at doctrine from the perspective of a spectator rather than as a participant. Looking at the doctrines as detached patterns of facts but not venturing into it, or even thirsting for it, means that, in effect, we are interacting with doctrines superficially. We do not connect them with the realities of our life, our faith. Similarly, John Calvin in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, has this to say about doctrine: "...doctrine is not an affair of the tongue, but of the life; is not apprehended by the intellect and memory merely, like other branches of learning; but is received only when it possesses the whole soul, and finds its seat and habitation in the inmost recesses of the heart.... To doctrine in which our religion is contained we have given the first place, since by it our salvation commences; but it must be transfused into the breast, and pass into the conduct, and so transform us unto itself, as not to prove unfruitful."

How then can we take tangible steps towards this approach to doctrine, an approach that accounts for both the mind and the heart? An approach which rightly and astutely side-steps the problems outlined above (pride, complacency, an unhealthy and unwarranted over-emphases of but a few doctrinal points)? Besides the obvious need of repentance of our pride when it seeps into our relationship with doctrine, one important way we can develop a proper approach to, and knowledge of, doctrine is to tap into the gifts of others. The Christian faith is a deeply communal one and we must prevent ourselves from suffering the ills of studying doctrine in isolation. We can do this by reading widely, drawing from reformed and biblical Christian resources from various sources, as well as studying other creeds and confessions of the faith. No one but our Lord Jesus Christ possesses a perfect understanding of the doctrines. Christ alone is the author and source of all doctrines. Therefore, there is great value and necessity in learning from one another as well as other like-minded saints. Saints who possess gifts other than ours. A recognition and appreciation of the "host of witnesses" around us will only deepen and increase our understanding of doctrine (Heb. 12, 1 Cor. 12:4-7).

An analogy made by Alister McGrath in his book, *Mere Discipleship*, captures the this point succinctly:

"Imagine that you are standing on a peak in the Swiss Alps. Below you, you see a breathtaking landscape. The landscape's beauty and grandeur consist of individual elements of this landscape - rivers, villages, forests, and streams. As we try to take in the vast, rich and beautiful panorama that lies below us, most of us will find ourselves concentrating on an element of the vista that captures our attention, filtering out the rest. We may focus on a village in the distance, filtering out the streams, pastures and forests as we concentrate on this single facet of the panorama. This "selective attention" or "cognitive bias" is helpful in some ways. It allows us to focus on what we think really matters. Yet, all too often, it also means that we miss out on other aspects of that 'big picture' - aspects that matter to other people and should probably matter to us as well. That's why the community of faith matters. Imagine that you are joined by a group of friends as you look at the panorama. As you start talking to each other about what you see, it becomes clear that others have noticed things you missed. Where your attention focused on the village, others were fascinated by the iridescent rippling of a fast-flowing stream or some bucolic delight of some cattle finding shade from the hot afternoon sun under a tree. As you talk about what each of you saw, a communal view of the landscape emerges that is far more comprehensive and reliable than any individual account of it..."

Besides recognizing the work of the saints and tapping into the gifts of godly men, there is also a need for us to sharpen our approach to various doctrines in the Bible. For instance, it is a mistake to merely look for proof texts for each theological truth; viewing, as one theologian puts it, various doctrines as mere individual gems stored in a treasure chest, independent from one another. However, having the right method in order to get the most of the doctrines plays an integral role shaping our approach to doctrine. In order to grow, we are exhorted not to be complacent always with the milk, but to take in the "meats of faith". This requires us to study the doctrines in ways that account for a careful study of the texts in question and the correct application of a biblical hermeneutic, such as the principle that "scripture

interprets scripture". Not only we are to consider the context where verses are found, we should examine how this particular doctrine is developed in other parts of the Bible. And we do this for we know that the Lord reveals many of the doctrines embedded in the Bible not all at one shot, but progressively through the history of redemption as revealed in the Bible. Further, it is also often helpful for us to know the historic background of a particular doctrine that we are studying, that we may discover how the saints of old dealt with this doctrine, especially in response to false teachings which, as with cycles in history, do often resurface, and those who do not remember the past are bound to repeat it (Jeremiah 6:16).

It is probably apt to conclude with the matter of application which can be condensed in the question of how we should respond to the doctrines of the Bible. Ultimately, to have a proper attitude and response toward doctrine, we should seek to have doctrine enter into our hearts through the help of the holy spirit. To this end, we cry out to the Lord with intense hunger and thirst for His righteousness, so that the doctrines, and the knowledge that we have will not merely be comprehended in our mind but will enter into our hearts as well. When doctrine finds its way into our hearts, it will, by necessity, subsequently spur us into good works, making us increasingly humble before God by conforming us to the image of our Lord Jesus Christ. All of this demands constant self-examination on our part, a constant self-examination of our attitude

in approaching and receiving doctrines whether that be in our private devotions, in our group bible studies, or through the preaching of the word in worship services. Even in our conversations with one another, the questions that should be in the back of sanctified minds ought to be as follows: Am I more humble by this conversation? Through the procurement of knowledge of this doctrine, am I becoming more Christ-like, and, through it, more and more ready to do good works?

At a time when fierce spiritual battles are raging on every front, and the world around us is changing at an unprecedented pace, it is urgent for us to put doctrine in its right place. Away with the notion of less doctrine and more application or experience in our lives! Instead, we should entreat our God to renew our desire for it, to strengthen our understanding of it, and to enable us by the power of His Spirit to live it out.

Proverbs 27:7 "The full soul loatheth a honeycomb; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet". Here, the contrast between a complacent and hungry soul is made plain. Clearly, there are direct applications that can be made between such an observation and our approaches to doctrine. May the Lord help us never to be complacent nor dull to His word and doctrines. May the Lord also grant us that earnest, zealous desire to long after doctrine, after His truth, that we may seek after it like gold, gold that enters into our hearts and equips us to be worthy soldiers of the Lord. (Psalm 12:6)

Watch and Be Sober (1)



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Two Texts

God commands us many times in His word to watch and many other times to be sober. But only two passages combine these two commands together. First is 1 Thessalonians 5:6, "Therefore let us not sleep as do others; but let us watch and be sober." Second is 1 Peter 4:7, "But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer." Both passages have to do with the revelation of God that Jesus Christ will return in a second bodily coming to earth to bring about the

end of this present world. 1 Peter 4:7 clearly grounds the calling to watch and be sober in the nearness (at hand) of the coming of Christ and the "end of all things."

To see this connection between the end of this present life and the calling to watch and pray in 1 Thess. 5, we have to refer to the context. In verse 2 the apostle Paul speaks of the "day of the Lord." In verse 1 he speaks of times and seasons. He does not say it explicitly, but he is teaching that the present time will end on the day of the

Lord. One reason this day is called the day of the Lord is that this is the day of the Lord Jesus Christ's second coming. Paul speaks of the end that Jesus' coming brings in terms of judgement in verses 3 and 4. Those who are in darkness and who think they have peace and safety in this present age because they think it will not end will experience "sudden destruction" (verse 3). They are in darkness and "that day" will overtake them "as a thief." Then Paul makes an amazing statement of fact to the Thessalonian Christians in verses 4 and 5. He states, "ye, brethren, are not in darkness" (verse 4), but rather you "are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night nor of darkness." Then follows verse six with the word *therefore*—because this is true, because we are children of light, because we know that Jesus is coming, the end is coming, and judgment is coming, "let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober."

So we find in these two texts the same calling "watch and be sober" for basically the same reason, Jesus is coming again and life in this present world will soon be over.

Three Words

These two texts use three Greek words that are translated into the English of the KJV as "watch" and "pray."

In 1 Thess. 5:6 the word "watch" in the Greek is a word that refers to someone who has woken up (risen) from sleep. Now that the individual is awake, he is alert, he is able to watch and give studious attention to his surroundings and to his calling. This is obviously in contrast with one who continues to be unaware of what is happening around him and unable to take any action because he remains asleep. The apostle of course does not want us to think of the contrast between being asleep or awake only in literal terms. He is speaking figuratively and is teaching us about *spiritual* sleep versus *spiritual* wakefulness. The Word of God is not calling you young people to wake up and get out of bed so that you can get to school or get to work, as your mothers might have to do once in a while (or often in some cases). The Word of God calls you to spiritual wakefulness and watchfulness! Are you awake spiritually?

The second important word that is found in both 1 Thess. 5:6 and 1 Peter 4:7. It is the Greek word that means "to be sober." The translation of 1 Thess. 5:6 is literal in

the KJV—"Watch and *be sober*." In 1 Peter 4:7 this word is translated "*watch*" in the phrase "watch unto prayer." Literally Peter says, "*be sober* unto prayer." The opposite of being sober is to be drunk. The Scriptures prohibit us from being drunk with alcohol (wine) in Eph. 5:18. Instead of having a mind that is numb or fuzzy because of drunkenness, we are to have clear minds, sober minds, that are able to grasp and to respond to the realities of life. But once again the apostle is not simply calling us to be sober with regard to the use of alcohol and warning us against the drunken abuse of alcohol. He is calling us to spiritual sobriety and warning us again sinful spiritual drunkenness. You young people may not use alcohol if you are under the legal age set by the government, and you may not drunkenly abuse alcohol when you are of age. But even if you do not touch alcohol it is possible to fall into a spiritual drunkenness in which you are not able to recognize the important spiritual realities that God reveals in His Word. The question before us is, are we spiritually drunk like the young people of this world, or are we spiritually sober, as is the calling of the members of the church—all the members of the church, including young people?!

The third and last word we have to consider is found in 1 Peter 4:7. It is the word translated in the KJV as "be sober" in the phrase "be ye therefore sober." This is not the same word as the one we just discussed that speaks of being sober as opposed to being drunk with alcohol. This word could more accurately be translated "be of sound mind" or "be right minded." This refers to the calling to make right judgments. The obvious connection between being sober and being right minded is that you can only make right judgments if you are sober. If you are drunk with wine or with the fuzzy-headed thinking of the world you will make wrong and foolish judgments. God calls us to have clear minds so that we will make right judgments about the world, about this present age, about earthly riches and pleasures, about ourselves, and about God and His word that He has so graciously revealed to us. What about you young people—are you making right minded judgments about all these things?

Our Important Calling

Look for the coming of Jesus Christ! This is the calling of the two texts and the three words under consideration.

Know that Jesus is coming again! Know that this world and this life will not last forever. The scoffers (1 Peter

3:3), that is, the unbelievers who are spiritually asleep, do not believe in the Word of God. They have judged that the Word of God is wrong. They do not believe in sin. They do not believe in the need of the forgiveness of sins. They do not believe that Jesus is the Son of God who came once to die to pay for sins. They do not believe that He is coming a second time to judge the world. They do not believe in God. They do not believe that God created the world in the beginning, that He rules the world now in His providence, or that He will recreate a new heavens and a new earth in the day of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That the unbelievers are asleep and do not know the spiritual realities that God has revealed in the Bible, has a huge and devastating impact on the way they think and live. They are intoxicated by sin. Sin has enslaved their minds so that they have made all the wrong judgments about everything. They judge the riches of this world to be far more valuable than the things of God's kingdom. They judge the pleasures of this world as the highest end that human beings should pursue. They sinfully seek after things that are not sinful in themselves. It is not sinful to eat, to drink, and to be merry, but they sin in these things because they have made them their idols. Rather than worship the one true God of Scripture, they worship their bellies (food), their technological devices, their own human abilities and achievements. They also seek after things that are sinful, things that are contrary to the Word of God. Having dethroned God, they make their own judgments about right and wrong. It is right to get drunk. It is right to commit fornication and adultery. It is right to disobey parents and others in authority. It is right to be obsessed with education, work, and with making money.

And they have judged that there will never be any consequences for their earthly minded sin-seeking. End? There is no end. Coming of Christ? Judgment of God? None of it is real to them. Their senses are dull because they are dead in sin. They are in darkness. They are lulled into thinking that everything is just fine because they are enjoying the here and now.

And we must not join them in their sleep, in their refusal to look for the coming of Jesus and to live in the light of His coming. No, we must have compassion for them. Without joining them, let's acknowledge that by nature we too were asleep, spiritually dead and in darkness. This is the implication of our calling to watch.

Remember the word refers to those who have been raised from sleep. Paul can say in 1Thess. 5:5 that we are children of the light and of the day only because of what God has done in raising us from spiritual death (sleep) to life.

Do you believe in Jesus Christ? That means you have been given the gift of faith. Faith is the gift God gives us so that we can be awake! God unites us to Christ by faith so that we have become partakers of the life and the knowledge of Jesus Christ. We know He died and paid for our sins. We know that He rose again from the dead. We know that He is sitting at the right hand of God in heaven. We know He has poured out His Spirit on the church, and that we have life by His Spirit dwelling in us. And we know that He is...coming...again...soon!

So our calling is to be who we are! God's children who are awake, who know Jesus is coming, and who look for His coming.

We watch as those who are awake. We say to ourselves every day, walking by faith and not by sight, Jesus is coming today. He may not make His appearance today. But He is coming. And we see the signs of His coming as set forth in Matt. 24, the book of Revelation, and many other places in the New Testament.

And we keep ourselves sober. Not only do we stay away from muddling our minds with alcohol, but we keep ourselves unspotted from all the earthly-minded thinking of the unbelieving world. We turn from the world to the word of God. We fill our minds with the Word of God. We believe and embrace the reality of all things as revealed by God in His word, especially concerning the coming of Christ and the end of this life.

And we make sober judgments. Christ is coming. This world is ending. I will not live for food. I will not live for money. I will not live for this life. I will not live for myself. I recognize God as God, and will seek His glory in all I do. I recognize Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior, and will live today to thank and praise Him. And knowing the sin of the world and the weakness of my own flesh, I will pray without ceasing for His grace, to continue to watch, to be sober, to be right minded as I wait for the coming of Jesus Christ.

"Just Friends" (2)



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Dear reader, do you still recall the three questions to consider when it comes to evaluating friendships? Previously, we discussed the first question that talked about the possible risks a platonic friendship might face. In this article, we will cover the last two questions.

1. What are some of the possible risks this friendship might face?
2. What kind of essential and loving boundaries must we implement?
3. Is God glorified throughout this friendship?

Boundaries

Boundaries are fundamental to every relationship. Boundaries are important because they set the guideline on how you would want to be treated and how you treat others. Boundaries establish guidelines on how people are to behave and conduct themselves around you. Every relationship flourishes with appropriate boundaries. They are even more important with a platonic friendship. Listed below are some examples of boundaries one may consider setting.

- No private texting/calling, especially late into the night.
- No private, exclusive meetings.
- Do not get too comfortable around each other.

Needless to say, this list is meant to be non-exhaustive. Some no's and don'ts are required to maintain the safety and integrity of the platonic friendship. Carelessness or liberty in a platonic friendship will eventually lead to temptation and sin.

Now, let us look at some of the do's in a platonic friendship. Once again, this list is meant to be non-exhaustive. Both parties have to exercise wisdom when coming up with boundaries in their platonic friendship.

- Do be honest about our intentions and articulate them clearly.
- Do spend time with one another in a group.

- Do encourage each other constantly with the Word.

God blesses appropriate boundaries. Sin feeds on the laziness of ambiguity. Let us be honest with our intentions of seeking a platonic friendship. Why are we investing so much into this platonic friendship? Do we like the attention given by the other gender that we cannot get from a prospective partner that God in His good time is withholding from us? Does flirting with the boundaries of something or someone that feels off-limits evoke our inner desires of lust?

Beloved, God blesses a thoughtful and honest answer that reflects the state of our hearts. We have to exercise discernment and be conscious about whether we are fooling ourselves with our sinful intentions. Once we are honest about our own intentions and where our boundaries lie, we have to articulate them clearly. Let us steer clear from interactions that evoke sinful desires of lust and temptation. Let us be humble and accountable, submitting to God and enjoying the good that can come out of a platonic friendship.

For God's glory

"Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." (1 Corinthians 10:31)

This is God's commandment for all of us! Like everything else, the end goal of all friendships, be it platonic or not, should be God and His glory. In today's world, the idea of intimacy in a friendship is to give "skinship", compliments and pledges of devotion to one another. All these quickly give a brief and false adrenaline rush of importance and significance but soon will die away if Christ is not the center of it all. Christian friendships should be far more focused on God and His purpose in each of our lives.

A true friend will bring us to God when we fall short of His glory. A true friend will encourage us to obey God and His commandments. A true friend is selfless and sacrificial, following the example of the sacrificial Lamb

that went to the cross for our sins. Since our hearts are prone to wander away from God, we need constant reminders of His glory and worth in our friendships. Build each other up by encouraging each other in the Word! Most importantly, do it for God's glory alone.

Dear church members, do not engage in gossip or backbiting when you know of a fellow brother and sister in Christ who are in an exclusive, platonic friendship. Yes, I am referring to the aunties and uncles who sit at the lunch table as well. The two of them may be hanging out by themselves at the back of the sanctuary or they may be privily texting late into the night. Whatever the situation is, go to them personally and check with them. If they deny being a couple, lovingly explain to them that their behavior is unwise and counsel them with the Word of God. A loving behavior trumps gossiping and backbiting which would eventually harm the fellow brother and sister if it gets to their ears. Gossiping and backbiting destroys the unity that God establishes in the church. Above all, God is not glorified in all that gossip and backbiting.

"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers." (Ephesians 4:29)

Conclusion

"All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not." (1 Corinthians 10:23)

Platonic friendships are available. And they are beautiful. Like all beautiful things, it requires careful investment, humility, selflessness, and above all, self-control.

What is good for some is not profitable for all and sometimes consequences may even be dire. A beautiful and holy platonic friendship in one instance cannot be translatable to every male and female, and certainly cannot be absolutized to every male and female. Doing so would simply be unwise and unsafe.

However, when the risks have been weighed and when boundaries have been set, we can, with a clear conscience, ask God to bless our platonic friendship. Do NOT fool ourselves; repeatedly examine ourselves and flee to the cross whenever we find that our intentions evoke the old man of sin. The Bible warns "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." (Galatians 6:7)

As with all friendships, platonic friendships are available. And they are beautiful. Like all beautiful things, it requires careful investment, humility, selflessness, and above all, self-control. Paul encourages us, "Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying." (Romans 13:13). Let us stay away from sneaky texts and private meetings. Instead, let us participate in intimacy that is pure, public and commendable, above all, filled with the Holy Spirit that enables us to walk in grace and truth.

"...thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the Lord" (Leviticus 19:18). God delights in all friendships, platonic included, but only when it glorifies Him. Men and women, let us take heed to God's word and be diligent in wisdom and relentless in self-examination. Above all, let us be friends in Christ!

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The Power of Prayer



Milton Ho
Member of CERC

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when someone asks you about the power of prayer? This question comes in many forms – “Why do you pray?”, “What are you doing when you pray?”, or even “Who are you praying to?”.

For believers, your response to these questions will reveal the depth of your relationship with our Heavenly Father, and it is always a good opportunity when we are asked these questions by both Christians and non-Christians alike to reflect about how we can continue to grow in this important relationship.

The Power of Prayer in the Bible

“Why is prayer necessary for Christians?” “What are the requisites of that prayer which is acceptable to God and which He will hear?” “What hath God commanded us to ask of Him?” “What are the words of that prayer?” These are questions we should know the answer to, if we’re familiar with the Heidelberg Catechism. They are the questions to Lord’s Day 45, teaching us about prayer.

In the Old Testament, prayer usually preceded miracles. God’s people were given wisdom which was required to build kingdoms, or direction to overcome humanly insurmountable tasks, catastrophes were avoided, and wars in which God’s people were severely outnumbered or technologically disadvantaged – all these were overcome with prayer and fasting. In each scenario, a common factor that was present in the Bible characters we read about was the great faith each and every one of them had in the promises of God.

Recently in January of 2021, Prof. Russell Dykstra preached a sermon in CERC on Exodus chapter 4 titled The Rod and The Serpent. Moses carried a rod for most of his life – from his shepherding days after fleeing from Egypt, to the confrontations with Pharaoh whilst carrying out his calling to lead Israel out of captivity, to the exodus of Israel from Egypt towards the Promised Land. Prof. likened Moses’ rod to prayer, as through thick and thin, and before each time Moses used the rod, he would speak to God. In his prayers he would

communicate his heart’s desire to God, and God would grant them via various means, usually starting with Moses using the rod.

Prayer then, Prof. Dykstra mentions in his sermon, was a tool that Moses used to communicate his heart’s desire to God. For Moses, it was not because the rod had power, but that Moses’ desire was exactly the same as God: to destroy God’s enemies and to lead God’s people towards the unseen Christ. I would think that only because Moses realised that he was not using his own strength, but that God was in control, that he was willing to let go of his insecurities and fully place his trust in God instead.

Losing Its Power – A Warning

Now, there also is another power that does not want us to commune with God. It casts doubt, tells us prayer is ineffective – “Where is God when we need Him most during our troubles?” it says. It uses our old man of sin against us. It uses our fears and insecurities. “Praying to God is only like getting wishes out of a genie from a magic lamp. It is fictional.” It uses the world that we are living in to tell us it is foolishness, insane, even, to speak to an invisible God whom we cannot physically hear His replies, or prove His existence using the most advanced scientific methods. This power is not something that we of little faith can easily fight against, as it works using principalities, powers and rulers that are high above us (Ephesians 6:12), and is as a roaring lion seeking to devour anyone he comes across (1 Peter 5:18).

Indeed, I am sure you have felt that many times your prayers do not seem to get answered, as have I. Sometimes it takes a tremendously long time – too long, it seems. Other times we feel that everything we do is blessed by God, then suddenly, it becomes a spiritual barren wasteland when things do not go well for us. What then? Does it mean that God has abandoned us, or that the devil was actually correct in his allegations?

The thing I like about Bible stories when I read them is that they are very relatable. Each character had their

own flaws and challenges. For example in Moses' case, he was so full of passion to his own brethren that he slayed an Egyptian overseer who was smiting his brethren (Exodus 2:11-12) but he had to flee Egypt to avoid the consequences (v15). Prior to going back to Egypt to ask Pharaoh to release his people, he argued with God to say that he was now too old and too meek to perform such a hefty task (Exodus 3:11, 13; 4:1, 10, 13 – yes, Moses complained quite a fair bit before he was convinced that he was the man for the job); when finally bringing the Israelites out of Egypt, he grumbled, almost sarcastically, and struck a rock twice impulsively to bring water forth for the thirsty people (Numbers 20:10-11) and tragically was the reason Moses could not enter the Promised Land of Canaan (Deuteronomy 32:51-52).

Figure this! Moses, through whom God parted the Red Sea and brought Israel from Egypt to the Promised Land, had been tricked by the same power that wished to subvert God and the tools God has given us, like prayer, today. Yet each time, God was patient and loving, and gave Moses the strength to overcome the devil's lies and to complete his given tasks, however impossible Moses thought it was.

So, yes. Sometimes our prayers might not seem to be answered and God might seem distant (like in the Israelites' case when waiting for Moses to descend with the Ten Commandments), sometimes it takes understanding that God's ways are higher than our ways, and sometimes it takes time. But all the time, God gives us what we need for our salvation (Philippians 4:19), rather than what we want, and we will have to learn that too by praying for wisdom, and by putting on the full armour of God, that we might be strong in the power of His might (Ephesians 6:10-18).

The Power of Prayer in Our Lives

Here is an open secret: The power of prayer was not exclusive to Moses and the other Bible characters. How so, though? Although we do not have a special rod like Moses to communicate God's will into our lives, we do have the Holy Spirit which dwells in us.

It is the same Spirit of the Christ who came down from His throne in heaven to live on earth as a lowly human instead, died on the cross for our sins, rose up on the third day as He foretold, and is now sitting at the right hand of God. The Spirit of Christ who loves us and hears us, and can intercede for us perfectly as he understands

what we go through, having lived as a human before. The Spirit of Christ that was sent to our hearts, crying "Abba, Father" (Galatians 4:4-7), as we live as the adopted sons and daughters of God. And what would you like to see in your life that resonates according to the Holy Spirit living in you, which shares God's thoughts too?

In my life there were some experiences that were too tough if left up to me, but with God all things are possible. One of which was the power of prayer for unbelievers which awakens hardened hearts of stone, being slowly fulfilled in my own family members and is still a work-in-progress. It is one thing which I have prayed about for a long time coming, as none of my family members started off as Christians, but were mainly Buddhists and free-thinkers.

One of these family members was my Aunt Endora, which some of you have met, or attended her wake when she passed on. She led a tough life. In her early-forties, the prime years of a person's life, instead of being financially able to do the things she wished like most with the earning power in their prime could, she was confined to the wheelchair for a total of fourteen long years due to a stroke. This caused the right half of her body to be paralysed. which was her dominant side. She was downcast but still hopeful in the first couple of years when she was going for rehabilitation and physiotherapy sessions which gave some form of possibility that she would recover her mobility. The next few years, her savings depleted due to not being able to work in her disabled state., In addition, going for physiotherapy sessions meant that she would have to think twice, as they were not free.

Have you ever seen a person give up on life? She used to complain, "Why did God give me such a terrible life? Why punish me? I feel so useless now." Even the simplest things like writing, which she did well with her beautiful penmanship that was painstakingly developed whilst she was working as a secretary over twenty odd years, was taken away when she could not use her right hand. It was heart-wrenching to hear those words.

However, this was a period when I was also starting to attend church, and each Sunday as I visited her after church, I would share with her what I learnt. After I became a member of CERC, I started to pray with her, sung her the Psalms, and read her the catechisms. There

was much resistance from her, as she often offered up joss sticks to the ancestors and Buddhist gods right after those activities. However, because I was her nephew, she would listen and participate.

Towards the end of her earthly life, she requested for a Christian funeral, and also told me that she will see me again in heaven. This surprised me when she did those things, as it was on her own accord without any prompting from me. Over time, she confessed her sins and as she learnt the language of prayer, she even prayed that God will forgive her, amongst other petitions. She said that she had nowhere to run in her current state but to listen to God's Word. She also acknowledged that everything in her life was designed by God so that it resulted in this outcome of salvation for her soul. What a work of God that was, considering that my aunt was steeped in Buddhist teachings all her life, and had refused any manner of receiving God's Word for many years due to her belief that if she did so, my late grandmother, who was also Buddhist, would not have any peace in the afterlife. Pastor Andy Lanning, who was still serving CERC as our minister, had been working together with my family to bring God's Word to my aunt, and when he eventually carried out her wake and funeral services, he shared my joy in witnessing how God had worked in her and had changed her heart, much like the conversions that the early Christians experienced in 2 Corinthians 3:3 in their loved ones and their communities.

After her death, my Dad, who was a free-thinker and brother of Aunt Endora, was impacted by my Aunt's testimony and started coming to church with my sister and I after her Christian funeral. He had also recently

written to Session to apply for a baptism interview. He might already have become a member of CERC by the time this article is published.

Prayer is an outcome of our faith in God. We pray because we have faith in the hope in Christ, because we believe in God's promises, and because God will do everything for our good (Romans 8:24-30). For me it was God's promise of the salvation of the family of believers that was given in Acts 16:31. Now, reader, how will you answer the question that we started this article with, "Why do you pray?"?

Pray Unceasingly

There might be times we feel that life is unfair, and we might have questioned whether we are really saved or pardoned for our sins, especially when facing great difficulties in life. Other times life is monotonous and nothing special is going on. And there are also times where it is exciting, and eventful. At which stage of our lives is prayer most important? What do you think, reader? I hope your answer is "all the time"!

Whether it is through corporate, family or personal prayer, pray about it, unceasingly, in the same manner in which the Psalmist sings (Psalm 121:1), just like Paul exhorts the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18), and like how Christ commands us (Matthew 6:9-13; 26:40-41, and Mark 13:32-37). My prayer is also that you will be able to witness first-hand the power of prayer being fulfilled through your life as we undergo the process of sanctification in our pilgrim's journey. No matter how big or small that prayer is, become a witness for our Saviour, Jesus Christ!

Parenting Peaceful Consciences



Paul Liu

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The Conscience

The conscience is something we as humans recognise in ourselves and in one another, regardless of whether one is a Christian or not. It is an innate ability to tell right from wrong and good from evil. In Chinese culture, the conscience is understood to be so part of being human

such that if one was said to have 'no conscience', it would not be just a comment about one's poor intelligence or lack in some mental or sensory faculty, but it would actually be a question of one's humanity and accusing him of being a highly corrupt person.

How can we properly define the conscience? From the word itself, “con-” means “with” or “together” while “-science” means “knowledge” or “awareness”. While this does give us a better idea of what it is, it is good to hear from the Word about the conscience. In Romans 2:13-16, we learn about the coming together of three “knowledges”. First, there is a natural knowledge of the moral law whose work is written on the heart of man; not the law itself written in gracious love as God promised to His people, but as a mark on each and every man. Second, there is an awareness and remembrance of what one has done and its value when measured against the moral law. And third, the awareness that there is a Being—whether acknowledged or otherwise—who is conscious of all things one has done and from whom no secrets can be kept. This means that every man and woman, whether they know God or not, are born with a conscience which serves as a witness from God within them.

Because fallen man would rather not have a guilty conscience, he selfishly evaluates the moral good and evil of the deed before he acts. While stealing another person’s money to enrich oneself will certainly make sense in an animal world, man may consider the act to be wrong as it may cause his conscience to trouble him. However, that fallen selfish conscience continually degenerates through perpetual iniquity and before long becomes dim and dead. It is just a matter of time before the benefit or pleasure derived from doing the wrong becomes greater in this scale of human evaluation and one falls and acts against his conscience. This weighs heavily on the mind and heart of natural man, as he knows he has violated what is good and right and that he would be inexcusable before any form of judgement. The Being who knows what was done and whose judgement is right has now become his enemy and will seek his punishment and bring him to justice. His thoughts are also in a state of turmoil as he responds to the thoughts of accusation and condemnation with thoughts to excuse himself by redefining the law and convincing himself of new standards of right and wrong, or by twisting reality of the circumstances and what one actually did so that there can be justification or excuse for the violation (Romans 2:14-15). The Bible describes this terrible sequence and state of lies and hypocrisy to be the searing of one’s conscience. It makes something that was once sensitive and useful become hardened, unfeeling, and of no effect.

In a Christian, the conscience is the same as the one in all men, but yet, entirely different. As with everything transformed and reborn in a Christian’s life, Jesus Christ the Word makes all the difference. The sinner for whom

Christ died also inevitably ends up in the sorry state of condemnation and turmoil for he stands at war against his Creator who in His holiness would require payment for sin. Who shall save him in this ultimate distress? Jesus, the Lamb of God, whose shed blood covers the doorposts of the elect’s heart, is the peace of the saved sinner. His atonement satisfies the wrath of God against sin and the angel of death, finding no condemnation, passes over.

The work of Christ, which shows the love of God, fundamentally and completely alters the conscience in a Christian. The work of the law will no more be painfully chiselled into a stony heart but the law itself will be lovingly written into a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26-27, Hebrews 10:16). His sin and iniquities are forgiven and remembered no more. He is assured that he is no more judged based on the value of his works, but upon the righteousness of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21). The omniscient Being he once feared has promised that his sin is forgotten (Hebrews 10:17). God is no more the angry judge who watches and waits to punish the sinner with holy wrath, but is now our compassionate Father who looks intently for us to return in repentance and humility—and runs to and falls on us with kisses of delight in spite of our dirty and sorry state (Luke 15:20). Thus, the conscience in a Christian testifies of and magnifies the love of God through the work of our Lord Jesus on the Cross. The conscience turns the child of God around and brings him to tears in sincere repentance and sorrow for sin knowing that forgiveness and righteousness are his in the Lord.

A Child’s Conscience

The fallen and selfish conscience of a child is at the stage where it is still relatively accurate and reliable, and it may not be as “experienced” in deceit as an adult conscience. As one born in sin, he can measure his actions knowing the difference between right and wrong, knowing well that both he and someone other than himself are aware of his actions. Driven by his self-seeking and proud conscience, the child acts out what is good to gain the praise of man and tries to avoid evil to escape punishment or to prevent disappointment of those they want to please. There is an ongoing balance of right and wrong where there is an endless struggle to merit an overall righteous status and be satisfied with one’s own behaviour. Without grace, there is no obedience out of love for God.

Those in the world have also noticed this, and parents often attempt to harness the conscience in order to have power over and influence the behaviour of their children. Parents can do this, first, by distorting the law

written naturally on the hearts of the children. They do this by adding or subtracting to this law according to how they would like the child to behave and follow through by evaluating their child's actions according to these new standards. For example, parents living in poverty may teach their children that stealing is not wrong, giving the excuse that it is part of survival and so must be acceptable and right, so that the children might one day fulfil the goal of helping the parents steal. Or, parents may judge and condemn their children for matters like lack of cleanliness or skills, so that they feel guilty and possibly try harder to behave as their parents would like them to—which is the parents' end-goal. These actions by parents exploit the consciences of their children in a way that distorts their view of what is right and wrong and over time deeply damages their consciences.

Parents can also try to use—or misuse—the conscience of their children by wrongly characterising the omniscient Being who is aware of what everyone does. Again, in our Chinese culture, there is a saying that goes, “Man acts, heaven (sky) watches.” Without needing to seek out the true God of heaven and earth, parents attempt to leverage on the fear within a child's conscience in order to scare them into behaving in the way that pleases the parents. Even the threat from a parent who says “I'm watching you” attempts to control the child using his conscience, whether or not the parent actually can or does keep an eye on the child.

As these tactical misuses of the conscience can be quite effective, there is a strong temptation—even for Christian parents—to resort to them. Parenting is not an easy task, and godly parents who try to do so in godly ways will often meet with roadblocks and seemingly insurmountable challenges. Sometimes in our fervent desire to train our children in the way they should go, we apply such brute-force parenting that seems convenient and effective, to the confusion and hurt of our children's consciences.

The Duty of Christian Parents

Other than praying for God's mercy to be on our children (Job 1:5), Christian parents have a duty to teach them the knowledge of God, and to daily lead them to see and confess their sins and find their forgiveness and peace at the Cross of Jesus Christ. These are impossible tasks for us unworthy and sinful parents who struggle daily with our own consciences—but yet, this we must do through Christ who strengthens us.

The first thing in this duty is for our children to know God. Here, we are not first referring to knowing God in

the sense of knowing all about God by reading through the entire Bible and confessions as soon as possible with our children—though these are essential to grow in knowledge and love for God. We want our children to know God in the way they know that Uncle Tim from church is daddy's or mummy's friend. A child may not know all about Uncle Tim—where he stays, what he does for a living, all about his past, but a child knows Uncle Tim as Friend and it completely changes everything. There is a wonderful foundation of safety, trust, and love just through that simple knowledge.

Our children need to know that God is our, and their, covenant God as revealed in the Scriptures. They need to know God as Friend, right from the very start. And we do this not because of any positive effects we humanly determine might follow, or because of any mystical illusions we may have, but simply because God has plainly revealed Himself as a covenant God who saves us and our children in the line of generations! He promises to be Friend to us and our children, and with trembling lips, we repeat this astounding truth about mercy we and our children are so unworthy of to their listening ears. This almighty Creator is a consuming fire ready to destroy sin and the sinner in holy justice; in Christ, God is daddy's and mummy's friend; in Christ, He loves you, and calls you “son” and “daughter”; in Christ, this almighty Creator is your heavenly Father, who deals patiently with you and loves you without change. Do your children know God through your words and actions about Him?

Another way we teach our children the knowledge of God is by lovingly bringing God's truth to them, knowing that it is the Holy Spirit who will apply this truth to form and strengthen the Christian's conscience in our elect children (Hebrews 8:10). Indeed, we humbly acknowledge that God is the one who ultimately teaches our children (Isaiah 54:13, Psalm 71:17) and as with the building of a house, unless He teaches our children, we instruct them but in vain. Thus, we teach and train our children not for reward or to merit anything on their behalf—God forbid we do it so our children might reflect how good and worthy parents we are—but only in obedience to God's Word as He tells us our responsibility as godly parents waiting for His saving grace upon our children and their consciences. We do this with full confidence that God's Word is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16).

Psalm 119:11 comes to mind when we think of God's truth and love in relation to the work of the conscience in us and our children: Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee. There are two

things we need to do with regard to God's Word, first, we must acquire it or in this case, provide it for our children; and second, we need to hide it in our hearts. So, never neglect feeding our children with the Word of God. The B-I-B-L-E is the life-giving word that proceeds from the mouth of God and it is the most important knowledge that we need to impart to our children. Never should academic studies and talent classes take precedence over the hearing and learning of God's Word. Would you not feed your child for a day because you were extremely busy or dead tired? Then we should never have that excuse for their spiritual food either. As weak parents, we may dread doing that devotion at the end of an exhausting day or if we are feeling unhappy due to problems in the family, but these must never get in the way of providing spiritual food for our children. And though we should do it cheerfully and lovingly, at the very least we need to do it as a matter of duty and responsibility that was charged to us as Christian parents.

The second thing is to hide the Word in our hearts (and our children's). Hiding here does not mean to conceal or put away so that it is forgotten and cannot be used. Instead, it means to treasure, store and stash away, and to protect something that is of great use and importance. How we read God's Word, how we esteem God's Word, and how we call God's Word to remembrance are some ways we show and tell our children how to hide God's Word in their hearts. We as parents have the responsibility to teach our children what it means to hide God's Word in their hearts and to encourage them to do so through our word and example.

The verse also teaches us God's love for us as He works in our conscience to preserve us and keep us from sin. As discussed earlier, the Christian conscience is redeemed by Christ, the Word, and becomes alive and ever so much more sensitive to sin and evil. The Christian walks in righteousness and flees from sin not because he wants to be more perfect to show himself good and praiseworthy, but because he is thankful for the salvation of his Lord and Saviour at the Cross. The redeemed conscience of a child of God gives no place to living in sin that grace may abound. Indeed, God's love for us is wondrous, and by the Spirit's work in our conscience, he actively keeps us from falling and stayed on the path of obedience (Jude 24-25). As we teach our children of God's love, we must also show them how the Spirit uses their conscience to lead them in the paths of righteousness.

Finally, we need to daily lead our children to see and confess their sins and to know of God's faithful promise

of forgiveness for those who truly repent. Our children are born in sin and will fall into sin repeatedly while on this earth, and each time it happens, their consciences will be troubled. We must teach them that a guilty conscience itself cannot lead to salvation (Matthew 27:3-5) and having a troubled conscience does not equate to repentance or turning from one's ways. The power that changes us and causes us to turn to God cannot come from our dead consciences—or any other part of our dead selves—but can only come through the effectual life-giving work of the Spirit in our hearts. We must lead our children in prayer, asking that the Holy Spirit may open their eyes to see that they have sinned against God and that He may work humility and true repentance in their hearts that they may find their forgiveness and peace at the Cross of Jesus Christ. We do it daily and as often as possible, that in time to come, they may also learn to pray sincerely for forgiveness on their own. It is ultimately the blood of Christ our High Priest that will purge their consciences from dead works and guilt so that they can find peace of conscience and joy in serving God (Hebrews 9:14).

Peaceful Consciences in Peaceful Homes

The result of all these is peace—there is peace when God's Word is obeyed and properly applied in our homes. A covenant child who is washed by the Word finds comfort and peace in his heart. He learns God's law as one who has been brought out of the land of Egypt and saved from the house of bondage. He learns that all his righteousnesses are as filthy rags and that the only way to stand righteous when measured against this law is by faith in Jesus Christ who cleanses him from all sin and imputes His perfect righteousness to him. He learns who God is in Christ: his almighty loving Father in heaven. This is the Gospel that, by God's grace alone, works faith and salvation in our children that they may have peaceful consciences because of the cleansing power of Jesus' blood.

There is not only peace for the children, but also peace for us parents. When we carry out our duties in obedience to God's Word without expecting anything in return, then are we able to persevere in our calling and rest in God's work in our children through the Spirit; we are not easily discouraged and dismayed though for long seasons, we see no fruit of our teaching. We labour and wait patiently upon the Lord because we understand it is God who teaches our children (Psalm 62:1). Because we depend on the Lord, there is also no place for comparing our children against others and this removes discontent and disappointment that would normally plague us.

When members of covenant families commit one

another to God and rest in Christ's work, the heavenly peace of God that passes all understanding will rest upon them to the glory of God. Where the Spirit of Christ is

present, there will be peaceful children and peaceful parents, and thus, peaceful homes (John 14:26,27).

Reflections: Idols of a Mother's Heart (2)



Jemima Joy Boon, Joanna Chua, Julia Koh & Nicole Lim
Members of CERC and young mothers in the church

In our first installment we shared some reflections on the book *Idols of a Mother's Heart* by Christina Fox. We saw how our sinful hearts are prone to prizing our children and earthly success more highly than we ought. In this second installment we look at how our only true source of comfort, confidence, and approval rests in Jehovah alone.

The Idol of Comfort

When we speak of comfort in our lives, we ask ourselves this question: who doesn't enjoy comfort? We are taken out of our comfort zones especially when we first step into motherhood. We do things that we have never done, and that pushes our physical, mental, and emotional limits. However, is it wrong to adore comfort? No, it becomes wrong only when we put comfort above God and His will in our lives. Here are some examples of situations we have experienced that pull us away from our comfort.

(I) Out of Our Comfort Zone

First, when we face difficult and unexpected situations, we fear that it will take too much time and effort to resolve them. For example, we begin each day with a plan for ourselves and our families. But when a child takes longer than usual to obey us at a task, we struggle to keep to the planned schedule while still trying to teach him proper obedience. This might result in frustration and sinful anger because our comfort in the planned schedule is shaken. Also, in such situations we might be tempted to neglect disciplining or instructing our children for convenience sake. We constantly need to remind ourselves that our calling as mothers is to raise our children in the fear of the Lord, and this will take a lot of time, energy, and patience (Deut. 6:7). When we worry that we will have to deal with such difficulties each day, are we resting in God's sovereignty in ordaining these situations and in His guiding hand to guide us through? As God has promised in His word, "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be

made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6-7).

(II) Is Our Comfort a Priority?

Second, when we have to make certain decisions for the family or the children, do we make those decisions based on our comfort or the word of God? Is our attendance at church and church activities based on whether it is convenient or comfortable for us? Do we find ourselves getting into the habit of prioritising our own and our children's comfort over fellowship with fellow saints? Being present with the church and its organic life sometimes means sacrifices of what we are used to. We might end up coming home to handle a difficult child and having less downtime for ourselves. Let us find joy and comfort in the fellowship of the saints, for "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Ps. 133:1)

(III) Looking Forward to Pleasure?

Third, when we do the same thing over and over again daily, our responsibilities seem to become a chore. We then live each day only looking forward to the pleasure we can enjoy at the end of the day, and this pleasure-seeking attitude builds up over the weeks and months. We tell ourselves that we need to be rewarded in some way when we carry out our callings faithfully. Eventually we find ourselves feeling weary with the responsibilities of the home and the training of our children. We become restless in this God-given calling, and the one thing we look forward to every day is to have our own rest and downtime. Sometimes we even think how we can cut corners at our daily tasks and escape to our pleasurable me-times, telling ourselves that we deserve pleasure, and we need it in order to pull through the day. We may even imagine how comfortable our lives were before we became mothers and seek to go back to our previous lifestyles.

We pray that God will help us to see that this calling,

which He gives to some of His children, is His way for us to be tried and that through trials we may learn patience. “We glory in tribulations also; knowing that tribulation worketh patience” (Rom. 5:3). We respond to all of these situations that supposedly remove us from our comfort with the strength and the joy of the Lord. We find our comfort and peace through prayer, as the word of God says: “Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer” (Rom. 12:12). We can find satisfaction and strength from the word of God and the riches of His promises rather than the pleasure that the world offers.

The Idol of Control

Motherhood can often feel like a whirlwind. Our young children depend on us for almost everything, and we attempt to manage it all, from their sleep to education to health. We ensure they nap and go to bed according to our meticulously thought-out schedule. We teach them their ABCs and Google “3- to 4-year-old developmental milestones” to check if they are up to speed with their peers. We ensure they eat a nutritious diet and keep them away from sick children. In all our planning, we find ourselves frustrated by things that do not go our way. Ask ourselves—have we bowed our hearts to the idol of control, of seeking security in ruling our own lives?

(I) Families Do Thrive on Order

Making plans and having structure to our day are highly valuable, as the Bible teaches us. “The thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness; but of every one that is hasty only to want” (Prov. 21:5). Another passage in Proverbs warns us against disorder and lack of self-control: “He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls” (25:28). And the admonishment to the church in 1 Corinthians 14:40 to “Let all things be done decently and in order” certainly has implications for our homes as well. Having rules, routines, and to-do lists is not wrong and is even profitable in maintaining order in the home.

(II) Who Really Is in Control?

What is wrong is believing that we are able to take control over our lives and attempting to do so. We place our hope in our plans, find (short-lived) happiness in the plans that turn out well, and beat up ourselves (or others) when our expectations are not met. This inevitably manifests in our lives in various forms—be it anxiety over the next day’s plans, frustration when our children do not take their naps or refuse to eat dinner, or bitterness against our husbands for not helping as much with the children as we want them to.

In all our disappointments with plans that fall to pieces, the word of God smashes this idol of control and in mercy turns us to Christ. “The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust” (Ps. 18:2). We have firm confidence in our faithful Father, for “all creatures are so in His hand, that without His will they cannot so much as move” (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 10, Q&A 28). Because of this, no matter our circumstances in life, we can be patient in adversity and thankful in prosperity. What a comfort to know that “A man’s heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps” (Prov. 16:9).

The Idol of Approval

As parents, we often hear comments about our children or our parenting styles. It may be natural to feel happy when people speak well of our parenting decisions, and there is certainly a place for giving and receiving godly encouragement, but when the validation of others begins to make us feel “right”, we need to examine whether the approval of others has become the meaning and motivation for our lives.

(I) Seeking the Praise of Man

When we unduly enthrone man’s acceptance on the throne of our hearts, we feel empty and worthless when we do not receive “enough” love and approval from those around us. Our hearts swell when people praise our parenting choices. Conversely, when people offer unsolicited advice or critique us or our children, we feel defensive, upset, or disappointed. We fear the rejection of others and seek to show the best parts of our families. We gladly share our successes with our children’s discipline, sleep, etc. but are reluctant to say that they rejected their meals or were unkind to their siblings. We are tempted to either slacken or tighten our outward show of discipline in front of others, depending on who we are with, to avoid negative judgment from them. Instead of striving to be godly mothers by God’s grace, we try to conform to society’s expectations of a typical good mother, be it by how well we organize our home, how successful we are juggling work and children, or how we educate our children. We crave the approval of our family members and get angry when they do not show as much appreciation as we think we deserve.

(II) Man’s Fleeting Comfort vs. God’s Eternal Assurance

Jeremiah 2:13 describes the “broken cisterns” (representative of idols) that Israel turned to. Just as a broken cistern is constantly leaking water, the idol of approval will never fill us. The contrast between what God gives and what we attempt to hew for ourselves is stark—something that is broken, temporary, and

unsatisfying versus an unending fount of love, acceptance, grace, and so much more in Jesus Christ.

In response to fearing others' opinions of us, society advocates messages of self-worth and taking pride in who we are. But the word of God lifts our eyes to Jesus, our Elder Brother, who has gained for us perfect acceptance in God's sight. Christ never fails, and therefore God's acceptance of us is steadfast and eternally sure.

Let us not be content with the fleeting scraps of approval that others give but remember the immeasurable riches of love that the King has given us. Read His word, and know with full assurance that "neither death, nor life,

nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38-39).

Conclusion

While embarking on the journey of motherhood, our old man of sin constantly besets us, and we find many of our own weaknesses magnified. Our prayer is that we may follow in the steps of mothers who have set godly examples, continue to love and serve those in our church family, and constantly look to the Author and Finisher of our faith to redirect us in our journey.

Regarding Church Polity



Lim Yang Zhi

Member of CERC and *Salt Shakers* chief editor

Recently, Prof. Dykstra gave a class on Article 31 of the Church Order. During the class, a member of our congregation asked for Scriptural proof that the individual is primarily responsible to protest against the session. Her question, negatively put, asks for proof that group action (i.e., banding together as members) to protest is not the biblical command. Prof. Dykstra explained that there is no single command in Scripture addressing protests, but that the entire vein of Scripture shows it.

I hope to show a small part of that "vein" from a well-known passage, Matthew 18:15-17. Some might wonder why this passage, which forms the heart of Christian discipline, instructs one to protest individually. My assertion is that this wise principle for Christian discipline applies for the way to protest too, and I will explain shortly. Before doing so, I assume our readers have already attended the class, physically or virtually. I assume our readers know the wording of Article 31: If anyone complain that he has been wronged by a decision of a minor assembly, he shall have the right to appeal, etc. I also assume our readers understand what a protest means—not "a matter of concern" for Session's consideration, not even a "criticism" of what session has done, but a protest against a specific decision of the session.

Matthew 18:15-17 is the familiar biblical ground for Reformed church discipline. Jesus' command is this: If

one brother has trespassed against me, I have the calling to confront that brother. This command can also be applied more broadly: If the session, my brothers in the Lord, has trespassed with an unbiblical decision, I have the calling to confront them via a protest. The calling to protest goes to the individual, not the group.

The most obvious evidence of that individual calling is Jesus' command to the individual. "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone" (v. 15). There is no reference to banding together with like-minded believers in a conflict with another brother. There is no reference to speaking on behalf of a group of others regarding the conflict. The reference is to one brother going to another alone.

This individual responsibility must be performed when the trespass (error or sin) first appears. In the case of Article 31, the individual brother, desiring to confront the session regarding a decision, writes on his personal accord. The matter is between himself and the session, and God holds that brother responsible to protest to session.

Indeed, our congregation is uncomfortable with the individual responsibility of writing a protest. This responsibility was not upheld in the past, and, as I understand it from others in our church, members were permitted to write as a group. However, our Church

Order does not permit such group action on the clear basis of God's Word, even if the substance of the group protest is biblical. I believe Prof. Dykstra has suggested helpful ways for both session and members to overcome the inability to write a protest, and I leave it to readers to listen to those portions of the class again.

However, I ask all our readers: What is the motivation for the believer to protest on his own? What drives a member, even a member who lacks the ability to write or speak his mind clearly, to bring his grievance to session? I believe Prof. Dykstra has answered the question in his class; I only re-emphasize it by noting that Jesus answers that question in the same chapter.

The motivation, implied by Jesus in Matthew 18:15-17, is love. Love for God and his church drives the child of God to make a protest. Jesus speaks of this love throughout the chapter. Firstly, Jesus calls his disciples not to despise the children of the church, but to love them as those whom the LORD is pleased to call into his covenant (v. 3-6). Secondly, Jesus describes his saving work as the work of restoring the lost sheep of his flock (v. 11-14). Even if a single sheep of Jesus were to walk astray, Jesus would seek to find that sheep at all costs. Even as Jesus seeks out to restore that sheep, so we must seek out our session whom we judge to walk astray from the Word. Thirdly, after Jesus' instruction of confronting the brother who walks in sin, Peter asks the well-

known question about forgiveness—how many times must I forgive (v. 21-35)? The answer is: Always! When the brother again walks astray and repents, we must forgive. Why? Because Christ commands us to love one another!

The child of God, in love, wants to make that protest to show the session according to God's Word where they might have erred.

Yet on the other hand, the session, in love, receives the protest in love. They do not discriminate against that protesting brother—"Oh, that troublemaker"; "here he is again." The session does not discredit the protest of a group, though made improperly. In love, they break the protest down with each brother, working with them to explain their individual positions, so that they may be properly addressed with the Word. The session aids each protestant to write out their protest.

This is the calling from Jesus Christ to his church: Love one another. In love, directly, confront the session about their error. In love, help one another protest in the orderly way Jesus has laid out. Let us repent, if any word or deed in CERC has been made in a lack of love. But let us look to Jesus Christ for strength to love one another!

Walk of Love



Ishu Mahtani
Member of CERC

John 15:12: "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you."

First love

When did you discover your first love? I mean, when did you first discover the fervent love for God in your life? Perhaps for many years you had been busy with work or in the pleasures of this world. You may not have had the time to think about God, and perhaps in the past you showed no interest in hearing about the good news of salvation. You perhaps remember the day when you actually confessed these beautiful words in your heart, saying, "I confess my sins before my Lord Jesus Christ as my only Saviour". Do you remember this first love? This was a result of the Holy Spirit working in your life. When God spoke to you, He changed your heart. You were then regenerated. This glorious work is

aptly described in the verse below.

Ezekiel 36:26

"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh."

This would have been the beginning of your walk of love.

His love for us

We read in 1 John 4:19, "*We love him, because He first loved us.*"

Yes, only the chosen receive this love. His sacrificial love was revealed to us on the cross when His only begotten Son died on the cross for us. He came in the flesh to live

amongst us, bear all our iniquities, shed His blood, and die the cruel death on the cross. Can there be any greater love than this?

Our walk of love towards God

Deuteronomy 6:5 reminds us, *“And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.”*

The command is clear. We are called to love our Creator with all our heart, mind, and soul. We are not to love the things of this world. We live as citizens in this world, but because we are not of the world, we have been called to love God alone. If we desire to show our love for anyone or anything else, we will not only sin against Jehovah but incur his wrath. For God our God is a jealous God. We are also reminded in Deuteronomy 10:12 to walk this walk of love. The verse reads, *“And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul.”*

From this verse I wish to expand our thoughts on three important aspects: fear, walk, and serve.

Fear – we are commanded to fear the Lord not because He is a tyrant or a cruel master. We may have fear when we face an earthly ruler or king. But when we come before our divine being, the fear refers to showing a great respect for our Creator. We ought to come before God with holy, reverend fear. If we treat God as merely a friend or speak to him as we speak to our neighbour, we fail miserably. That would be seen as blasphemy. Actually, if we live according to the word, we will gain much knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. Proverbs 1:7: *“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.”*

Walking in all his ways – Our walk must be a walk which is in obedience to His word. We read in 1 John 4:16, *“And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.”* This reminds us of the need to walk according to His commandments. We are to live our lives pleasing to God—not that our walk would in any way merit our salvation. Our walk of love towards God is the fruit of our being saved by grace, not by any works.

Serve – We read in Matthew 6:24, *“No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”* We can serve God

in many ways. First and foremost, we have the calling to share the word with our neighbours. We also have a very important calling to show our love for our brothers and sisters in Christ. This we can do by praying for those in need and by serving them when they need assistance or guidance in their spiritual walk.

Walk of love towards our neighbour

Mark 12:30–31, *“And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.”*

This is the word which our Lord Jesus brings to us as well. It may be our colleagues at work or someone we meet in church. The heartfelt desire to show forth love to all our neighbours will result in our desire to share the gospel with them. We do not know whom God will save. It may be our closest friend or someone we meet not so often. By sharing the gospel with them we will do that which is called of us. This is the love that we should show towards our neighbours.

Challenges

The walk of love which I have briefly shared is not easy. If we rely on our own wisdom and understanding, we will fail, and fail miserably. If we follow the kind of love which the world has to offer, it will be only doom and gloom. The world speaks about love as a love full of feelings and emotions. They speak about a love which is only temporary, a love which may seem strong and powerful at first sight but which will soon fade and die. Many psychologists and counsellors have sought to advise their clients about the need to stay positive and solve their problems using love as their approach. Sadly, those approaches have often ended up with people falling into misled ideas of what true love is all about.

Conclusion

If we desire the true walk of love, we must look to God alone. We must pray earnestly for the Holy Spirit to grant unto us the unction to walk according to His word. Only by the grace of God can we walk in the manner which is full of love and godly. I pray and hope that we will consider our walk of love each day.

NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES



Singapore

We are thankful that Prof. and Mrs. Dykstra have arrived safely to Singapore, completed their two-week Stay Home Notice and started ministering among our midst. We are also thankful that we have finally been able to worship altogether as a congregation for both morning and afternoon services once more. After almost a year, we also finally managed to celebrate the Lord's Supper, albeit with some changes. The elements of bread and wine were separately pre-packed and sealed and were distributed by the elders with gloves. The form of the Lord's Supper may have changed slightly but the significance remains ever the same.

United States of America

The seminary finished its special interim period between semesters (Jan 4-13) and Prof. R. Cammenga taught his course on the life and theology of John Calvin. The lectures were recorded and sent to the faculty of the PRCP seminary who viewed the lectures with the students and held their own discussion sessions. Bro. Josiah Tan finished his internship last semester and is back in the seminary for his final semester. May God continue to bless the students and professors in their studies.

India

The COVID-19 situation in Kolkata has not improved much and some members continue to have difficulties getting to church due to lack of transportation. Mission work may also become more difficult in the future as the government is trying to pass an anti-conversion bill that forbids individuals from becoming Christian unless approved by the court and Christmas may no longer be a public holiday. May we continue to pray for our fellow brothers and sisters in India as they go through these many trials. Rev. Emmanuel Singh has also been suffering from blurred vision in his right eye. May the Lord continue to keep him and bless his work in Kolkata.

The Philippines

The congregation of Berean PRC have been allowed to meet in person (up to 50%) and continue to be led by Rev. V. Ibe in their services. They also continue to have online Bible studies on the Belgic Confession and Faith and Church Order of Dort on Sunday evenings. The saints in Maranatha PRC unfortunately have not been able to resume face-to-face services and continue to meet online. It has been almost 11 months since they have been able to have congregational worship in person. The PRCP Seminary classes began in January and are being taught via the Internet. We pray that the Lord continues to be with the saints in the Philippines.

COVENANT LIFE IN PICTURES



Clockwise from above:
A CERC worship service, COVID-style
with people spaced apart in groups of 8;
Other rooms besides the main hall utilized
to accommodate everyone with the safe
distancing requirements;

Preschool Sunday school, with rows spaced a metre apart, and like worship services, no live
singing allowed - but the class can still do actions while listening to song recordings being played!



Clockwise from above:
The Dykstras on a hike with Ishu, Melina & Cheryl;
Bread of Life members tossing lohei on the
last day of the Lunar New Year before
having Bible study together;
The Mustard Seeds Bible Study group
also enjoying lohei at their recent meeting

