

JOEL 3:16 MATT 5:16

SALT SHAKERS

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*But the God of all grace,
who hath called us unto his
eternal glory by Christ
Jesus, after that ye have
suffered a while, make you
perfect, stablish, strength-
en, settle you*

1 Peter 5:10

*Lying lips and deceitful
tongues*

*Letter to the church in
Thyatira*

*Christian Living:
Evangelism*

*Redeeming holiday
time*

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Chairman's Note

Most of our readers would have received the committee's memo of a four-month break. This break was intended to give the committee some time to catch a breather, as well as to improve on the way things were done internally. That break has come to an end with this fresh edition of Salt Shakers.

You may have taken note of the size of this issue. One of the issues the committee has increasingly faced is the difficulty of finding local writers. Sometimes potential writers simply decline; at other times, writers ask for a postponement to the next issue. Still, at other times, the postponement becomes indefinite, and the article is cancelled out of the issue. The challenge of finding local writers able to contribute articles remains. Nonetheless, Salt Shakers seeks to continue its publication with writers committed to the work, as the LORD provides. One important place Salt Shakers takes in the life of our church is fellowship. These articles are one of the many things brothers and sisters in the Lord can discuss together for mutual encouragement and exhortation.

May you find this issue to serve the edifying of the body of Christ.

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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Psalm 120: Lying Lips and Deceitful Tongues



Lim Yang Zhi
Salt Shakers chief editor

Psalm 1. 16. 23. 27. 42. 73. 100. 119. These are stand-out numbers from the Psalms. One says, “Psalm 23,” another replies with ease, “The LORD is my shepherd.” One says, “Psalm 42,” another replies, “As pants the hart for streams of living water...”

But what if I say, “Psalm 120”? The number would likely not conjure any verse or stanza to memory.

Psalm 120 is not well-known. But it was not so among the Old Testament church. It was one of the fourteen Songs of Degrees, Psalms that were sung as the Israelites travelled from their homes to Jerusalem to worship God. Lord-willing, we will meditate on each Psalm in the editorials to come.

While some songs of degrees were clearly sung in a group, Psalm 120 was sung by an individual. The child of God, journeying to worship God, sings a song of distress.

The psalmist was sorely afflicted. He was troubled, full of sorrow, and likely weeping. What has afflicted the psalmist?

Hear the psalmist’s cry: Deliver me, O LORD, from lying lips and a deceitful tongue.

Lying lips and deceitful tongues—not two different tongues, but one tongue that has afflicted the child of God. That tongue has lied. What is the lie? The lie is the opposite of reality. The lie is a distortion of what is true. The truth is God in all His righteousness, holiness, and goodness revealed in His Word. The lie, however, is a corruption of that revelation, so that God’s righteousness, holiness, and goodness cannot be found in the lie.

But the tongue does not just corrupt God’s truth into a lie. The tongue, after all, is not only lying, but also

deceitful. The deceit of the tongue is its cunning craftiness to make its words appear true, and when its words are false. Do not be mistaken; a lying and deceitful tongue always corrupts God’s Word to us. However, what is said looks good. It makes us think and feel that what’s said isn’t so bad, or even that it has a good point.

Whose tongue and lips afflicted the psalmist? The man was not named, but his heart is revealed to us. From his heart we see his true intent. The man desired war. Warfare is not sinful. Warfare is part of the life of the Christian. Warfare is the Christian’s daily battle against a cunning trio—Satan, the wicked world, and our sinful flesh. Warfare against these hosts is holy. It is the putting-away of sin, and the putting-on of God’s Word as armour.

But the warfare against the psalmist was not this holy warfare. The warfare against the psalmist was the violent destruction of the righteous psalmist. The man with these lying lips and deceitful tongue was the man bent on killing the psalmist, if not physically, then spiritually; and hurting the psalmist spiritually, the man hurts the psalmist’s heart, soul, and mind.

What could this violent man do against the psalmist?

With his lying lips, the man lied to others about the psalmist. The psalmist is against God and his church. This psalmist seeks to hurt us; stay away from him! Or with more subtle lies: This psalmist said I have sinned? Don’t listen to him; he’s over-reacting. The man lies about the psalmist. The man, in lying about the psalmist, destroys the psalmist’s reputation before others. However, more violent is the fact that these lies, when it

reached the psalmist's ears, confused and hurt the psalmist. All this verbal violence was done, although the psalmist was blamelessly seeking peace.

But the man also deceives. He appears to others that he is speaking for their good, even their edification. He even appears to the psalmist that he is speaking to the psalmist's good. After all, the psalmist has dwelt in this man's tent. Maybe the man appears friendly to the psalmist. Maybe the man has given the psalmist food and drink, even holds conversations with the psalmist in his tents. The man even goes with the psalmist to Jerusalem, to worship God with the man! But behind the psalmist, he speaks evil against the psalmist.

Maybe the psalmist confronts the man about the evil he hears, and the man apologises to the psalmist. But at the same time, the man sneaks in an excuse for his sin, blaming the psalmist for tempting him to sin, maybe claiming the psalmist for sinning against the man. The man appears to seek the good of the psalmist, only to continue his evil speaking against the psalmist.

God condemns the lies and deceit of that violent man. These lies and deceit, along with backbiting, gossip, and slander, are the violation of God's holy law in the ninth commandment. They are also the violation of God's law in the sixth commandment. The man, in his lies and deceit, dealt with the psalmist violently. The psalmist named no physical violence done. But the violence spoken of in the short psalm came from the little member of the body—the tongue!

Oh, where was the afflicted psalmist? The psalmist described himself as sojourning in Mesech, and

dwelling in the tents of Kedar, even dwelling with the man that hateth peace. Notice the growing intensity with each description. The psalmist was troubled. He was afflicted by sin. He was afflicted because there were men who sought murder and violence, not peace.

The place the psalmist was at was a troubling place. Yet, it is unlikely that the psalmist was outside Israel. The psalmist, and Israelites after him, sang this psalm as they were travelling to the temple. If these believers were on their way for the feasts, they could not have been outside Israel geographically.

Rather, the psalmist was in Israel. In Israel, he cries that he feels as if he is wandering outside the refuge of the church. In Israel, he cries that he feels as if he lives in a tent with unbelievers. In Israel, he cries that he is afflicted by the sins of violent men.

The shocking experience of the psalmist is a sound warning in our times. The psalm is a sound warning to the church. Are we a congregation of believers with viperous, flaming tongues, aimed at the destruction of fellow members? God condemns the tongue of gossip and backbiting, even if the words spoken seem true. God hates the tongue that says two good words, "I'm sorry," but goes on to excuse his sin with a hundred more words. God hates the tongue that says, "I've reconciled with so-and-so," but adds, "but I don't really want to talk to him." All these deceptions, God hates, not only because they twist the truth of things, but also because they hurt the neighbour. Such hurt is violence. The deceiving tongue is the violent tongue.

To such tongues, God gives coals of juniper. Certainly, these coals are the destruction of all

God hates the tongue that says two good words, "I'm sorry," but goes on to excuse his sin with a hundred more words. God hates the tongue that says, "I've reconciled with so-and-so," but adds, "but I don't really want to talk to him."

The psalm is a sound warning to individual believers. Life as a member of the church is difficult. It is a life full of affliction, not merely because of the persecution of this world, but also because of the sins of fellow believers in Christ.

unbelieving tongues that speak lies (think of Nadab and Abihu). Yet, these coals can be the heat that purifies (even chastens) all believers who have not bridled their tongues with the Word (think of the coal that purged Isaiah's tongue).

The psalm is a sound warning to individual believers. Life as a member of the church is difficult. It is a life full of affliction, not merely because of the persecution of this world, but also because of the sins of fellow believers in Christ. A sin against you by a member of your (spiritual) family hurts greatly. When a child of God confesses his faith in a true church of Christ, that child vows to take the life of Psalm 120—one that will face terrible hurt, because of the violence of fellow believers.

What shall the troubled believer do?

Shall he keep silent?

Shall he bite back at his evil brother?

No. The child of God cries to God for help.

In fact, when we sing this psalm, we sing not of that violent, deceiving tongue first, but of the psalmist's cry to God for help. This is the deliberate order of the psalm from the Spirit: first, the God-centered cry for help, before a lament about self.

That cry for help was a cry to God. There was no shame to say to God, "I am in need!" There was no resistance to confess, "I am in distress!" In other psalms, the psalmist was not even ashamed to confess his sin, while being persecuted by enemies. The psalmist knew his vulnerability to sin against

his enemies. Yet the psalmist did not hide his sinfulness from God.

A cry to God, in other words, was a wholehearted trust in God. In that cry, there is no hesitancy, no fear, and no shame to bring our burdens to God. The psalmist did not ignore his troubles. Not only did he cry to God for help, but he expressed the contradiction that troubled his heart: I am for peace; but when I speak, they are for war! The psalmist did not dismiss his troubles by saying, "It's not that bad." He squared his affliction with two conflicting words—war, and peace.

He did not merely say, "Ah, God is sovereign." That's what some of us do as Reformed believers from time to time—just acknowledge everything is from God's hand, even explain a little how it will work for our good (some way and somehow), and everything will be fine. That naïve understanding of sovereignty is not the psalmist's understanding.

Neither did the psalmist downplay the sin that is involved in his troubles. He describes the actions of his enemies as violent, lying, and deceitful—not merely hurtful, inaccurate, and confused. This use of strong words was not an attempt to tarnish the enemies' reputation; the psalmist had no business in vengeance. The psalmist's strong language was his submission to the afflictions God sovereignly sent to the psalmist.

Only when the psalmist could acknowledge the evil done against him, could he then feel the true weight of his afflictions and his need for God. In that enormous weight pressed on the psalmist, he pleaded, "Deliver me, O LORD!"

We struggle with the reality that we are wounded by another's sin...

Does it shock us that the psalmist could pray so boldly? We sometimes struggle to pray with such boldness. Worse still, we simply do not pray. We could pray for the sister afflicted with cancer. We could pray for the brother struggling with a job. But we resist expressing to God that a member of our church-family has sinned against us.

We struggle with the reality that we are wounded by another's sin; "I should be strong and move on." We assume moving on means never needing to bring our distress unto the LORD, time and again. Perhaps we know that our brother's sin incites us to hate that brother. Ashamed with ourselves, we keep silent before God, and fill that sinful silence with other prayers.

The inspired psalmist would have none of these attempts to avoid prayer. Why? The psalmist prays with certainty that God would hear. The psalmist knows that Jehovah God gives an answer to the believer that is wounded in the church of Jesus Christ.

What is the answer? The answer is in one word: LORD.

Jehovah! The God that never changes.

The answer is that God is faithful to the psalmist. The answer is that God will hear the psalmist's cry. The answer is that God will not let the psalmist destroy himself in a desire for revenge, but that he will cover that sinful desire with the blood of Christ, even purging it away. The answer is that when friends and family hurt, even forsake the psalmist spiritually, God will never forsake the psalmist, but will fill the psalmist with the grace, love, and peace the psalmist can't find in men.

The answer, in other words, is God's gracious covenant with us. In His covenant, He washes us from the evil desire to overcome evil for evil. In His covenant, He answers our prayer with a daily measure of grace to bear with the evil done against us. In His covenant, He turns the evil that hurts us so greatly to our profit—even as it hurts.

Where did the psalmist find God's answer?

The psalmist could not find it in the tents of Mesech and Kedar—that is, among his brethren that behaved like the heathen surrounding Israel.

The psalmist could never find it in himself. All the psalmist saw in himself was the distress and violence done against him.

Because the psalmist could not find God's answer among his brethren and his heart, there can only be one place to find the answer—God's house!

And where else did God dwell in the Old Testament, but in the temple, upon Mount Moriah, at Jerusalem? Here is the psalmist, grieved and tormented, travelling to Jerusalem to find his comfort at the temple. Not at the gold that overlaid the furniture of the temple; not in the earthly prosperity that marked the city of Jerusalem; but at the bloody altar, where the blood of the animal was spilt and sprinkled—there, at the altar, the psalmist found comfort, that God has not forsaken the psalmist, because the sacrifice joined the psalmist to God forever! The sacrifice was the picture of Jesus

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Christ, reconciling us unto God by the shedding of His blood, by the covering of our sins by that blood, and by the purging of our sins by the washing of His blood.

The psalmist is grieved. The psalmist is afflicted. But the psalmist is also comforted.

Take away the altar, and all the psalmist is left with is misery—misery from the sins of others against him, and misery from his sinful response.

Don't take the altar away! Don't stay away from

church; come, listen to Christ week after week!

Do you see a brother afflicted? Bring him to the altar in prayer and the reading of the Word. Do you see a sister, tempted to return evil to the evil tongue of another member? Bring her to the altar. Remind her of the blood of Christ that cleanses her from all her sins, so that she returns no more to evil. Remind her that she belongs to Christ, and that her Lord is pleased only with a heart that desires righteous peace, not war.

Will I find you at the altar, dear reader?

Lessons from God's Letters to the Churches (5)

Letter to Thyatira (Revelation 2:18-26)



Prof. Herman Hanko

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(Before you read this article, please open your Bibles and read Revelation 2:18-26. This letter is the longest of the seven letters Jesus wrote to the seven churches of Asia Minor.)

Thyatira was nearly 90 miles inland from the Aegean Sea and was on the far western part of the province of Asia, nearly in the adjoining province of Mysia. It is not known when and by whom the church was established. It was a large distance from Ephesus and the distance may have prevented Paul and his associates from preaching there during the time Paul was in Ephesus, when the surrounding churches were organized. We do read that Paul passed through Mysia on his way to Macedonia where his second stop was Philippi (Acts 16:7).

The city was a prosperous city with many guilds of various businesses found in the city. It is interesting that when Paul went to Philippi, he met with some women on a riverbank, who were worshipping together. The group was led by Dorcas who was from Thyatira and was a seller of purple (Acts 7:14). Thyatira was famous throughout the Mediterranean Sea basin for its manufacture of purple dye made from a particular shellfish, although later the dye was made from a plant native to the region.

The church in Thyatira is praised by the Lord for its good works. Those works, all-important Christian virtues, were love, service, faith and patience. When a congregation is characterized by these virtues, it is a godly congregation.

It is probably true that the Lord mentions faith as the congregation's most important virtue. That is, the congregation lived and walked in the world as

those who belonged to Christ and confessed that all their salvation was to be found in Christ. The other attributes that belonged to the congregation: love, service and patience, were attributes that express a unity in the congregation that bound them together in a conscious and continual activity of helping each other in love for each other. It was a close-knit congregation in which each member asked himself/herself the questions: Who needs encouragement, comfort and assistance in their life? And how can I be of help?

It is well to ask yourselves if these important characteristics are a crucial part of your life in your church. You can't fulfil your calling by leaving the church.

Yet, strangely enough, Thyatira had an extremely dangerous defect and sin that would in time destroy her if she did not repent. It was a serious sin that required discipline by the elders, who failed this important part of their calling.

The sins that were committed by some in the congregation and were left undisciplined are described in two parts of the letter. In verse 21 the charge laid against the church is described as tolerating a woman who claimed to be a prophetess and who told those of the congregation that God had revealed to her that it was permissible for the members to commit fornication and to eat meat sacrificed to idols. Apart from the fact that this woman claimed to occupy an office in the church

The church is a small band of sheep surrounded by ravenous wolves.

forbidden to women, she claimed to have special revelations of God that were contrary to the revelation of God in Scripture.

Whether her name “Jezebel” was her real name, or whether she is called that by Christ because she was like the utterly godless wife of Ahab, I do not know. But in claiming that these sins were permissible, she was teaching the people that they could commit sins that they had committed as pagans in their idolatrous idol-worship; she was telling them that God did not want them to be a separate people when he saved them in Christ, but they could continue the evil practices they were accustomed to while pagans.

The letter continues to point out a related sin to which the Lord points an accusing finger in his letter to this church. In verse 22, the Lord simply brands the sin of Jezebel and her followers as nothing else but adultery, though Jezebel may have claimed as a self-appointed prophetess, that fornication and eating meat sacrificed to idols was permissible because God revealed that to her. As adultery, it was a violation of God’s holy law and was despicable in his sight.

Further, Jezebel’s teaching was that fornication was acceptable as a good practice because in this way those who practised it could “taste the deep things of Satan.” This sin especially would carry those who practiced it to enter the depths of total depravity.

Although the sin was monstrous and although it actually was taught in Thyatira, Jezebel apparently argued that such hellish conduct was virtuous for Christians because the deeper the Christian sank into sin, the greater was the grace of God that saved them. The greater the sin, the more the grace of God was exalted. The lower one descended into the depths of hell, the more he would appreciate the wonder of his deliverance.

All this may sound abhorrent to us, but the danger is always present in the church. For the Apostle, Paul himself warned against this very sin in Romans 7:1.

Some were taking the position: “Let us continue in sin that grace may abound.” Paul meant that there were those in the church who believed that the truth of justification alone led some to say that sin was good because it was conducive to greater appreciation for the doctrine of justification by faith alone without works. In our day, some say that they need not concern themselves with doing sin because if they are elect, they will be saved without works. Never mind, they say, doing good works; we are not saved by good works. Or, to put it differently, If I’m elect, I will be saved no matter how wicked I may be. And if I’m reprobate, nothing I do is going to save me from sin.

Sometimes one hears a person defend a similar position taken by some who claim to be Christian. In the case of Jezebel, she assumed to herself the gift to receive revelations from God that permitted her to perform acts contrary to Scripture.

I recall my father telling me an experience he had in his first years of the ministry. A lady came to him and told him that God had revealed to her that she had to marry a certain man (whose name I never knew). Knowing human nature, my father wondered why she came to him to ask him. There didn’t seem to be a reason. So he asked her, “Is this man God told you to marry himself a married man?” Looking rather surprised, she said, “Well, yes; but God told me to marry him. I cannot disobey God but I must do what he says.” My father said to her, “God says in his Word that to marry a married person is adultery,” She remained adamant in this position that it would be disobedience to God to refuse to marry him. “My father said, “If you marry him, you will be excommunicated from the church.” She married him and was excommunicated.

The Lord makes clear how evil Jezebel’s doctrine was in verse 24. He describes it as knowing “the depths of Satan.” That is, Jezebel taught that she had been instructed by God to teach that one must descend into the vilest of Satan’s temptations to learn the riches of grace. “The greater the sin,” so

to speak, “the brighter shines God’s grace in saving us.” Such terrible “doctrines” were being taught in Thyatira.

It is well to pause here and reflect on this position of Jezebel, for there still is much controversy over the question of the place of good works in the life of a justified sinner. Jezebel surely carried the doctrine of good works to the extreme by teaching that the worse we sin, the more brilliant will be the grace of God that saves us. Good works are not necessary to be saved. Indeed it is not necessary to do good works, for grace alone saves us. Nor is it possible for us to do good works. Jezebel’s teaching is only an extreme implication of denying the necessity of good works.

Let it be understood that this teaching is wrong and deserves the same condemnation that Jezebel’s teaching received.

We MUST do good works, our Heidelberg Catechism says. My Seminary professor, Rev. Hoeksema used to say on the pulpit: Salvation does not mean that we are carried to heaven in a top bunker of a Pullman sleeper: (A Pullman sleeper was a train coach that was for sleeping during overnight train rides. It consisted of several upper and lower bunks.)

God saves every creature in his creation by glorifying a creature while preserving its nature. A fish remains a fish; an elephant remains an elephant A tree remains a tree – though God lifts the curse and glorifies every creature. So a man or woman remains a man or woman; that is, a rational and moral creature who can do things and who is enabled to do things good and bad in his relation to God. He/she has a mind and will, which are also saved. Salvation by grace means that a man or a woman can, when saved, do only good things. Yet, in this life he has only a small beginning of the ability to do good things – he retains a totally depraved nature. Yet by the power of a regenerated heart he is given the spiritual battle within him and in his/her life in the world, only to be made perfect at death and the resurrection.

In Ephesians 2:8, Paul writes that God’s grace is the fountainhead of our salvation and faith is the means of receiving it. Faith is the gift of God by which we receive grace.

Our Heidelberg Catechism, that gem of our Confessions, tells us that faith is three things (Lord’s Day 7). First of all it is the graft that unites us with Christ. Every blessing of salvation comes to us by faith. We are, through the grafting of faith, so a part of the body of Christ that we are one with him. Second, faith is a genuine knowledge of the Scriptures by which we hold for true all that God has revealed in his Word. The whole of Scripture speaks of Christ as the one by whom God gives salvation. When we believe Scripture, we believe Christ, for we meet him on every page of Holy Writ. Nor do we believe in him as we believe the existence of a very notable person such as Abraham Lincoln. We only know ABOUT him. But when we know Jesus, we know HIM. We know him personally as our friends and Savior. Third, faith, according to Lord’s Day 7 is confidence. That is, briefly, we have confidence in Christ that he will give us all things, including our salvation, so that we can say that our only comfort for body and soul, for time and eternity, in life and death, that I am not my own, but belong to my faithful Saviour, Jesus Christ (Lord’s Day 1).

Furthermore, the Heidelberg Catechism defines good works as “those that proceed from a true faith.” And faith is a gift of God; so we are saved by grace, through faith, not of works (Eph. 2:9). So in verse 10 of Ephesians 2 we are told that our good works are the purpose of our salvation, and are determined for us by God in his counsel and are a gift of faith (Eph. 2:10). (I cannot refer to this text without recalling that it was the very first text I was assigned to make my first sermon in Seminary. There is a very interesting story about that text, too long to tell here. Remind me and I will tell you someday.)

Paul could therefore teach what he does in Phil. 2:12-13. We are called to work out our own salvation: not someone else’s salvation, which we often try to

do, but our own. We are told that we can do this because “it is God that worketh in you both to will AND TO DO of his good pleasure.

Thus if we do not do good works the reason is that our faith is weak, or a false and imitation faith (James 2). So good works are not of us, but are the fruit of faith; and faith is the gift of God. Thus our good works are not necessary for our salvation, but they are the necessary fruit of our salvation by faith, and are necessary as the fruit of faith in the life of the Christian. We must do good works – and the one united to Christ by faith does good works.

But to return to Christ’s letter to the church of Thyatira, God pronounces terrible judgments on those who follow that wicked Jezebel if they do not repent. God will cast Jezebel into a bed, by which punishment is meant that God will punish her with more and more terrible sins, for God punishes sin with more and more terrible sin (See Romans 1:18ff., where the sin of idolatry is punished with homosexuality); send her followers great sufferings, and kill her children. In this way God will show for the church to see that God is truly God, that he means what he says when wickedness is punished, good rewarded and that all the world may know that what God’s Word says will surely happen. And will punish such people and their generations yet unborn.

The blessings that are promised to the faithful who continue their good works mentioned in verse

19, presuppose that the church disciplines and excommunicates the wicked in her midst. The blessings promised are power over the nations. One must understand how great this blessing is. The vast majority of the world’s inhabitants are wicked. The church is a small band of sheep surrounded by ravenous wolves. Nevertheless, the saints shall have complete power over them to rule over them, and to smash them all with their billions in pieces. This will literally take place at the judgment day, when the saints will come with Christ and will be glorified with him. All the world from Cain to the hordes of peoples living today and are yet to live, will be gathered before the great white throne to be judged for their sin.

According to II Peter 1:19, the morning star that is promised to the faithful in Thyatira is Christ himself whom they (and we) shall receive in all his blessed fullness. Now we only see him through a mirror darkly, but in glory we shall see him face to face (I Cor.13:12).

*When I in righteousness at last,
HIS GLORIOUS FACE SHALL SEE,
When all the weary night is past
And I awake with thee,
To view the glories that abide
Then, then I shall be satisfied.*

Be at Peace With Church Office-Bearers as Much as Possible!



Rev. Angus Stewart

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

Previously we considered “Murmuring, Strife and Contention Against Church Office-Bearers.” Now we turn from the negative to the positive: “Be at Peace With Church Office-Bearers as Much as Possible!” The phrasing of both titles comes from the last paragraph of *Belgic Confession* 31, which is headed, “The Ministers, Elders, and Deacons”:

Moreover, that this holy ordinance of God may not be violated or slighted, we say that every one ought to esteem the ministers of God’s Word and the elders of the church very highly for their work’s sake, and be at peace with them without murmuring, strife, or contention, as much as possible.

Church Office-Bearers Themselves

Let us suppose that you are “not impressed” by your minister or elder or deacon. In fact, you are tempted to despise him and criticise him to others. What should you do? How should you react?

First, we should heed our Saviour’s sharp word of warning: take the mote out of your own eye before judging others (Matt. 7:1-5)! Similarly, the apostle Paul exhorts us frequently to that humility of mind which honours the brother (e.g., Rom. 12:10; Phil. 2:3).

Are we really concerned about God’s holy name and the welfare of His church? Or is our opposition to a decision by the church’s leaders merely our sinful flesh masquerading as piety?

Second, we need to carefully and calmly evaluate the relative seriousness of the problem. Are the office-bearer’s faults real or imaginary? Are they being viewed accurately or are they being exaggerated? How bad are they? Serious enough for suspension or deposition, or do they not reach that level? Church Order 79-80 gives the principal gross sins justifying the former and outlines the main steps to be taken. However, most concerns regarding church office-bearers in a solid creedal and Reformed church fall (a long way) short of suspension or deposition, and so this part of the article will cover the church member’s proper attitude and behaviour towards an office-bearer whom he or she perceives (rightly or wrongly, fairly or unfairly) as weak.

We must remind ourselves of the basic principles of biblical and Reformed church government, which *Belgic Confession* 31 calls a “holy ordinance of God.” Jesus Christ, our crucified and exalted Saviour, is the sole head of His church. As the only universal bishop, He calls ministers, elders and deacons as His representatives. He does this through the nomination of qualified men by the council, the election of some by the congregation and their installation into ecclesiastical office (Acts 6; I Tim. 3; *Belgic Confession* 30-31; Church Order 4, 22, 24). As such, these men “are lawfully called of God’s church, and consequently of God himself,” as the “Form for Ordination of Elders and Deacons” states.

Having established the truth of the lawful call, we must call to mind and obey the Scriptures that concern the believer’s duty towards his church’s office-bearers. Here are some such exhortations:

And we beseech you, brethren, to know them

which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves (I Thess. 5:12-13).

Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine (I Tim. 5:17).

Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you (Heb. 13:17).

The *Heidelberg Catechism's* explanation of the fifth commandment is pertinent:

I [must] show all honor, love, and fidelity to my father and mother and all in authority over me [including my church office-bearers], and submit myself to their good instruction and correction with due obedience; and also patiently bear with their weaknesses and infirmities, since it pleases God to govern us by their hand (A. 104).

Notice the key elements from Lord's Day 39:

1. The church office-bearer is "in authority over me" for "it pleases God to govern us by [his] hand."
2. I am called to "show all honor, love, and fidelity to" him and "submit myself to [his] good instruction and correction with due obedience."
3. This includes that I "patiently bear with [his] weaknesses and infirmities."

It is, therefore, my solemn duty before God, as the *Belgic Confession* puts it, to "be at peace with [all the church's office-bearers] without murmuring, strife, or contention, as much as possible."

Church Office-Bearers' Decisions

Let us suppose that you do not like a decision of the consistory or session (consisting of the pastor and

the elders of an instituted congregation) or the council (a larger body, which also includes the deacons). What should you do?

Often our first impulse is, sadly, to grumble about it to friends and family or anyone who will (foolishly) give us an ear. However, this is not behaving according to Scripture or godliness but acting according to the flesh. Obviously, this is not the calling of a Reformed Christian.

The "Form for Ordination of Elders and Deacons" exhorts us, "receive these men as the servants of God: count the elders that rule well worthy of double honor, give yourselves willingly to their inspection and government." Its concluding prayer includes this significant request:

Grant also especially thy divine grace to this people, over whom they are placed, that they may willingly submit themselves to the good exhortations of the elders, counting them worthy of honor for their work's sake; give also unto the rich, liberal hearts towards the poor, and to the poor grateful hearts towards those who help and serve them; to the end that every one acquitting himself of his duty, thy holy name may thereby be magnified, and the kingdom of thy Son Jesus Christ, enlarged ...

This should give us pause. Are we really concerned about God's holy name and the welfare of His church? Or is our opposition to a decision by the church's leaders merely our sinful flesh masquerading as piety? Or is it a godly concern for truth and righteousness, but with sinful motives also involved?

We need to examine ourselves honestly before God and pray for the renewal of our hearts. Then we should ask the office-bearers respectfully about the issue of concern.

What if we still do not like the decision or are not fully satisfied by their response? Perhaps the issue is not a matter of religious principle, for example, details regarding the church car park

or the layout of the congregational bulletin. Such like are properly referred to as adiaphora, things “indifferent,” because they are neither commanded nor forbidden in the God’s Word.

Things become more difficult if the issue is (in perception or in reality) scriptural, doctrinal and creedal. After all, no church is infallible and apostasy is a real possibility for every congregation and denomination (II Tim. 4:3-4).

Then the concerned member should bring the matter to the consistory or council officially and follow Reformed church polity. He must pray earnestly, operate according to holy motives (seeking the glory of God according to His Word) and remain patient, by trusting in the Lord with all his heart. In his concern for the apostolicity and holiness of the church, the believer must also seek to maintain the church’s unity. Paul writes,

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:1-3).

Why? Upon what is this based? The great missionary theologian continues, “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Eph. 4:4-6).

If no resolution to the problem is reached, the matter should be taken to the denomination’s broader assemblies (Acts 15), as the Church Order explains, or help should be sought from sister churches. “Let all things be done decently and in order” (I Cor. 14:40)—this is crucial! When this injunction is not obeyed, the problem becomes much bigger and the protestant and/or the church will suffer.

Even in the high-stakes procedure of ecclesiastical protests or appeals, the “as much as possible” principle still stands:

Moreover, that this holy ordinance of God may not be violated or slighted, we say that every one ought to esteem the ministers of God’s Word and the elders of the church very highly for their work’s sake, and be at peace with them without murmuring, strife, or contention, as much as possible (Belgic Confession 31).

Evangelism



Matthias Wee

Member of and deacon in CERC.

In the December 2020 issue of *Salt Shakers*, sister Joanna wrote an article “Reaching Out”, which encouraged church members to look out for each other’s well-being, as an extension of the love of Christ. She concluded from Galatians 6:9-10 “And let us not be weary in well-doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.”

In this article, the scope shifts slightly – from focusing on within, to without. From the focus on the good of our neighbour in the church, we next take a look at desiring the good of those outside the church. We look at the work of missions and evangelism. We will see how evangelism is not just something good to desire, but it is Christ’s explicit command to the church.

What is evangelism?

“Evangelism” comes from the Greek verb *euaggelizó* in the New Testament, which means to “announce good news”, and is closely related to the verb *kérussó*, which means “to proclaim”. Evangelism is the proclamation of good news, or the gospel, as it is otherwise known.

Broadly speaking, evangelism is simply the proclamation of the gospel. Each Sabbath, as church members sit under the preaching of the Word, they are being ‘evangelised’ to. However, the more common understanding and usage of evangelism is in the context of the proclamation of the gospel to those outside the church, and this is the focus of the article. Desiring the good of those outside the church first starts with sharing this good news, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Two questions come to mind. Who should

evangelise? And why?

The calling

The calling to evangelise is plain from Scripture. It is Christ’s commission to the church. Matthew 28:19 states this commission “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations...” Acts 1:8 records Jesus’ command to his disciples before his ascension into heaven “... ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

The Church is gathered from all nations, and the primary means is through the proclamation of the gospel. The Canons of Dordt, Second head of doctrine, Article 5 summarises it beautifully “This promise (of the gospel), together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of His good pleasure sends the gospel.” This – the preaching of the gospel is a mark of the true church.

We have answered the “why”, but not the “who”. Who should be doing the work of evangelism? Well, the answer is also found in the same passages quoted above. Jesus’ commission to His disciples is a commission to His church – you who have heard and received His Word by faith – Go! Proclaim the gospel!

Some may ask – is not the proclamation of the gospel reserved for the work of pastors and missionaries? The preaching of the gospel indeed has its special place in the church. However, evangelism is the duty of each and every believer! In Acts 8:4, when the church at Jerusalem was scattered due to Saul’s unrelenting persecution, it

records “therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.” The Greek word translated as “preaching” is *euaggelizō*. That is evangelism! Ordinary members went about, evangelising – proclaiming the gospel far and wide. Their persecution was used by God to spread the gospel amongst the Gentile nations, sowing some of the seeds that were to germinate under the future mission work of the apostles. Hence, it is evident that evangelism is the duty of each believer – you and I are commissioned by Christ himself for this very work.

Equipped for evangelism

Me, evangelise? How is that possible? That may be a question running through our minds. First of all, let us look at who sends us. In Christ’s high priestly prayer (John 17:18) He says “As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.” On the authority of God the Father, Christ, whom the Father sent, sends us, his disciples, into the world. Our Sovereign God, the Omnipotent One, commissions us through Christ. We were chosen by the Father, given to Christ (John 17:12).

Secondly, we have been equipped for this work. The Holy Spirit sanctifies us, consecrates us for this work. We do not go out in our own strength, but Christ’s. Just as the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, and joint-heirs with Christ (Rom 8:16-17), we can go about this work with confidence, knowing that we bear the image of Christ who sent us.

This should not give us false confidence or pride, however. Bearing the image of Christ is a heavy responsibility. What do others see in our daily conduct? Do we resemble Christ in our speech and actions? Do we with humility esteem others better than ourselves? Do we pray for and prepare ourselves for opportunities to evangelise by reading and meditating upon His Word?

Desiring evangelism

We have seen how evangelism is the calling of every

Christian, and that Christ has sent and equipped us to do this work. The question is – do we desire to do it? The answer must certainly be a resounding “yes!” However, I am sure all of us would admit to not answering “yes” as often as we should. Is it foremost in our thoughts and prayers? Do we think about the day or week ahead, and consider who it might be that we may have the opportunity to evangelise to? Do we pray earnestly to have a heart for those who do not know Christ?

It is quite easy to be caught up in our focus in the service of the church, the family and so on; legitimate tasks, and important ones, certainly. But let us not forget the commission of Christ to evangelise.

In Singapore, we are in a unique position where there are opportunities aplenty for evangelism, in a land where there is freedom of worship. In the 2015 census, approximately 18% of the population were Christian. That means 82%, or 4 out of 5 people whom we rub shoulders with daily are not Christians. They could be our next-door neighbours, our colleagues or schoolmates, the maintenance worker in the estate, the person beside us in the train, or even in our own families. Do we consider whom the next person may be that we could reach out to and pray for an opportunity to do so? Are we like Paul, yearning after the salvation of the lost (Rom 9:1-3)? I certainly can do much, much better.

We may be tempted to think that the work of evangelism lies solely under the responsibility of the local church, or a certain committee set up by the church. Certainly, the church is called to preach the gospel “to all persons promiscuously and without distinction”. But the calling to evangelise is to every believer. We have seen that in the sections above. Let us not be tempted to sweep this responsibility under the work pile of others, but embrace it as our calling. We are instructed to show mercy to our neighbour. Is not our neighbour one whom God has placed in our path (Luke 10:29)? And what greater mercy is there but to proclaim the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to those who are not of his fold, seeking their salvation in Him?

The fruit of evangelism

Though we are equipped by Christ for this work, it does not always make it easy work. Many of us who have had the opportunity to reach out to someone will know that more often than not, we face indifference, rejection and sometimes even outright hostility or ridicule. It can be discouraging when the fruit of our work is not readily evident. We think of biblical examples: the hostile rejection of Christ by the Jews, or the violence that Paul and Silas experienced in Philippi, and perhaps a small voice of doubt may arise – am I cut out for this task?

Certainly! Let us not forget that He who has sent us is our Sovereign God. All things happen according to

His Will. We prepare ourselves diligently through the study of His Word, think of different ways to approach a person or pray for opportunities to evangelise, knowing that God anoints our lips and that the outcome rests in His hands. At times, the fruit of repentance and salvation may be evident only years from when the seed was first sown, like the casting of bread upon the waters, and finding it (fruit of it) only after many days (Ecc. 11:1).

Looking back to Galatians 6:9 as we conclude, let us not be weary in well-doing, but to heed the calling of our Lord Jesus Christ, prayerfully seeking the good of our neighbours both inside and outside the church.

Redeeming Holiday Time



Daniel Tang
Member of CERC

Dear young people of CERC, a whole year has flown by and the December holidays are fast approaching. I am sure that you all are looking forward to this long break, where you can finally put down the stresses of school, exams, CCA, tuition etc., and under COVID-19 restrictions too.

I remember my school holidays fondly. Weeks of not having to worry about homework. Plenty of time to catch up on sleep, friendships, hobbies, and pretty much anything other than school. The possibilities abound! What shall I choose to do today?

First of all, take some time to read Ephesians 5.

Because if you are wondering what to do with your holidays, Ephesians 5 offers plenty of good guidance.

How not to redeem the time

Eph 5:3-4 But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints;

Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks.

Ephesians 5 starts with some advice on what a Christian should not be found doing. While a sin is a sin regardless of its severity, we can link Ephesians 5 to some activities which a young person might be tempted to fall into.

Covetousness. When I was in school, we all knew the marks of a cool kid. I am sure you do too. Every teenager wants to fit in and be that kid. Some of your friends may be spending their December holidays stocking up on the latest gadgets or clothes, or amusing themselves at a cruise or staycation (or

even holidaying in Germany). Are you jealous? Do you wish you could have the same? Beware of covetousness!

Foolish talking and jesting. This is the other area that so many of us fall into so often, myself included. We will probably be seeing our friends and family a bit more during the holidays. We are naturally happy to see each other, and there will be plenty of laughter and jokes. What shall be the subject of our conversation then? During these times, let us remember that our speech ought to edify and build up one another.

Giving of thanks. Ephesians 5:3-4 ends with the advice to give thanks. Of all the good things that we could possibly do, it is striking how the apostle Paul, guided by the Spirit, chose to cap off his admonition with an exhortation to give thanks. However, upon closer examination, it becomes clear why. Giving thanks is the precise way to avoid falling into the sins earlier mentioned. When we give thanks, we recognize the many good gifts that God has freely bestowed upon us, undeserving as we are. We have no right to ask for more! And when we have thankful hearts and lips, then we remember to occupy our time with gratitude to God, and not by foolish talking and jesting.

How to redeem the time

Ephesians 5:15-16 See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

Walk circumspectly. This phrase can also be translated to mean “to watch or look carefully”, “to be vigilant”, or “to be on the lookout”. What are we looking out for? The devil! The devil never ceases to attempt to place temptations in our way,

to distract us from living a holy life. Young people, beware especially of his ally, the wicked world. The wicked world is attractive. It advocates many 'good' things, some of which may sound familiar: environmentalism, diversity, inclusion. At first glance, some of these movements may even seem aligned to the Christian walk, but upon further examination, they often glorify the creature rather than the Creator, and encourage sin to fester under the cloak of acceptance, among others. Always be on the lookout, and remember to seek first the Kingdom of God (Matt 6:33).

Not as fools, but as wise. To walk circumspectly, wisdom is required. Wisdom is not easily obtained. Young King Solomon realized this when he asked God to grant him – not riches nor power – but wisdom. Pray that God grant us the wisdom to discern the truth from the lie – especially when today, the lies are well clothed in seeming righteousness. And read! Read good literature – like this magazine – and other good Christian books and magazines. Our King James Bible may not be the easiest to understand because of the old English used, but there are plenty of well-written articles and commentaries to help break down the passages into simpler terms that anyone can digest.

Redeeming the time. The word “redeem” can be interpreted as: to improve, to get back (something valuable) or to make an exchange (for something of value). Hence redeeming the time, simply put, is to make the most of your time here on earth. We realize that our days on this earth are few (70 to 80 years – Psalm 90:10). Our time on this earth is precious. What will you use it for? For lusting and coveting after the things of this earth - where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal (Matt 6:19)? Or for foolish talking and jesting?

Coming back to a more immediate consideration: your holiday time is short. November and December,

to be precise, then back to school again. What are you going to use this time for? I realize this has been an unusual year for us all, with the COVID-19 pandemic still nowhere near abating. As a youth, CK activities were a big part of my life, and now you have been made to take these activities online.

Though the road may seem weary and the effort even pointless, may I urge you to make the most of this December holiday, in whatever way you can. Christian fellowship is important. Take the initiative to meet with your brothers and sisters, in small groups if you must, but never stop. Attend and support the CK activities, even online. Look out for needs in the church and see if you can spare some time this holiday to encourage our brethren in the Lord.

Because the days are evil. Truly, the days are evil. Slowly but surely, the wickedness of the world is no longer wicked, but accepted. The evil has become the standard of good, and those who stand for the truth are now labelled the bad guys – intolerant, bigoted, etc. To make things worse, COVID-19 restrictions have decimated church life. CERC's event calendar has been basically empty the last 18 months. True, we had a few online events, but being online is no substitute. We need the time and space to gather to meet, to learn, to talk to one another, to encourage one another. This is how we help each other to stand strong in the wicked world. Pray that normalcy will return soon. But in the meantime, we need to support one another in whatever way we can. I pray that you will use this holiday to redeem the time, to fill your days with meaningful and God-glorifying activities, and to serve the cause of the Kingdom.

Book Review: The Peacemaker



Marcus Wee

Marcus Wee is a member of CERC and is currently studying for the ministry at the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary.

How do you handle conflict in your relationships? Do you avoid conflict at all costs, trying to avoid the potential pain and hurt that all-too-often results from such conflict? Are you at a loss on how to address sin in your relationships, whether your own sin or the sin of others? Do you find it immensely difficult to confess your sins to others, or to forgive others when they do confess theirs?

Whether we struggle in handling conflict in our relationships, or not, *The Peacemaker* will prove to be invaluable in pointing us to Scripture, and giving solid practical advice on resolving conflicts.

The author of the book, Ken Sande, is now president of Relational Wisdom 360, an organization focused on preventing conflict. He founded Peacemaker Ministries in 1982, a ministry that aims to equip Christians and churches to respond biblically to conflict.

The focus of the book is “how God can help you as an individual Christian [to] throw off worldly ideas about resolving conflict and become a true peacemaker” (15). The book is divided into four major sections, the 4 G’s of resolving conflict: 1) Glorify God (1 Cor. 10:31); 2) Get the log out of your eye (Matt. 7:5); 3) Gently restore (Gal. 6:1); 4) Go and be reconciled (Matt. 5:24).

Conflict starts in the heart, when our own idolatrous desires are unmet, and leads us to sinful responses...

Focusing on God is the key to resolving conflict constructively. God is sovereign, even over conflict, and ordains it for our good (62). One must see conflict not as a mere inconvenience, but as “an opportunity to glorify God, serve others, and grow to be like Christ” (31).

Here are a couple of important questions to ask during conflict: “How can I please and honor God in this situation? In particular, how can I bring praise to Jesus by showing that he has saved me and is changing me?” (34).

How we handle conflict is a glorious opportunity to be a witness to others of God’s saving work for and in us, and also to “breathe grace” to the one with whom we are at conflict.

Sande defines conflict as “a difference in opinion or purpose that frustrates someone’s goals or desires” (29). We must examine ourselves and our contribution to the conflict, no matter how small it may seem to us. As Matthew 7:5 instructs us, we are to get the beam (log) out of our own eye, before we presume to remove the mote (speck) in the brother’s eye.

Conflict starts in the heart, when our own idolatrous desires are unmet, and leads us to sinful responses, as James 4:1-3 details (102).

After we have examined ourselves and our own contribution to the conflict, we are to confess our sins to each other. One of the finest sections of this book is titled “The Seven A’s of Confession” (126-134). 1) Address everyone involved, those whom we have sinned against or who have witnessed our sin. 2) Avoid “if, but, and maybe,” for these words ruin a confession by shifting blame to others. 3) Admit

How we handle conflict is a glorious opportunity to be a witness to others of God's saving work for and in us, and also to "breathe grace" to the one with whom we are at conflict.

specifically what you did wrong, including wrong attitudes that were involved. 4) Acknowledge the hurt that the person endured as a result of your action. 5) Accept the consequences of your action (Appendix C explains how forgiveness is compatible with consequences). 6) Alter your behavior. 7) Ask for forgiveness (and allow time).

Do we confess our sins, often, to one another? How do we do so? We ought to follow the 7 A's of Confession, not mechanically and thoughtlessly, but from the heart.

Part 3 of the book is titled "Gently Restore." Chapter 6 provides some basic guidelines for talking privately to a person with whom we have had a conflict. When should we overlook the brother's sin with a love that covers a multitude of sins (1 Pet. 4:8), and when should we not overlook his sin, and instead speak to him about it (still out of a heart of love)? Here are some helpful guiding questions: "Is it dishonoring God? Is it damaging your relationship? Is it hurting others? Is it hurting the offender?" (150-155).

If and when we do decide to speak to the one with whom we have a conflict, what happens when the person does not recognize his contribution to the conflict, even after we have humbly acknowledged our own? Once again, Sande provides wise guidance (158-160).

Chapter 7 explains fundamental communication principles and how to apply them. When confronting

one about a conflict, one should focus on the gospel, and not on the law. It is the gospel, what God has done and is doing for us in Christ, that gives hope for change.

A second principle is good listening, including clarifying what others have to say, and agreeing specifically on any points in common (165-169).

Finally, it is important to speak clearly and constructively, taking every effort to speak, not in a manner so that we can be understood, but in a manner so that we cannot be misunderstood (176).

Chapter 8 elaborates on the principle of Matthew 18. One important principle is: "we should try to keep the circle of people involved in a conflict as small as possible for as long as possible" (186). Most of the instruction in this chapter is sound, although the author does have some odd advice for churches to deal with unrepentant sin (193).¹ Rather than follow such advice, we have the steps laid out in Article 77 of the Church Order for what to do in such a situation.

Part 4 of the book discusses forgiveness and reconciliation. Forgiveness is not passive; it is not excusing or minimizing the sin of the other; it is an active decision. In particular, forgiveness involves making four promises:

"I will not dwell on this incident."

"I will not bring up this incident again and use it against you."

"I will not talk to others about this incident."

"I will not let this incident stand between us or hinder our personal relationship." (209)

We ought to distinguish between the attitude of forgiveness, which one must have regardless of whether confession of sin is made, and the act of declaring forgiveness, which is done only upon the repentance and confession of the offender (210-211).

¹ Sande advises discreetly informing others in the church about the sin of the brother, so that they can call him to repentance.

Let us reflect on our own forgiveness of others for a moment. Do we strive to maintain an attitude of forgiveness towards those who have wronged us? When we say “I forgive you,” are we faithful in keeping the four promises outlined above?

Do we say, “I forgive you, but I can never forget what you did and I can never be close to you again?” That is not forgiveness; not the forgiveness that God freely shows to us in Christ; not the forgiveness that we are called to imitate: “forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Eph. 4:32b). At times, consequences for sin may be necessary (Appendix C), even after confession is made and forgiveness is granted, but not the cruel punishment of withdrawing one’s love and fellowship (213).

After forgiveness comes reconciliation. It is necessary to make a deliberate and sustained effort to maintain the relationship; otherwise, the relationship will deteriorate (219).

How does one work on reconciliation in the face of great difficulty? The author introduces what he calls the “Replacement Principle” (220-222). Negative thoughts, words, and actions cannot simply be put aside; they must be replaced by positive ones.

This is important first of all at the level of thought. When negative thoughts about a person enter

our minds, we have to replace them with positive thoughts, perhaps of his strengths instead of his weaknesses. As we do so, praying to God for grace, we will find ourselves thinking well of the person.

The same holds true also of our words and our actions. The author quotes a seemingly naïve yet true statement of C.S. Lewis: “Don’t waste time bothering whether you ‘love’ your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him” (221-222).

One concluding observation. This book ought not be read as a self-help book, as if following the guidelines mechanically will lead to resolved conflicts and improved relationships.

One must sincerely desire to show unconditional love and to seek the neighbor’s welfare above one’s own welfare. One must have a right heart that seeks to glorify God even in the midst of conflict. Only then will the principles, carefully considered, and the practical advice, discerningly followed, benefit the child of God and the relationships of which he is a part.

Sande, Ken. The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict. 3rd edition. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004.

NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES

Singapore

We rejoice with thankfulness for the ordination of Pastor Josiah Tan on 22 August 2021. Indeed it has been a long wait for CERC to have a minister and it is by God's gracious providing hand that we finally have one. We are also deeply thankful for all the ministers who have come to help with pulpit supply during our wait. We pray for Pastor Tan as he labours in our midst, that God may give him the utterance to preach God's work and wisdom in all things.

We are also thankful to be able to gather in larger numbers for congregational worship and to be able to fellowship face to face with one another. We pray that the COVID situation will continue to stabilise and that we will all be able to worship as one congregation once more, God willing.

America

The Reformed Witness Hour celebrated its 80th year anniversary since its first broadcast on Oct 12 1941. Over 4,100 weekly programs have aired on radio, and in more recent years, over the internet. In the next four months, Rev W. Bruinsma will deliver a series on Hebrews 11. You can listen online on your favourite podcast medium (Google music, Spotify and iTunes) or visit the links provided on the PRCA website!

India

We are saddened to hear that Kolkata is in lockdown due to a sharp rise in COVID deaths – do continue to pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ that they will be kept safe and well, God willing. On a more positive note, the congregation has found a new place for worship which is in a better location for members. It is a bare place and will need water, electricity and furnishing like windows and grills. The church is planning to rent the place first and purchase it later. Pray that God will continue to provide for them.

Philippines

It is with a heavy heart that we learn about the split which has taken place in the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines with the PRC in Bulacan withdrawing their membership from the denomination, taking with them the mission field in Leyte and two of the PRCP's seminary students.

We continue to keep the missionaries and the remaining churches in PRCP in prayer that the Lord will continue to uphold them. We pray that God will continue to bless the work there, despite the disruptions caused by the COVID pandemic and we are thankful that God has provided technological and other means to keep the work going.

COVENANT LIFE IN PICTURES



We rejoice upon the ordination of our new pastor! Pastor Josiah Tan pronounces the closing blessing for the first time and signs the Formula of Subscription.



Snapshots of video song presentations by the preschool class, Beulah Bible Study group and Gethsemane Bible Study group for CERC's 34th anniversary



CERC 34TH ANNIVERSARY | GETHSEMANE |

Psalter 370 | Psalm 133
The Communion of the Saints

1. HOW GOOD AND PLEASANT IS THE SIGHT
WHEN BRETHREN MAKE IT THEIR DELIGHT
TO DWELL IN BLEST ACCORD.
SUCH LOVE IS LIKE ANOINTING OIL
THAT CONSECRATES FOR HOLY TOIL
THE SERVANTS OF THE LORD

2. SUCH LOVE IN PEACE AND JOY DISTILLS,
AS 'OER THE SLOPES OF HERMON'S HILLS
REFRESHING DEW DESCENDS,
THE LORD COMMANDS HIS BLESSING THERE,
AND THEY THAT WALK IN LOVE SHALL SHARE
IN LIFE THAT NEVER ENDS

