

Rather than vindicate ourselves, we ought to desire to be like Christ! Christ, who is no less the embodiment of meekness and love. Let pilgrims who thus hope find...

Cheryl Lim - A Pilgrim's Path: Hope

It does not mean praying to God for good grades with the excuse: If God gives me good grades, I will be able to glorify Him. Giving your best means to be faithful and...

Chang Zi Hui - Honouring God in Our Studies

It is unrealistic, then, to think that we will have more time to establish and build true godly friendships later on in life. The time to establish and build friendships is now.

Lim Yang Zhi - Where Are My Friends?



salt shakers

joel 3:16 matthew 5:16

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1 John 3:2-3

"...we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."

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WELCOME TO THE 39TH ISSUE OF SALT SHAKERS!

Dear Readers,

We are grateful to God for making it possible to publish another edition of Salt Shakers. In this issue, Paul writes his last editorial as Editor of the magazine, for he will be taking over from Elder Leong as advisor of Salt Shakers. In his place, Aaron Lim will be succeeding as Editor from next issue onwards. We are especially thankful for Paul's faithful service as editor from the creation of the magazine till now, and for his continued labours for the magazine and in the church.

In this edition, we continue our consideration of the theme of "A Pilgrim's Path". As Peter writes, we are strangers to the world, elect according to the foreknowledge of God our father (1 Peter 1:1-2). Yet, we are in the world. How shall we walk in it? This is an important question for us to ask in the days of our youth. A pilgrim's life is fraught with trials, afflictions and tears, and those who believe the true Christian life is a way of ease in the world are deluded or in for a hard shock. The difficult path of a pilgrim in life does not appear an attractive prospect to anyone, and yet we are called to walk it. Moreover, we are called to walk it joyfully! Peter writes: "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations..." (1 Peter 1:6). How is this possible?

The subtheme of The Pilgrim's Path that we consider in this issue is the pilgrim's hope. As Christians, we have hope and comfort amidst all our sufferings. Our hope makes us sick with longing for our desire (Proverbs 13:12), but it also gives us patience and courage for each day. Our hope is absolutely certain, because it is a hope based on the promises of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore, we have joy unspeakable, even now (1 Peter 1:8), as we believe on, and wait patiently for the appearing of our Lord.

Armed with this hope, and called to this path, we return to the first question. How should we walk in it? The apostle goes on to instruct us. Being bought not by vain things, but with the precious blood of Christ, "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all matter of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy." (1 Peter 1:15-16).

The calling of the pilgrim is clear: to walk separate from the world; to live a holy life. Let us diligently and prayerfully consider this journey together in this issue, and how we may encourage one another as youth. God's blessings, and remember to pass the salt!

In Christ,
Lee Yang



A PILGRIM'S PATH: THE STEPS OF A GOOD MAN (PART 1)

>>Paul Liu



Paul Liu is Editor of Salt Shakers. He was also recently elected as Deacon in CERC in August

"The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way." Psalm 37:23

Pilgrims in this World

It is said in worldly wisdom that everyone dies, but not everyone truly lives. This is interesting because it shows that the sages and wise men of the world know two important things about this life. First, there is a common end or goal; and second, there is a way or journey that one takes en route to his end. In this very broad sense, everyone who lives is travelling on a path—much like a pilgrim.

But, what defines a pilgrim from just anyone who is travelling? The origins of the word "pilgrim" gives us a good idea; in its origins, the word has meaning related to being from another country, or being a foreigner. The philosophy of the worldly wise is to truly live by being at home and as one with the world. One who makes himself or herself at home in this world cannot be called a pilgrim. A pilgrim is someone who is acutely aware that his surroundings

are strange, and who earnestly looks for a dwelling-place of permanence, one whose builder and maker is God (Hebrews 11:8-10).

If you were to travel to another country—imagine a place you have never been to before—you will definitely feel that you are a stranger and foreigner there. You would not know how to get around, you would not know which places were safe or dangerous, and if you wanted to ask for directions or information, you might not even know how to speak their language! But, Christian pilgrims are yet something more than that. We are strangers not because of physical reasons like we are from another country, or because we speak another language; we are strangers because of a great spiritual difference between us and those of the world.

This difference is vast, as different as life and death—yes, spiritual life and spiritual death. Because we have been saved from our sin and misery through the Cross and quickened by the life of our resurrected Lord, we are spiritually alive people who live in the midst of a dark and sinful world. Immediately, we realise that the world is strange—just as they would consider us strange. Our spiritual eyes are opened to the dangers and vicious traps that lie in wait to cause our downfall (1 Peter 5:8). We find it difficult to understand the language and conversation of the world—just as they struggle to understand us and consider our lives foolish (John 15:18-20).

But yet, we are good pilgrims, only because we have been cleansed by Jesus' blood and are covered by the righteousness purchased for us at the Cross of Christ. We are saved by grace alone, and not because of any good in us. We do not embark on this pilgrimage because we consider ourselves holy and worthy enough for this journey. No, we embark on this journey because we are thankful pilgrims who have been given new lives, and so we willingly obey our Lord who has called and given us the privilege to be pilgrims and strangers in this world (Romans 12:1-2, Colossians 3, Ephesians 2:1-7).

Finally, a good pilgrim differs from any other traveller because the way he takes is one of struggle and difficulty. There is always another path that seems so much easier—both physically and spiritually—in so many aspects of a pilgrim's life, but yet he chooses to walk the strait and narrow path that leads to life (Matthew 7:13-14). It is foolishness to the world that we should carry the burden of sin on our

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backs as we daily flee to the Cross with weary footsteps and faltering breaths (1 Corinthians 1:18). It is foolishness that we should forgo the pleasures of sin and instead choose to suffer affliction with the people of God (Hebrews 11:25). It is foolishness to obey and serve the true and living God when the whole world is walking merrily in the opposite direction of godlessness and man-worship.

Are you a good man on a journey? Are you a pilgrim in this world?

Our Sovereign God

Those who journey with a purpose will often try to plan where they would like to be and how they should get there. They will direct their life according to their plans and do all in their power to accomplish their goals. However, the Bible says, “the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jeremiah 10:23). This means that no matter how hard he tries, man will never be the one who determines what happens in each step of his life. Even if life appears smooth sailing for a season, he will still be frustrated and troubled because he cannot rest in a sovereign Being who loves him and works all things out for his ultimate good. When the storms of life come upon him, everything comes crashing down because he realises that he is helpless and there is no comfort around him.

In stark contrast, though the journey of a pilgrim in this world is a treacherous one, he can be at peace because God’s Word says that his steps are ordered by the LORD. What wonderful knowledge is this that lets us rest no matter what troubles are around?

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Our journey in life is full of ups and downs, horizon after horizon, and paths of all different kinds. It would be easy to forget what a step means in such a journey. When you walked out of your house this morning, do you remember what the 35th step was like? Of course not, we could not even be bothered about such a small detail; and so how amazing it is when God tells us that he is concerned with each and every step of our journey! Every single detail of our lives comes to pass by the hand of our almighty Father (Luke 12:7) and so we never have to question if something happened by chance, or whether it happened because God had overlooked something and things spun out of control—never.

Jehovah’s sovereignty is also shown in the order of our steps. Sometimes, when things do not go according to plan, we may not question “Why?” but instead, we question “Why now?” We had a plan in our heads which we loved so much, but the sequence of things went haywire and we are left in distress. *The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD.* Our sovereign God does not just plan things that will happen in our lives, He plans and carries out His will down to the exact timing of every single event—and step—in our lives. You may have to take an extra year to complete your studies; you may have to

wait years for the right person to come along, and then some more for a little one to follow; your father may have been brought home while you were little. Remember, with your loving Jehovah God, nothing happens a moment too soon, and nothing a moment too late. Every step takes place at the right and perfect time whether we realise it yet or not. *My life in all its perfect plan, was ordered ere my days began* (taken from Psalter 383, versification of Psalm 139).

That our steps are “ordered” also has a very important meaning that holds further comfort for a pilgrim. Our steps are ordered in the sense of being commanded and established with power and authority. A little child can plan his own birthday party to the minutest detail with a timetable of events down to each minute, but it would be meaningless if he could not book the venue because he was too young or he could not order a birthday cake because he had no money. The LORD who plans the way of a pilgrim—down to the steps he should take—is the One whose Word created heaven and earth (Psalm 124:8); and He is also the One whose will is undeniable. The perfect plan of our lives as pilgrims is commanded and established in its exact detail by our sovereign God, and this holds infinite comfort for us pilgrims who love this God (Romans 8:28).

His Delight, Our Comfort

To understand anything about delight and any resulting comfort in this verse, we must first of all understand that the LORD delights in His own way. Knowing who He is as sovereign Creator of all things, it necessitates that everything He plans must first of all serve His glory and good pleasure. What is the greatest work of God in your life? To give you the best academic

**“...God delights
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results in your school? Or, to give you the highest paying job possible? Or, to make you live to a ripe old age? No, God’s greatest work in us as pilgrims is the work of salvation that He is bringing to pass in our lives.

Specifically, He orders all our steps so that we may be sanctified daily as we journey our way to heaven. God showed His pleasure and acceptance of Jesus’ sacrifice on the Cross by giving Jesus a seat at His right hand. This

delight extends to His work and way of sanctification in our lives. This is comforting to us as pilgrims because we are reminded that we are in Christ, and so God as long as God delights in the work of His Son, we will always be the objects of God’s delight and concern (Hebrews 10).

It follows, then, that God delights in the way of a pilgrim who walks in His will and way. In God’s plan, a pilgrim may sometimes wander down paths of danger and temptation. But if such a pilgrim is one who belongs to Him, then he will always be found and returned to the right path, to the great delight of the LORD (Luke 15:20-24). By God’s grace, pilgrims will continue to walk in the fear of the LORD, and though the way might be difficult and full of trials, they maintain their hope in His mercy. God takes pleasure in the way of

such pilgrims, and this knowledge gives added strength and encouragement to them (Psalm 147:11).

A pilgrim’s comfort is that he can rest in God’s work and delight in him. These are unmovable anchors in his life that will remain no matter how the winds and waves may rage (Psalm 121:3). Just like Paul and Silas did, a pilgrim in the worst of circumstances can pray in faith and sing joyful praises unto God (Acts 16:25). And so he, in turn, delights in the way and will of God in His life. He is happy with his lot in life, and continually enjoys sweet communion with the God of his salvation who he knows delights in him first.

Are we happy pilgrims?

(to be continued...)

LOVING CHURCHES WHO SEEK THE TRUTH

>>Pastor Daniel Kleyn



Pastor Daniel Kleyn is missionary of the PRCA to the Philippines.

Sad to say, there are many divisions within the church as the body of Christ. Although Christ has only one body, that body is often splintered in its

earthly manifestation. Many different denominations and/or independent congregations exist in the countries and cities in which we live and in all the world. The people of God are required to maintain church unity, but so often such unity is not seen. And the cause is sin, including the sin of departure from and rejection of the truth.

All of this raises the important question of how we, as a Reformed church and as Reformed believers, should view and relate to other churches. Specifically, how should we relate (both officially and as individuals) to churches that are

close to us in the faith but not one with us in that faith? Should we, because of doctrinal differences, keep them at arm’s length? Or may and ought we to seek them out and have fellowship with them?

These questions immediately bring to mind the command given in Ephesians 4:3 that we must endeavour “to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

What is especially clear from this verse is that church unity is not a pipedream, but a reality. We are not commanded

to establish church unity, or to create it. Rather, we are admonished “to keep the unity of the Spirit!” This means that church unity exists. It is something that Christ has given us. Having done so, Christ now gives us the calling to maintain and preserve it. We must make sure, by His grace, that it is not lost or destroyed.

The reason unity is a reality is because it is the unity “of the Spirit.” The Holy Spirit creates and establishes this unity. Without the Spirit, church unity would be impossible, also within our own local church. By nature we are not united to each other, for sin causes separation (Isaiah 59:2). Sin makes us proud, independent, self-centred, and argumentative. Sin causes us to disagree and fight, and thus to separate from each other. Sin also causes us to be interested in and even to run after every wind of doctrine. But the Spirit destroys the ruling power of sin in God’s elect and unites them. Having the same Spirit, we have the same life, and faith, and Lord. Having the same Spirit, we are united in the truth. The Spirit leads the people of God to know, believe, confess and live by the same truths. We are united to others, not regardless of what we believe (as advocated by the ecumenical movement), but because of what we believe. Unity in the Spirit is unity in Christ, which is unity in the truth.

“Our calling to maintain the unity of the Spirit (which is unity in the truth) must be our starting point...”

Our calling to maintain the unity of the Spirit (which is unity in the truth) must be our starting point and guiding principle in how we relate to other churches and other believers.

God has given our churches the body of truth. He has given us the precious truth of the gospel of His sovereign grace in Jesus Christ. He has revealed that truth to us in His Word. He has given it to us as it is summarized and set forth in our Reformed confessions. God has also given us in our own congregation(s) unity in that truth. That truth should be precious to us. We must guard and protect it. We must stand for the truth of God without compromise. This means we may not unite with those who oppose it, but only with those who are one with us in the truth.

The question now is, how do we carry this out? In answer to that question, it must be clear from the outset that the way in which this is carried out with those who are not one with us varies from church to church, and from situation to situation.

If there are churches who have made it clear that they are determined to oppose and reject the truth, certainly we cannot be close to them nor continue to seek unity with them. By their conscious and deliberate rejection of God’s Word, they give evidence of departure from the faith. Instead of being a church that is reforming and coming to a clearer understanding and confession of the truth, they are moving further away from the truth. This does not mean that they have immediately become a false church. But the fact is that they have shown by their wilful rejection of the truth that they are headed in that direction.

“If there are churches who have made it clear that they are determined to oppose and reject the truth, certainly we cannot be close to them nor continue to seek unity with them”

Although we cannot have close relationships with such churches and their members (for how can two walk together, except they be agreed? (Amos 3:3)), we must still love them. After all, Christ commanded that we should love even our enemies (Matthew 5:44). Thus, we certainly must love those who have departed or are departing from the faith.

The critical thing is how that love comes to expression. It does not manifest itself by “walking together,” but rather by seeking humbly to show such churches and members the seriousness of their departure from the truth. Love for them means we strive to draw them back to the truth. Whenever we have opportunity to communicate with them, we call and encourage them to embrace once again the precious gospel of God’s Word.

Perhaps a more common situation (as is also expressed by the title of this article) is that we come across churches and believers who, although they are not one with us in the truth, are nevertheless showing some interest in that truth. They become acquainted

with our churches, and curious about our beliefs. They want to know what sets us apart from other “Reformed” churches. They would like to hear more. They might even request that we provide preaching and teaching in their church.

Obviously we must love them. But now that love comes to expression in different ways. For if someone is interested in the truth (even if that interest is only small for now), this is an indication that they are heading in the right direction. In contrast to those who have rejected the truth and are headed in the direction of departure and apostasy, these churches and believers are headed in the direction of coming closer to the truth. And that is critical – the direction a church is taking.

It is especially such churches and believers that we should reach out to and befriend. We may not cut them off and isolate ourselves from them on the basis that they do not confess (yet) what we do. If we did that, how would they ever come to know and love the truth? Instead, we ought to reach out to them and visit with them, both officially as churches as well as on a personal level. If they desire that our pastor(s) lecture or preach, then if possible we willingly grant that as a consistory/session. And if the latter does occur, then we as individuals can perhaps go along and make good use of the opportunity to get to know the other church and its members, to witness to them by our lives and words, and to encourage them in their pursuit of the truth.

We need to remember that this should always be done with a measure of care, for we must never compromise the truth, nor allow ourselves to be led astray by those who do not hold to it. Yet as those who have been personally

“As God gives opportunity, may our churches and members be willing instruments in His hands...”

blessed by the truth, we eagerly want others to know it and to be blessed through it. Our fellowship with these churches and believers, along with our witness to them, is motivated by our loving desire that they might have and experience what we do. We want them to embrace and be comforted by the gospel of Christ that comforts us.

This takes much wisdom. Our goal is that they embrace the truth for proper reasons. We need to be on guard that they do not embrace it (or put on an appearance of embracing it) for monetary or social or other earthly reasons. We want them to embrace it because they become personally convicted that it is indeed the truth of God’s Word.

It also takes much patience and prayer. It has been my experience that it can take many, many years of patient

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instruction from the Scriptures and from our Reformed confessions, along with patiently answering questions, before such churches fully understand the truth and reach the point where, by the grace and Spirit of God, they are convicted of it and come to love it. But our love for God and His truth, and our consciousness of the calling to maintain the unity of the Spirit in that truth, compels us to undertake such patient and prayerful labour.

In conclusion, we do well to ponder the Preamble of the PRCA’s Constitution of the Committee for Contact with Other Churches. It reads as follows:

The Protestant Reformed Churches in America, in obedience to Scripture as interpreted in our three forms of unity, confess that there is one holy, catholic church. They believe, further, that it is their sacred duty to manifest the true unity and catholicity of the church on earth in as far as that is possible, not only in their denominational fellowship, but also in conjunction with all churches which have obtained like precious faith with us, both domestic and foreign.

This certainly applies to the official work of a church (or churches) in reaching out to other churches who are seeking the truth. But the principles also apply to the individual believers and members. As God gives opportunity, may our churches and members be willing instruments in His hands who strive, by life and by speech, to win over and thus gain others to the precious truths of His gospel. And may God bless such efforts, carried out by weak and sinful means, in order to manifest the reality of true, blessed unity among those to whom He has entrusted His truth.

A PILGRIM'S PATH: HOPE

>>Cheryl Lim



Cheryl Lim is a confessing young adult in CERC.

Not too long ago, the Lord dealt a heavy hand upon my family. An affliction so difficult to bear that we thought we would all but be consumed by it. It gave us countless sleepless nights and damp pillows. It was the cause of tension, resentment, frustration and anger at the dinner table. I struggled. Work became a comfort and a refuge, while church, somewhat of a dread. I coped by ignoring the problem, under the pretext of waiting on the Lord and submitting to His will. It was a case of waiting the storm out. Yet all the while, a more bitter storm raged within my soul.

One morning, I received a call from a dear friend in USA. A friend who, like me, bore a burden from the Lord. Indeed, a burden so great, it made mine feel small and light in comparison. In that conversation, she impressed upon me truths that I absolutely needed to hear. Or perhaps truths that I had known all along, but had chosen to ignore. These were the simple, straightforward principles of love and humility. The conflict that we were embroiled in had often left me feeling wronged, maligned, and mistreated.

There are a few ways in which one can treat this topic of a Pilgrim's hope. One may do so exegetically by expounding on specific texts. Or one could deal with it thematically by writing on various aspects of hope, and making reference to relevant passages in Scripture. But it is the intent of the author to take a slightly different approach in this article. And that is to write of hope from the personal perspective of the child of God as she makes her pilgrimage through this earth. While both of the above methods (exegesis and themes) will still feature, they will be applied to the pilgrim's journey with all its sorrows, trials and afflictions.

Why, you may ask. Simply because hope is not a cold and objective truth that belongs behind the doors of our sanctuary or catechism rooms. Rather, what is written in Scripture about this is real and true to the experience and life of the child of God. While this hope may sometimes be a flicker, and other times a roaring fire, it truly lives in the heart of every pilgrim. Hope, that causes one to cling fast to the sure promises of God even when the waves of life's tumults come crashing down. And perhaps, in this pilgrim we will see ourselves, and her hope may be our very own.

This provided me justification to pursue my self-righteous course of action. I did not know how to, and perhaps refused to, resolve this humbly and lovingly. However, by laying before me snippets of her own life, this friend taught and encouraged me to do so. Though completely at odds with the pride of my human nature, this hour-long chat brought such calm to my soul it was as if Christ Himself had said "Peace, be still".

Sometimes the Lord has a way of teaching us lessons so that they really stick. At around the same period when I had this chat, a small group of us had been practising to sing at a friend's wedding. The proposed song was titled "No Greater Gift". What more, it was based on 1 Corinthians 13. It was as if the call from halfway around the globe was not sufficient and God, in His providence, had me sing from one of the greatest chapters on love. The lyrics

gripped my soul. They did. It does not always happen with choir singing, but these words resonated with me as they left my lips.

Love is kind and gentle, rejoicing in the truth.

*Love is not proud. Love is not rude.
Love never fails, though all other gifts
will cease.*

Love hopes and endures, love bears and believes...

If I have no love, I am nothing at all.

There is no gift greater than love.

How does hope fit into all this? The words of the Apostle John sheds light, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." (1 John 3:2-3) If I have certain hope that I will be like

Christ when He appears (and I do), then will not I purify myself? As John Calvin puts it, “it cannot be but that this hope will excite and stimulate us to follow purity, for it leads us straight to Christ, whom we know to be a perfect pattern of purity.” This, I believe, is one of the hallmarks of hope. Rather than vindicate ourselves, we ought to desire to be like Christ! Christ, who is no less the embodiment of meekness and love. Let pilgrims who thus hope find in themselves such a yearning for purity. In a similar fashion, the Apostle Paul exhorts “And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.” (Romans 13:11-12) Likewise in 1 Corinthians 15:58 and its preceding verses, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.” Our salvation is at hand! In the twinkling of an eye, we shall be changed! We shall put on incorruption and immortality! The hope of such a future is the basis for our holy pilgrimage at present.

This was a trial that brought my own sins, and the sins of others around me, under the spotlight. It was dismaying, yea, despairing, to witness the reality of the cry, “But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.” (Isaiah 64:6) While striving to be pure, I grappled intensely with my sins; the quickness of the mind to conjure wicked thoughts (quicker, I almost feel, than my conscious mind can stop it); the fire of a tongue, truly, an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

**“As your feet slide
on the loose gravel,
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relief yet again.”**

Early one morning, as I was starting yet another day's battle, I received a text from a mother in church (indeed, one whose children arise up and call her blessed). She called my attention to Luke 7:36ff, which records the account of the woman who washed Christ's feet with her tears. I read “... Her sins, which are many, are forgiven...” (v.47) It was her faith that saved her; faith that was a gift from God. Faith that He gifts to each of His children, freely. This forgiveness of sins and hope of perfection will cause us to lift up our voices in echo of the prophet Micah, “Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.” (Micah 7:18,19)

It has been a long-drawn ordeal. Just when you think you have reached the peak and overcome the fight, you see an even higher peak beyond and with a sigh continue the weary trudge up. As your feet slide on the loose gravel, threatening to obliterate your past labours, the Lord mercifully sends relief yet again. This time, it was a sister-in-Christ, my “mirror” [1], who was the instrument of grace. She brought to me these wise words from Scripture

“Whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof: so he that waiteth on his master shall be honoured.” (Proverbs 27:18) The farmer painstakingly cares for his fig tree, tenderly cultivating it, pruning it, nourishing it, with the eventual reward of eating of its fruit. In like manner, as the servant waits on his Master, faithfully observing His commands, he will be honoured. Elsewhere, we have the promises “...for them that honour me I will honour...” (1 Samuel 2:30), and “If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour.” (John 12:26)

An aspect of hope includes the longing for the reward that is to come. At judgement day, we shall receive our reward of grace, and Christ will be our all in all. In hope of this reward, we do well to patiently labour and wait upon our Master. Even when the present returns are small, and even when we are at the brink of exhaustion. We press on!

And so, my fellow pilgrims, as we continue our sojourn which will undoubtedly be filled with tribulations, let us hope in the coming of our Lord, in the reward which is to come, in the forgiveness of our sins, and turn not to the left hand nor to the right. Let us confess with one accord “The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places.” (Habakkuk 3:19)

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[1] Prov 27:19 As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man.

CREATURES: SHEEP

>>Lim Tze Yan



Lim Tze Yan is a confessing young adult of CERC.

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Timothy 3:16).

God-breathed, and there Scripture came – that is literally what “given by inspiration” means. In His Word, God is pleased to reveal His secret counsel and will to us. Further, in His revelation to us, God is also pleased to use different and various metaphors, symbols, parables, and types in order that we, as His people, may understand the spiritual realities and truths of His Word. One of the many earthly figures used in Scripture is the sheep. In this article, we will delve into the symbolisms and significance of sheep.

The Symbolism of the Lamb as Jesus

Oftentimes when we come across verses on sheep in Scripture, we are quick to relate the reference to us – we are called the sheep of Jesus (Psalm 23, 44:22; Romans. 8:36)! While sheep has its reference to us (which we will look at in the following paragraphs), it is not the only symbolism. Jesus is also at times referred to as the Sheep, or more familiarly, the Lamb (John. 1:29; Revelation 12:11, 14:4, 17:14, 22:3). The picture of the lamb has its spiritual reality in Jesus because lambs were used

as sacrifices for sin offerings in the Old Testament. When our first parents fell into sin and tried to cover their shame by sewing fig leaves (Genesis 3:7), God taught them that He alone could take away their shame and guilt of sin through the sacrifice of Jesus by providing them with coats of skin (Genesis 3:21).

Adam and Eve then taught their children to offer a lamb of sacrifice for their sins as it pointed to the spiritual reality that was to come – Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. By faith, Abel held on to the promise of the Lamb and offered “unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh” (Hebrews 11:4). Throughout the Old Testament, the people of God offered the best of their flocks, those without blemish, as atonement for their sins (Leviticus 1). The sacrifices made by the Old Testament saints were not only in awareness of their sins, but also in hope of the promise that their sins will be atoned for by the perfect sacrifice of the sinless and spotless Lamb that was to come. In essence, these offerings and sacrifices in the Old Testament were pictures that pointed to the spiritual reality—Jesus Christ.

The Significance of the Lamb as Jesus

“He [Jesus] was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to

the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth” (Isaiah 53:7).

In the prophecy of the coming of Jesus, Isaiah likened Jesus’ suffering throughout His lifetime to the shearing and slaughtering of sheep. Just as a sheep is silent and does not resist when it is under such circumstances, Jesus was silent when He was mocked and despised (Matthew 26:57-68). Jesus’ silence does not equate to Him being weak in any sense. Rather, Jesus’ silence was His perfect submission and humble obedience to His Father’s will (Matthew 26:38-39). Jesus had all power – He is also very God (HC. Q.A. 17) – to go against His enemies, but He knew that His suffering, not just on the cross, but all the time He lived on earth, was necessary in order to “redeem our body and soul from everlasting damnation, and obtain for us the favour of God, righteousness and eternal life” (HC. Q.A. 37). The picture of a sheep has reference to Jesus from the perspective of His perfect obedience of suffering to accomplish the will of His Father – atonement and redemption for His people (John 1:29b).

The Symbolism of Sheep as the People of God

“Thus shall they know that I the LORD their God am with them, and that they, even the house of Israel, are my people, saith the LORD GOD. And ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men, and I am your God, saith the Lord GOD.” (Ezekiel 34:30-31).

**“Just like sheep,
we are utterly
dependent on God,
who is the giver and
taker of life; without
whom, we can do
nothing at all”**

As mentioned, we, as those whom God has chosen are also called His sheep (Psalm 78:52, 79:13; Matthew 27:31-46; John 21:15). At this point, before moving on, we ought to note that the representation of Jesus as a Lamb is different than the representation of us as sheep. The picture of a lamb pointed to the aspect that Jesus showed perfect obedience and humility as He did His Father's will. On the other hand, when the same picture is used on us, it has a different meaning.

Why are we called sheep? Before we answer the question, let us look at some characteristics of sheep first.

Sheep are dependent creatures

Sheep depend on their shepherd to search for suitable pastures for them to graze in. If sheep were to graze on pastures that are uncommon to their diet, they may die from bloating. Sheep are also helpless because they are defenceless against their predators. Unlike the deer who have strong legs to run fast when in danger or huge tusks like the elephants to fight back against their predators, sheep have neither of those mechanisms to defend themselves. They rely heavily on their shepherd to protect them.

Sheep are directionless creatures

Sheep are prone to wander. Such is especially prevalent when they are in a comfortable environment – one

that has lush pastures and still waters. Neither do sheep have enough sense to find their way back to the flock. They need their shepherd to watch out for them and to keep them together as a flock.

Sheep are stubborn creatures

Ever tried to move a sheep? If a sheep refuses to move, it would not budge a bit. There is great necessity to move the flock together, for there is safety! But does the stubborn sheep want safety? In its obstinate ways, the sheep just wants its own way, not knowing what is best for itself.

Does the description of sheep sound awfully familiar?

Consider this: Do we know how to protect ourselves against spiritual dangers and against our enemies (Ephesians 6:12)? Do we know where the straight and narrow path that we ought to take is? Do we know that it leads to the gates of splendour? Or are we unwittingly led onto the wide and broad path that leads to the gates of destruction (Matthew 7:13-14)?

Just like sheep, we are utterly dependent on God, who is the giver and taker of life; without whom, we can do nothing at all (Matthew 10:29; Hebrews 1:3). Absolute dependence on God extends further than just our physical life – it includes our salvation (Acts 4:12). We, who daily increase our debt of sin, can in no wise deliver ourselves from it. We depend entirely on Jesus to save and deliver us from all our sins (Hebrews 7:25).

Just like sheep, we are prone to wander. As the prophet Isaiah writes, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way” (53:6). From the days of Moses, we have seen how

often the people of Israel murmured when their journey to Canaan was difficult; how often they blamed Moses and wanted to return to Egypt where there were better food and conditions (Exodus 16:1-3; Numbers 11:1-6). Just as Israel coveted after a prosperous physical life, we fall into the same sin of covetousness when our hearts lust after earthly riches and pleasures. Taking a vacation is not wrong in itself, neither is having more wealth than others. God may be pleased to bless us with such physical gifts. However, to what extent do we seek after such earthly treasures? Have they become mammon that we seek to serve (Matthew 6:24)? When our hearts crave after the things of the world, have we then wandered away from God?

Just like sheep, we are obstinate in our sinful ways. The root of our stubbornness is actually pride (Acts 7:51). The attitude that our hearts take is one of “I-know-better-than-God”. How often are we slow to respond when the Word of God comes to us! In our stubbornness, we dread and refuse to break the fallow ground of our hearts—we allow our ‘pet’ sins to thrive (Jeremiah 4:3-4; Hosea 10:12-13). Like the stubborn sheep that refuse to budge, we insist on following our deceitful hearts.

The Comfort God Gives to His Sheep

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.” (John 10:27-28)

Though we are dependent, wandering, and stubborn sheep, God takes pity upon us for the sake of His Son who

came as a Lamb and sacrificed Himself for the atonement of His sheep (John 10:11, 15). Jesus, not only the Lamb of God, but also the good Shepherd, has claimed us to be His! By the work of His Spirit in us, we hear His voice in the preaching of His Word; we hear His voice in the reading of the Bible. The voice of Jesus is efficacious, continually and constantly working in us, sanctifying our hearts. In response to His voice, we obey Him in love. We cleave to the Shepherd, trusting that He will always lead us to green pastures and

still waters, where there is safety (Psalm 23:1-2). And finally, as His sheep, we are assured that we have eternal life with Him, now and in heaven. The assurance given by Jesus in the original language strongly emphasises—it is in fact one of the strongest negations in Scripture—the impossibility of perishing. What a great comfort we have as sheep!

Yes, we are dependent sheep – but what greater joy and comfort do we have from depending on the illimitable and omnipotent Saviour than depending on our weak and sinful selves! And

yes, we are wandering sheep – but our Shepherd never leaves us wandering; rather, He seeks and brings us back to His fold (Matthew 18:12-14; Luke 15:3-7)! And yes, we are stubborn sheep, by nature – but the Holy Spirit has renewed our hearts that we may confess our frailty and need to be turned by the grace of God (Psalm 73:26)!

His sheep shall never perish! What great comfort we have as His sheep!

CHARISMATICISM (PART 6): MIRACLES

>>Pastor Angus Stewart



Pastor Angus Stewart is Minister of the Word at Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland (www.cprc.co.uk).

In the previous five articles on renewalism (Pentecostalism, Charismaticism and neo-Charismaticism), we covered its history (including each of these “three waves” and their precursors) and its peculiar views on the baptism with the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues and prophecy. We now conclude with one last feature of the renewalist movement: its claim to perform miracles in the post-apostolic age.

Nature of Miracles in the Bible

The nature of miracles in the Bible, especially the healing miracles, is very different from that of the Charismatics. You could say that the miracles in Scripture specialize in hard cases: demon-possessed people, paralytics, the blind, the lame and even the dead. This makes biblical miracles easy to verify. This is not the case with the so-called healings of the renewalists. C. Peter Wagner of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, states that his healings major in headaches and backaches. How do you verify these “cures”?

Look, for example, at the stark contrast between the unverifiable healings of headaches and backaches, etc., and the miracle recorded in Acts 3-4. In Acts 4:16, after Peter (and John) healed the man who was born lame, the false leaders of the church declared, “What

shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it.”

Notice how all who came to the apostles to be healed were always healed, as in Acts 5:16: “There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one of them.” This is very different from Pentecostal or renewalist healing services, where unhealed folks make their sorry way home after yet another meeting.

There were no relapses for those healed in God’s Word. Compare this with the many poor souls filled with enough adrenalin to get out of their wheelchairs on the stage but a day or two afterwards are no better. Two thousand years

after the apostles, there is a world of difference!

If anyone claims to do miracles, the question must be asked, What do they mean by miracles? Do they mean what the Bible means, namely, that all who come for healings are always, verifiably, completely and immediately healed of various and serious afflictions, without any relapses or remuneration for the healer or anything designed to whip up the crowd or play on their emotions? [1] Scriptural miracles are the standard, the benchmark. All that falls short is fraudulent and spurious, and must be rejected by God's people.

Workers of Miracles in the Bible

Whom does God use to work miracles after Pentecost? In 2 Corinthians 12:12, miracles, "signs, and wonders," are called, not the signs of believers, nor the signs of specially anointed or baptized saints, but "the signs of an apostle." This is also what you discover when you go through the book of Acts. Acts 2:43 and 5:12 clearly state that it was the apostles who performed miracles. The apostle Peter heals the lame man in Acts 3. In Acts 5, God slays Ananias and Sapphira at Peter's word—you do not hear much from renewalists claiming that sort of miracle! Peter heals paralyzed Aeneas and raises Tabitha from the dead in Acts 9. Paul performs various miracles in Acts 13-28.

There are three other individuals who were not apostles who did miracles. First, Philip wrought miracles in Acts 8 but he was an evangelist (Acts 21:8)—another extraordinary, temporary office—and he was ordained as a deacon by apostles (Acts 6:5-6). Second, Stephen performed miracles (Acts 6:8). He was also deacon who

was ordained by an apostle (Acts 6:5-6) and the first Christian martyr (Acts 7). In that he wrought miracles, God especially stamped him as the first one after Pentecost to give up his life for Jesus Christ. Third, Ananias in Acts 9 wrought a miracle but he was a prophet, for he received a vision in which Christ spoke to him. This miracle was unusual, too, in that Christ had earlier struck Paul blind on the Damascus Road and then He sent the prophet Ananias to Paul to restore to the apostle his sight. There are no prophets today, as my previous article proved.

1 Corinthians 12 may seem to indicate that some outside of the extraordinary offices in Corinth wrought miracles, yet we note that this is in the apostolic age and that the apostle Paul himself was the founder of this church (Acts 18; 1 Corinthians 3). Moreover, in Paul's next epistle to the Corinthians, he refers to miracles as "signs of an apostle" (2 Corinthians 12:12) because they were performed in the apostolic age: 1) by apostles or 2) on apostles (e.g., Acts 9) or 3) by prophets, who functioned alongside apostles (Ephesians 2:20; 3:5; 4:11), or 4) by evangelists, who were apostolic helpers (Ephesians 4:11; 2 Tim. 4:5), or 5) by those ordained by apostles.

Miracles in the False Church

Another point must be made with respect to miracles. Nowhere in the Bible do we have predictions or promises of the saints working miracles in post-apostolic days. Nor does God's Word present a future in which the true church will work some miracles and the false church will too. Although there are passages to which some people will appeal, Scripture clearly predicts miracles in the line of the development of the false church alone.

In Matthew 24:24, false Christs and false prophets will work great signs and wonders (cf. Mark 13:22). According to 2 Thessalonians 2:9, mighty miracles will be performed by the man of sin. In Revelation 13, 16 and 19, the miracles are wrought by the false prophet in the service of the beast.

The Bible also teaches that the mystery of iniquity, which is the spirit of Antichrist, was working already in the first century and keeps working through the millennia to bring forth the Antichrist (2 Thess. 2:7; 1 John 2:18). The line of false miracles runs in the development of apostate Christianity.

You can see this, too, if you read church history, as we saw in my second article in this series entitled "The Precursors of Modern Charismatic Christianity." The Montanists, the abundance of false miracles in the Dark Ages, the Anabaptists, the French Prophets, Edward Irving and the Catholic Apostolic Church, and the church of Rome today (especially with her Marian miracles) and modern renewalism—all prepare the way for the greatest anti-Christian miracle worker of all time, Antichrist. That great man of sin will perform real, mighty miracles, unlike much of the weak, deceptive miracles in Charismatic and Romanist circles.

"...Scripture clearly predicts miracles in the line of the development of the false church alone."

Conclusion

I could highlight, and expand upon, other problems connected with renewalism but I will only briefly mention some of them.

Prosperity theology, also known as the health and wealth gospel, came out of renewalism and retains its distinctive false teachings. Scripture tells us that the love of money is the root of all sorts of evil (1 Timothy 6:10), yet in the health and wealth movement that is preached as the gospel!

Renewalism boasts in horrendous, unbiblical worship practices (especially people falling backwards and doing “carpet time,” and adults uttering gibberish in religious services), which are far from, and diametrically opposed to, the regulative principle of worship (cf. Leviticus 10:1-2; Deuteronomy 12:32; Isaiah 1:12; Matthew 15:5-9; John 4:24).

The false ecumenism of renewalism is well-known. The Pope even invited a charismatic contingent to Vatican II

(1962-1965). Idolatrous bodies have a way of seeking each other out and working together!

Then there are the Modalist renewalists: those Pentecostals and Charismatics who reject the orthodox doctrine of the Holy Trinity and especially deny the distinct personality of the Holy Spirit. Even with their heretical views of the Holy Spirit, they can still receive the “baptism of the Holy Spirit,” they can still “speak in tongues,” they can still utter “prophecies” and they can still perform “miracles,” just like the other renewalists! It makes no difference. Apparently believing the truth concerning the Holy Spirit does not matter when it comes to His “gifts.”

In his very helpful book, *The Theology of the Holy Spirit*, Frederick Bruner observes that, in his analysis of the doctrine of the renewalists, the theologian he found most helpful was Martin Luther. [2] Why? Because Luther deeply grasped salvation in Christ alone through grace alone by faith alone to the glory of God alone according to Scripture alone.

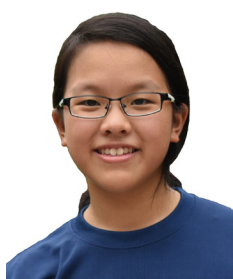
It was Luther who issued the famous rebuke to the Anabaptists, the charismatics of his day: “I slap your spirit on the snout.” Think about it. What well-known animal has a snout? A pig, an unclean beast in the Old Testament. Luther was declaring, “Your spirit is an unclean spirit and I slap it—hard.” Remember also Luther’s prayer. He besought his heavenly Father that He would fill him with His Word alone and that God would never, ever, give him visions or direct revelation but would make him blessedly content with, and rich in, sacred Scripture alone! Luther’s scriptural and spiritual desires, prayers, contentment and warfare should be ours too!

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- [1] Cf. Angus Stewart, “Eight Facts Regarding Biblical Healings” (www.cprf.co.uk/articles/healings.html)
- [2] Frederick Dale Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), p. 344.

HONOURING GOD IN OUR STUDIES

>>Chang Zi Hui



Chang Zi Hui is a youth in CERC.

As Christians, it is our chief duty and privilege to honour and glorify God in everything that we do as stated in 1 Corinthians 10:31: “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” In the Lord’s Prayer Christ has taught us (Matthew 6:9-13) in the first petition - “Hallowed be Thy name”. This petition teaches us

to ask for the right to “sanctify, glorify and praise” God not only in all His works, but also to “use our whole lives, our thoughts, words and actions” to honour and praise God’s name (LD47, QA122). Therefore, the principal purpose of our studies must be to bring honour and glory to God through them.

“As Christians, it is our chief duty and privilege to honour and glorify God...”

With all this said, how exactly do we honour God in our studies? We honour God in our studies, first, by giving our best in all that we do. Giving your best does not mean doing well in all the subjects. It does not mean praying to God for good grades with the excuse: If God gives me good grades, I will be able to glorify Him. Giving your best means to be faithful and to use the talents God has given each and every one of us to serve Him. In the parable of the talents, the lord praised the two servants who gained more talents with the talents he had given them and called the servant who hid his talent in the earth “wicked and slothful”. The wicked and slothful servant’s talent was then taken away and given to one of the servants who had gained talents. (Matthew 25:14-30) This teaches us that if we do not properly use our talents and gifts to the best of our ability, we will be judged and held responsible for that. It does not matter if we do not do well. If we have given our best, it is our best and we should be content with it.

“...we can honour God in our studies by being content with whatever He gives us.”

Second, we can honour God in our studies by being content with whatever he gives us. Some of us think that we can glorify God with what we achieve. However, that is denying God’s glory by trying to control what we can glorify Him with. We should instead trust in Him to give us what we deserve, and even if the results are different and opposite from what we expected, we must still be satisfied with them. Nevertheless, this does not mean that we simply sit back and slack off, and then be content with our results as mentioned in the previous point.

Last, we can honour God in our studies by separating ourselves from the world, namely, the unbelieving students. We Christians are called to live a “holy and spiritual life separate from the world”. This does not mean “living along with the world in its lusts” or “seeking to flee the world in the physical and local sense of the word” (Bekkering, 1983). Some ‘worldly’ people chase after academic success so that it becomes the most important thing to them in life. We cannot and must not follow these people. Yes, we can and ought to treat our studies as an important thing in our lives. But prioritising our studies too much leaves us at a risk that we might possibly regard our studies as more important than God. This is, in fact, idolatry! “To seek and accumulate earthly treasure (possessions) out of these (evil) motives is to make an idol god of them” (Slopsema, 2015). However, we also should not run away from studying. Instead, we should seek to honour God with our studies. By separating ourselves from the world, we set ourselves as clear examples for the unbelievers to see. We witness to them with our behaviour the glory of God. “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the

“We honour God in our studies, first, by giving our best in all that we do.”

praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1Peter 2:9).

What then, is the blessedness of honouring God in our lives? If we seek God, His glory and His heavenly things, we receive “the reward of grace”. This reward comprises of “the Father Himself”, “grace for the good fight of faith” and “the new earth” (Ophoff, 1951). God gives us Himself and the strength to fight against the world. “For they who honour the Father, the Father will honour” (Ophoff, 1951). We must learn to honour God in our studies!

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SCRIPTURE'S COVENANT YOUTH (PART 2): ISAAC

>>Prof. Hanko



Prof. Herman Hanko is a retired professor of the Protestant Reformed Seminary. His present work consists of preaching at Hope Protestant Reformed Church, writing for the Salt Shakers magazine, writing in a forum for the young people in Singapore, and writing new books. He has been to CERC many times and is dear to the people here.

We begin our discussion of Scripture's teaching concerning various young people who are noted in the Bible for being children of God's Covenant. I begin with Isaac, the son of Abraham and Sarah.

Scripture doesn't say a lot about his youth, but some things are important for God's purpose in the life of Isaac and for our instruction. I hope you will read all the Bible says about Isaac so that you may have the material Scripture gives us in your minds. There are passages in the New Testament that speak of Isaac's youth as well as the history recorded for us in Genesis.

Let us remember before we begin that the entire history in Scripture of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob revolves

around God's promise to send to His people the "Seed of the Woman" who was Christ. What is included in Scripture about these patriarchs is only the material that has to do with God's faithfulness to His promise to send Christ.

This same interest of Scripture in the coming of Christ is evident in the Genesis narrative of Isaac's birth. Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah was 90 years old when Isaac was born. He was truly a son of his parents' old age. God deliberately waited so long before giving them a son that both Abraham and Sarah were much too old to have. God was showing them that the true seed of the woman would be born only by a miracle—as Isaac was. Human beings cannot bring forth one who saves us from hell; it takes a miracle of God's working. Isaac was truly a miracle child. Isaac himself knew that. He knew he was born by a miracle; he knew that he was the promised seed of the woman of whom God had spoken to Adam. He knew that he was the heir of the birthright blessing. (You will remember what we learned about the birthright in our forum discussion of Jacob.) But he not only knew it; he dedicated his life to being a faithful Covenant son.

Isaac did this even though he was persecuted because of it.

You will recall that Abraham had another son, named Ishmael, a child born out of the union of Abraham and Hagar, Sarah's slave. Both Abraham and Sarah thought they would help the

Lord along, because the Lord seemed to be remiss in fulfilling His promise. So they decided that Abraham should marry Hagar and have a child with her; that would help God bring into the world the promised seed for Ishmael could be that promised seed.

But Ishmael was not the seed of the woman. He thought he was and he acted as though he was. He claimed the birthright for he was the firstborn; and he hated Isaac when Abraham and Sarah made Isaac the heir of the birthright. He mocked and taunted Isaac even when Isaac was still a baby, but also as he grew older. He probably said something like this: "Ha, ha; you think you're the heir. I'm the firstborn and I'll get the blessing." The Bible says that he persecuted Isaac (Galatians 4:29-31). It was so bad that he had to be expelled from Abraham's house. But Isaac bore the persecution in the assurance that he was in the promised line of Christ, and he insisted that he alone had the right to the birthright. Isaac was faithful to his calling.

"God was showing them that the true seed of the woman would be born only by a miracle—as Isaac was."

It sort of makes me think of the believing youth of our own times. Those who belong to the true church of Christ and believe that they are saved are afraid to let other people know that they belong to the true church, and to tell others outside the church that their membership in a false church is wrong. They sometimes hide their commitment to God's truth for fear of being mocked. How quick those outside say to us, "Oh, you people think you're the only ones going to heaven." They mock and ridicule us if we stand for the truth. We are persecuted for it. Here in America we run up against this very thing time and time again.

What if Isaac had said to Ishmael, "Well, you are a child of God's Covenant too; you have part of the birthright too. We need not fight about it. Let's be friends"? Persecution would have ended and Isaac and Ishmael would have gotten along well together. We need only compromise a bit and we can be friends with people from all kinds of churches. It's the easy way, because we escape persecution that way—and we are frightened by the thought of persecution.

But there is one more part of Isaac's life that we need to know about and emulate. A Covenant child is well aware of his calling to marry and have children. (I know: this is under usual circumstances. God sometimes calls us to remain single and He usually has a special place for us in His Covenant when He prevents us from marrying.)

There is a sort of analogy here between Isaac and today's believing youth. Believing Israelites wanted children, because having children was a sure sign of their desire to have a part in the coming of Christ. Think of those mothers who feared they could not have

children. Hannah is an outstanding example of this. And this was even true of Isaac's wife, Rebekah (Genesis 25:21).

The same is true of Covenant young people today. They know that Christ will not come back until all the elect are born and brought to faith in Christ. They know too that God has promised to save them **and their children**. They bring forth children in the assurance that they are bringing forth the church. They therefore, express their desire for Christ to come by having children, Covenant children, elect children, the church.

I know, too, that things are different today than they were in Bible times. Abraham fetched a wife for Isaac—as in some countries today parents pick out the spouses for their children. But it doesn't make any difference: parents may not pick out the spouses for their children today, but they must and do teach their children what kind of a spouse they must seek out: a spiritual and godly spouse! And children must listen to their parents.

Abraham absolutely forbid Isaac to marry a girl from Canaan. God didn't save Canaanites and these women were wicked (Genesis 24:1-9). Instead he sent his trusted servant nearly 200 miles away where some of Abraham's relatives lived, for these relatives, though outside the Covenant lines, were still believers in God. In other words, Abraham insisted that his son Isaac marry a believer.

This is the obligation and calling of Covenant youth. They must find a wife that loves the Lord and holds to His truth. Their marriage must be a picture of the marriage between Christ and His church. To attain that, husband

"...they must and do teach their children what kind of a spouse they must seek out: a spiritual and godly spouse!"

and wife must be united in the truth. If they are not, their marriage and home will never be blessed, because the whole spiritual character of a home is determined by the unity of faith in the parents. Apart from unity in the truth there is only strife, disagreement, bitterness and division. When husband and wife agree in the truth, they agree in what church they attend, in the Covenant instruction of their children, in teaching their children to walk in God's paths, and how to discipline the children when they do wrong.

My father insisted that we marry someone in the church. When told that we could not find anyone in the church, his answer was: "If you are absolutely convinced that God does not have a mate for you in the church, then look outside, but insist that your first date be to go to church together, and it had better be a Protestant Reformed Church. And settle the matter of church membership before you even think about marriage."

Isaac was content with this. He, too, wanted a God-fearing wife. Read Genesis 24:63-67. No doubt Isaac was in the field meditating when Rebekah came, because he was pondering the will of God for him in maintaining the line of the Covenant.

And do not let it escape your attention that Isaac married her. He did not know her; he had never even heard of her before she came; he had no opportunity to “date” her and see whether they were compatible.

She was a God-fearing woman who loved God’s Covenant. That was what counted. He had no opportunity to

“date” her and see whether they were compatible.

The Chinese have a proverb that I like. It goes like this: “A kettle does not sing until it has been on the stove for a while.” By this saying, they meant that true love does not have to and should not come between a man and a woman until they have been married for a

while. They do not marry for love; that comes later.

I am not sure that this is always the case, but it was emphatically the case with Isaac and Rebekah. They married in the Lord even though they were strangers.

BREAK-UPS IN THE CHURCH

>>Josiah Tan



Josiah Tan is a member of CERC and is currently studying at the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

In God’s sovereign plan for his children, not all relationships lead to marriage. Some end in a break-up and there are often painful emotions that follow. But even at this low point in one’s life, we take refuge in the one relationship we have that will never break. Resting in the comfort of the unbreakable Covenant God has established with us helps us find our way through sleepless nights. There is peace in our heart when we call to remembrance that Jesus Christ has washed us with his blood. The unconditional love of God that surrounds us helps us to do the humanly impossible—genuine praying and seeking the spiritual good

of the one with whom we once had a relationship.

At first glance, it seems that Scripture does not have much to say about break-ups. It may also seem that solid Reformed literature does not speak specifically to one who has sunk deep into depression. However, Jesus, who is the Truth (John 14:6) and Wisdom (Proverbs 8) knows every sorrow and suffering that we go through (Hebrews 4:15), including all the pain involved in a break-up. Jesus knows every bit of that pain intimately.

The Facebook relationship status may have changed, the Friday date nights may have changed, dinner venues may have changed, but the Word of God still remains our light in the path of life, that at times are treacherous (Psalm 119:105). Contrary to what our sinful flesh cries out for—over-indulgence in food, deluded dramas, shopping sprees, pornography—to deal sinfully with the hurt, we must find all our comfort only in the Word of Jesus Christ. Oftentimes, our flesh does not even desire true comfort. Rather, we desire

sinfully to remain hurt and justify our seeking comfort in the lusts of the flesh. We must cry out to God to give us a desire for true and lasting comfort and for a greater hatred against deceitful comforts that the world tempts us to. Contrary to what the world advises us to do—to entertain revengeful thoughts, backbiting, gossiping, slandering, rashly rushing into another relationship, we must find true and lasting joy only in God. This joy gives us a heart of forgiveness, love for the neighbour, and draws us yet closer to our God. This is not to say that going out for game of volleyball is wrong to help one cope with a break-up.

“But even at this low point in one’s life, we take refuge in the one relationship we have that will never break.”

Rather, we must take to our hearts that the process of healing and growing will start and end with God's word.

You may have lost a relationship with a person, but you will never lose your unbreakable Covenant relationship with God. You, with the church, have been married to the head of that Covenant, Jesus Christ. You may not have the one you have broken up with calling you out anymore, but Jesus Christ has always and still is calling to you, "Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field; let us lodge in the villages" (Song of Solomon 7:11). That is the field of the adventure of faith. Because the focus of the call is to the whole church of Jesus Christ, therefore that call comes personally to you! He calls you to an adventure to continue digging deep into God's word. It is an adventure because communion with God thrills our spiritual heart more than anything in this world. Taste and see that growing in the knowledge of God and in His doctrines is sweeter than anything our souls have tasted. That village Christ calls you to lodge in is the call to pour out your heart to Him in prayer during those sleepless nights. This call is irresistible, so that any child of God who is hurting, will be given spiritual strength from on high to answer that call to rest in our Lord Jesus Christ.

You may not feel desired like how you once were. Yet, know that you ought to say with the Shulamite woman, "I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me" (Song of Solomon 7:10). Christ covers all our sin with grace upon grace (John 1:16). There is absolutely nothing good in us, but because of the goodness of Jesus, He desires us to an extent that infinitely surpasses how anyone else will desire you. This desire of God for us is pure, eternal, and infinitely stronger

than the pull of a million black holes stacked together.

Hear the words of Christ, "Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck." (Song 4:9). Our eyes may be puffy from the nights of tears, but with one look at our puffy eyes, Christ says that you and I have ravished His heart. The doctrine of God's Covenant is precious and is infinitely deep. In this, as the pain slowly begins to heal, we are assured that we are God's. We are precious in His sight and God is ours. He is everything to us.

Jesus Christ calls you to come, not just physically, but to bring all of your heart to the gathering of the saints on the Lord's Day. Come! Hear the comforting words of Christ in the preaching, the Bible studies, and fellowship with fellow saints. It is especially through the preaching of God's Word that the gushing grace of God meets us. It is especially in the preaching of God's Word that all the streams of Bible study and church activities are filled with living waters, from which we drink and are spiritual invigorated. This is Covenant love and sweet fellowship with God and His people. You will find God's call to join with the saints in worship and the intimate congregation prayer sweet and irresistible to your soul.

And so, the troubled soul with a trembling voice sings,

*"Thy thoughts, O God, how manifold,
More precious unto me than gold!
I muse on their infinity,
Awaking I am still with Thee."*

(This and following stanzas taken from

Psalter 383, versification of Psalm 139.)

Every Reformed Christian knows and believes that God is sovereign over all. God is sovereign over the terrorist who blows up bombs in brutal murder. He is sovereign over the cancer that has made a father a widower. He is sovereign over every married couple that He has united together as one flesh. And He is surely sovereign over all our relationships. God's sovereignty is absolute. As the Almighty One and the Lord of Lords, he does whatsoever He pleases. In His might, the sovereign Potter makes one lump of clay to demonstrate His mercy, and another to demonstrate His justice and wrath against sin. If not a hair can fall from my head without God willing it, then all the events in my relationship—every date, every mistake, every devotion, every laughter shared, and finally its eventual end, are surely ordained by God's eternal decree. As impossible as it seems now, all these things that have unfolded in one's life are now serving our salvation perfectly.

*"Ere into being I was brought,
Thy eye did see, and in Thy thought
My life in all its perfect plan
Was ordered ere my days began."*

But when one's heart continues to weigh a ton and you feel like you are being crushed to the ground, we might be tempted to ask, "How does a break-up bring glory to God's name?" We may very well be tempted to think that somehow, God must have made a mistake! Oh, we can tell others that we are trusting in God and continue to keep a straight face in church. However, in the inner recesses of our hearts, a part of us can, as it were, grab God out of heaven and put Him in an interrogation chair, demanding God to explain to us why it feels like there is a

“We may feel as though we do not have any spiritual strength to go on, but the Holy Spirit is always with us, never leaving us.”

knife in our gut. Yet, God lovingly rebukes us in Isaiah 55:8-9, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” We humbly submit to the infinitely wise counsel of God. And we repent of our doubts in the God of heaven and earth. We quietly recall the saints of old, of Joseph and of Job, we recall our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, at the mount of transfiguration before facing the ultimate suffering on the cross, and we ask God for strength to keep our minds on the bigger picture: God is God. Man is nothing.

Because we still have the old man of sin, we can be far more prone to jealousy and anger especially after a break-up. A wise king quickly fortifies a breached wall in the face of an opportunistic enemy approaching. God tell us that we are by nature, children of wrath. Scripture reveals to us that we are totally depraved. In a break-up, we may feel that our sinful emotions may be far more powerful than our will. It seems that hate will devour our love. Yet, God knows our weaknesses. He reminds us, “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to

escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” This is the truth of the perseverance of the saints that every Reformed believer holds dearly to. God will preserve you by giving you the strength of heart to persevere in love for God and your neighbour. Rule your heart wisely by tripling your defences with the Word and love of God.

“But God, who is rich in mercy, according to his unchangeable purpose of election, does not wholly withdraw the Holy Spirit from his own people, even in their melancholy (depression) falls;...” (Canons of Dort, Article 6).

We may feel as though we do not have any spiritual strength to go on, but the Holy Spirit is always with us, never leaving us. We may feel that a temptation is impossible to resist, but know that God gives us the Spirit that moves our spirit to cry out, “Blessed be the name of the Lord!” In this trial of losing a relationship, there will surely come a way of escape that you will be able to bear. That way is through the cross. Through praying for mercy for yourself and the one that you have broken up with, God guides us in the right way forward. When we fail to forgive the sins of others, we fail to experience God’s forgiveness of our sins. When we stubbornly hold on to the hurt, we often go astray from God and the church. Rather, by God’s grace, we love the one whom our flesh calls us to hate because we have been baptized with the Holy Spirit of God and the Spirit dwells in our hearts.

So we pray...

*“Search me, O God, my heart discern,
Try me, my inmost thought to learn;
And lead me, if in sin I stray,
To choose the everlasting way.”*

That everlasting way is not the way of looking to marry those who are not in the Lord or to date someone whom we are not in full agreement with in doctrine and life. That everlasting way is to wait upon the Lord and to run in the path of obedience and ardent desire for God. Think of the dreadful consequences of Samson’s sin when he set his heart on wicked Delilah.

To the readers who know of someone who has gone through a breakup, or have gone through a break-up themselves, remember: Christ prayed for His sheep who crucified him. Stephen prayed for the salvation of those who stoned him to death. If you know the person who broke up with your friend is to be “blamed”, know that that person is a precious child of God too. There may be untold hurt. Yet, Christ never gave us a limit for forgiveness. Even if in your own judgment, your friend was sinfully dumped, we are to love that brother or sister who appears to have caused the hurt. Pray for his or her spiritual welfare. The church on this earth is made up of sinners at all times, but God will not take it lightly when someone speaks evil of a lost sheep. It is especially the foolish and dumb sheep that God loves, and there will be great rejoicing when it returns—just as the father killed the fatted calf upon the Prodigal Son’s return. Smite that lost sheep with your gossip and words, and God will lovingly but painfully chasten you too. We are called to love mercy (Micah 6:8). We are called to defend and promote the honour and reputation of both parties involved in the break-up (Heidelberg Catechism Lord’s day 43). Hence, all parties must ask themselves, “In the light of the Truth of God’s word, what is God teaching us in this painful circumstance that He has sovereignly brought to pass?”

OUR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION: A COVENANT NECESSITY (PART 9) - CONCLUDING REMARKS

>>Aaron Lim



Aaron Lim is a member of CERC.

Covenant education for Covenant seed is faithfulness to Jehovah's Covenant. Leaving our children to fend for themselves in the ungodly education of public schools is contrary to all the precepts of the Covenant. We rob our children of their Covenant privileges when we give them an ungodly education instead of a Covenant one.

It is sheer folly to expect godly, spiritually mature men and women to be raised under an ungodly education. As a corrupt tree cannot produce good fruit, so an ungodly education cannot produce godly children.

Jehovah's calling for Covenant parents is not to raise up the political and

"It is sheer folly to expect godly, spiritually mature men and women to be raised under an ungodly education."

business leaders of this world. It is to raise up "Davids", "Daniels", and "Pauls" for the church of Jesus Christ; it is to rear mothers in Israel.

Educating our children carefully in the ways of the Covenant will serve an important purpose. We will raise a generation that knows their Reformed faith intimately; by God's grace, they will love it, confess it, maintain it, defend it, live by it, and even die for it. We will raise a generation who will be jealous for their precious Reformed heritage because they have a God who is jealous of His glory. We will raise a generation whose chief end in life is the glory of their God.

It is extremely crucial for parents in CERC to understand and be convinced of Covenant education. Most of our second generation members have undergone the public education process and know of its evil consequences. If the Reformed faith is to survive and be developed in all its splendour and beauty, the next generation must not be bystanders in their children's Covenant education.

If CERC pursues the path of Covenant education for her young (using whatever means the Lord provides us), we will be very much alone. Most churches in Singapore have carelessly given their Covenant seed over to the public schools and are suffering its devastating consequences. We must not be afraid to be alone, for God's people always constitute a very small remnant.

"...we must give serious consideration to the education our Covenant children receive and make significant effort to be greatly involved in it."

I have no doubt that Covenant education in Singapore is a difficult path that will involve much sacrifice. It is, nevertheless, the path that Scripture directs for us as Covenant parents. God assures us that He will bless us in the way of obedience.

God has provided the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) as an example for us. There is nothing cultural about the PRC's insistence on providing a Covenant education for her children. It is Biblical. It is confessional. It is Reformed.

For reformation to take place in the church of Jesus Christ, we must give serious consideration to the education our Covenant children receive and make significant effort to be greatly involved in it. The Christian education of our children is not a matter of choice. It is our Covenant duty. It is our Covenant privilege.

It is a Covenant necessity.

DESIRING A GOOD WORK (PART 2)

>>Prof. Dykstra



Prof. Russell Dykstra was ordained and installed as a minister of the Protestant Reformed Churches of America in 1986. Ten years later, he was appointed as Professor of Church History and New Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Seminary. He has been to Singapore and visited CERC four times.

1 Timothy 3:1 This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.

In 1 Timothy 3, the Apostle Paul begins his instruction on the special offices in the church, that is, the offices of Elder, Deacon, and Minister of the Word. Christ is the officebearer of God, the Mediator with the threefold office of prophet, priest, and king. Christ calls men to fill these offices in the church on earth as His representatives. He qualifies them and gives them the authority to do His work. These offices are vitally important, for the special offices are the means Christ uses to maintain and bless His church.

In 1 Timothy 3:1, the Spirit reminds the church that it is a privilege to be called by Christ to the special offices. Therefore, the man who desires to hold

such an office desires a good work. The question that remains is: Why is it “good”? We concluded the previous article with a brief answer: the “good” character of the work is due to the fact that the office is from God. It is His work. To be more specific, it is good because it is the work of Jesus Christ who directs the church to the right activity. Christ cares for His church as a father cares for his children. In our consideration of 1 Timothy 3:1, we now turn our attention to the “good work” of the Elder.

The Lord Jesus rules His church through the office of Elder. The rule of the Elder begins with the life and work of the Minister. Yes, Elders are to rule over the Minister’s life. They must take heed to his “conversation.” The Minister must be a godly example to all, and at all times. The Minister must not be a stumbling block to others. And his life must never contradict his preaching for a lifestyle that is contrary to the preaching robs the preaching of its power. The hearers will begin to despise both the Minister and the Word that he brings. In addition, a Minister’s folly or sin will give occasion for enemies of the Truth to blaspheme. It is up to the Elders to rule over the Minister so that this never happens, but that rather, the Minister adorns the preaching with a godly life.

In addition, the Elder rules over the preaching. Obviously, the Minister must preach the truth drawn from the Bible. The Elders must see to it that there is no false doctrine in his teaching

and preaching. In fact, the preaching must explicitly reject the lie and defend the truth over against current errors. In addition, the Elders must be sure that the Minister preaches the whole counsel of God. The warnings of Scripture and the admonitions must be clearly sounded in preaching if it is to be a key of the kingdom of heaven. In short, the Elders are responsible for the preaching. It must set forth Christ crucified and risen again. This preaching will glorify God in Jesus Christ, and will edify the congregation.

This is one of the most difficult aspects of the Elders’ work. Elders need much wisdom in order to help a Minister preach such sermons. If an Elder takes this aspect of his work seriously, he will be very attentive to the preaching, will be very much “in the Word” and giving thoughtful consideration to the preaching weekly. In this spiritual activity, he will grow tremendously in wisdom and knowledge.

Another significant aspect of the Minister’s work that the Elders must oversee is his catechetical instruction

“In 1 Timothy 3:1, the Spirit reminds the church that it is a privilege to be called by Christ to the special offices.”

of the youth. Elders must carefully observe both the content of the instruction and the manner of giving instruction. Catechism is part of the official teaching of the church. This is a primary means of building up the youth in the truth. Elders oversee this work by visiting the classes. They take note as to whether the youth are in fact growing in their knowledge and love for the Reformed faith.

The Elders' oversight includes the Minister's work in family visitation. Elders observe his work because they accompany the Minister and assist in it. The final significant area of the Minister's work is in pastoral labours. Here, too, Elders have responsibilities. To some extent, Elders must know what their Minister is doing. No doubt there ought to be some privacy between pastor and member. Nonetheless, these labours of the pastor are yet subject to the authority of Elders.

Since they have oversight of the life and work of the Minister, wisdom is essential for Elders. They must know how to take oversight without improperly dominating a Minister, or overextending their authority into every area of a Minister's life. Those who desire to be faithful Elders will pray continually for wisdom from the Spirit. And a wise Minister will rejoice in the proper oversight of his labours by such men.

The second main work of the Elders is supervision of the Deacons. This also demands wisdom, for Elders must not make Deacons to be sort of "junior Elders." Deacons have their own labour—the ministry of mercy in the church. The Elders may not simply assign work to the Deacons as though they are the servants of the Elders.

Yet, as rulers in the church, Elders are called to supervise the work of the Deacons in wisdom. It is not their calling to hang over the shoulder of the Diaconate and direct every move they make, for example, who receives money and how much. The Elders supervise first in that they must see to it that Deacons are faithfully carrying out the duties of their office. Are the Deacons doing the work Christ calls them to do? And then, in the second place, the Elders must watch for a possible abuse by a member of the office of Deacon. Deacons are very close to the work and bestow benevolence out of love and mercy towards the poor in the congregation. It is possible then that they do not recognise a misuse of the office. Then the Elders must point that out to them. As with the Minister, the Elders must see to it that lives of the Deacons are above reproach.

The Elder oversees the work of the Minister and the Deacons. They also exercise oversight of each other. Paul so taught the Elders of Ephesus as he left them to embark on his third missionary journey—"Take heed to yourselves" (Acts 20:28). Elders must take heed to the walk of life of the fellow Elders. And they must see to it that each faithfully executes the duties of the office.

The Reformed (Biblical) form of church government insists on the parity (equality) of the three offices. In harmony with that principle, the three offices exercise mutual oversight. The Church Order of Dordt (Art. 81) calls for mutual censure to be done at set times—at least four times a year. This is the oversight of the Elders over officebearers.

The main work of the Elders is the oversight of the congregation. The form for the ordination of Elders sets forth

"Scripture makes it plain that this work of oversight is the care of the congregation as shepherds of the flock of Christ."

their responsibilities. The Elders have authority to watch both the confession and lives of the members. Specifically, the form teaches that Elders are to diligently look that every member properly deports himself. They are called to admonish the disorderly. Understand that the Elders need not wait for a session meeting to do this. The Elder is in the office twenty-four hours a day. He is personally called to do this as part of work. Of course, his admonitions of members must not be based on his opinions, but only on the teaching of the Bible.

The Elders are also called to exercise Christian discipline, also known as the "last remedy." Long before excommunication, the Elders visit members who are living in impenitent sin. They admonish sinners officially. They do all in their power to lead sinners back to the truth and to godliness. All their labours must be done out love

"Since they have oversight of the life and work of the Minister, wisdom is essential for Elders."

for the member. And, if necessary, the Elders are called to remove the impenitent members out of the church.

Scripture makes it plain that this work of oversight is the care of the congregation as *shepherds* of the flock of Christ. Paul's instruction to the Elders of Ephesus recorded in Acts 20:28 ff. indicates this pastoral (shepherding) nature of the Elders' work. Paul admonished them to take heed to the flock, that is, pay attention to the congregation. Elders must know the congregation; young and old, single members, as well as families. What are their lives like? With what difficulties are they struggling? How might they need assistance? Elders make it a point to know.

Besides, said Paul, you must feed this flock. Elders have the responsibility for the spiritual nourishment of the congregation. Paul also required them to watch against false doctrine, and any "wolves" who seek to enter the fold pretending to be sheep, and finally, "support the weak." Take special care of those who are vulnerable, who are spiritually or physically in a position of weakness.

Additional inspired revelation of the pastoral nature of the Elders' work is found in 1 Timothy 3:5. Paul indicates that the Elders are to preside over their own houses well. This is not simply to rule over the household, but rather to see that all things are done properly. Clearly, that activity of presiding over something will take much time and attention.

The Spirit then compares the Elder presiding over his own house to taking care of the church. We think of an Elder *ruling*, but Paul does not *say rule*. Rather he is to *take care of the church*. This word is used twice in the parable

of the good Samaritan (Luke 10). He took the wounded men to an inn, and "*took care* of him." Then the good Samaritan continued on his journey, but instructed the inn keeper, "Take care of him...." So likewise must the Elders take care of the church. This involves much more than dealing with the church as if it were a "business". And far more than merely ruling, it involves the work of shepherds caring for sheep. An Elder must have love and compassion for God's people. His work is pastoral.

The Reformed church's understanding of this is reflected in the Church Order and the Form for Ordination of Elder. Elders are to visit the families regularly. The idea is not merely official family visitation. It implies other, informal meetings when an Elder calls a family to say that he would like to come over and visit. The visit is not sought because there is a problem. Rather, says the Elder, "I simply desire to get to know you and your children. I hope to get a better understanding of your life, struggles, and trials. The purpose is that I might better help you, either now or in time of adversity." To accomplish this, it might be best to divide the congregation into districts and assign an Elder or pair of Elders to a specific group so that they would be responsible for these members and give them special care.

The Form for Elders' ordination also indicates that Elders must be ready with good counsel and advice. This, first to the Minister. This is very important, for Elders know the congregation much better than the Minister. They should also be ready to give good advice on his work. But the Form exhorts them to give good counsel to any and all in the congregation. This is the calling of Elders! The congregation, therefore

must not be afraid to go to them for help and advice. They are prepared to help.

Consider also these questions that church visitors may ask about the work of the Elders:

1. Do the Elders regularly attend the services for divine worship as well as the consistory meetings?
2. Do they at set times attend the catechism classes to see how they are conducted and attended; and do they assist the Minister in catechizing when there is a need?
3. Do they see to it that Christian discipline is exercised, and that everything is done honourably and in good order?
4. Do the Elders visit the sick and others in agreement with the calling of their office?
5. Do they try to prevent and remove all offense in the congregation, and try to comfort and instruct the members?
6. Do they conduct themselves as examples to the congregation in their family and outward walk of life?

Clearly, faithful Elders spend themselves in the care for the church of Jesus Christ.

In the next (and last) instalment, we will consider the blessing that an Elder receives, and therefore the incentive for men properly to prepare themselves for the office, because they desire this good work.

WHERE ARE MY FRIENDS?

>>Lim Yang Zhi



Lim Yang Zhi is a confessing young adult in CERC.

[Continuing from “Who Are My Friends?”] Two months ago, we answered the question, “Who are our friends?” Scripture teaches that true friends are those who share the same spiritual likes and dislikes, and those who help us spiritually; we find that such friends can be believers only.

But a second question arises. Where can we find believers? Or, to put the question differently, where can we find such friends?

Therefore, we must answer our title this way: Our friends are in the church.

Scripture plainly teaches this truth. In his prayer in Psalm 122, the Psalmist sets his mind on his “companions,” whom he calls “the house of the LORD,” the church (vv. 7-8). In Psalm 16, the Psalmist speaks of his delight in the saints (v. 3). According to the Psalmist, these saints do not worship other gods; in other words, these saints are members of the church that worships Jehovah.

Consider, also, Amos 3:3 again. Two cannot walk together—befriend each other—unless they are agreed. Where can such agreement (or, unity) be found? Thinking further, we find that this agreement (unity) can be found only in the church, the one, united, body of Christ (see Ephesians 4:1-6).

The answer to our title is rather simple.

But the article does not end there. I want now to focus on applying this answer. In other words, knowing our true friends come from the church, what must we do?

Knowing our friends are found in the church, we must spend our time with the church. For our church, we have many activities where we may spend our time with fellow believers. There is time in between our Sunday services for fellowship. Saturday afternoons are packed with activities to study and discuss the Scriptures. Furthermore, scattered through the week are casual activities such as meals, as well as an hour or two of exercise (volleyball, basketball, soccer, etc.).

These activities give us time to forge our friendships with fellow believers. They give us time to find out what our friends like or dislike. (Remember, part of friendship is sharing the same likes and dislikes.) We may find out through casual conversations—asking what he likes and dislikes in the classroom, at home, and in the youth group. We may

discover more by silent observation. Friends do not always tell us with words what they like and dislike. Some of those likes and dislikes we figure out by watching how our friends react to various things.

These activities also give opportunity to build a trust that opens the way for us to help our friends, and vice versa. You would not be comfortable when a stranger suddenly comes to you and offers you help. You need time to know what kind of a person that stranger is before you can trust that he can really help you, and that he is out there to help you. Likewise, we need time to know our friends—and for them to know us. As we know each other better, we will know that they are willing and able to help us when we need help.

Time must be spent in the church to establish strong friendships among believers.

But, my more urgent point is that time now must be spent in the church.

Already, in your life as teenage students, you do not get much time to spend

“Two cannot walk together—befriend each other—unless they are agreed. Where can such agreement (or, unity) be found?”

with your friends. School takes up most of your weekdays. Sometimes, even a part of your Saturdays is taken up by the school. What is left, minimally, is a portion of Saturday and Sunday. The hours you spend with fellow believers on those two days are easily countable: At most eight on Saturday (if you stay for dinner after the activities), and six on Sunday.

Moreover, you will get less time in the future. Life in junior colleges, polytechnics, and universities will eat up more of your time left outside of school. Guys, our two years in NS will eat away more time, if not our strength to join the fellowship of the church when there is time. Ultimately, for guys and girls, we all will begin to work in the world. Our jobs will take a heavy toll on our time and energy for our friendships.

It is unrealistic, then, to think that we will have more time to establish and build true godly friendships later on in life.

The time to establish and build friendships is now. The time to find ourselves in the activities and bustle of the church is now. We may not say, “There will be time later.” That is not true; that will never be true. The time is right now.

The way to true friendships in the church is not easy.

I would not be wrong to assume that some of you have faced times when you say to yourselves, “I just don’t have the strength to be in the fellowship of the saints.” Or, “I just can’t find the time.” We want to have strong friendships with our fellow believers; but we

find ourselves unable to forge such friendships.

There is difficulty. What can we do to overcome this difficulty?

Among the many things we can do, three stand out.

First, **pray**. Our hearts must desire what is right—true friendships with believers in the church. When we desire what is right and bring that desire to the Lord, the Lord will strengthen us to establish and maintain the friendships we seek.

Telling our parents our difficulties is a second thing we should do. The Lord gives us parents to guide us through our youth. However, guidance cannot be given if we choose to be silent towards our parents about our struggles. The

**“The time to
establish and build
friendships is now.”**

Lord has ordained that parents guide us when we share our struggles with them. When we do so, our parents would know the best advice to give us.

Yes, I, a child in a Covenant home for nineteen years, grant it that parents do not always give the best advice. Yet, the source of help God sets for us in the home is our parents. Do not hesitate to share your struggles with your parents.

A third thing we can do is to make time. Find ways to get your school-work done to free up time for the activities of the church. To do so may mean spending less time on Snapchat, Facebook, YouTube, or video games;

it may mean spending part of your recess to get school-work done. Do not misunderstand me: My point here is not to tell you how you should make time. My point is that all of us must find our own ways to free up our time for the church. To share a little from my side, I gave up watching videos on basketball tactics and keeping up with the latest basketball news on the Internet. For me, giving up these things spared me more time in the week to get myself ready for Bible studies and workshops.

Again, these are not the only three ways to fight the struggle. Nonetheless, they are a start.

Above all, do not be discouraged to find yourself struggling. To spend our time in the church, to find true friends in the church, is one of the difficulties the Lord has given us in Singapore.

And, I say, a difficulty and struggle unique to us. We do not have our own school yet. If we were to have our own school, we would spend our weekdays among fellow believers—not just hours, but days! Indeed, an abundance of time to forge strong friendships with each other! But, this school is yet to be.

What then? Is it worth the struggle now to forge such friendships?

And, there is still that question about unbelievers.

More to come, DV.



News from the Churches

SINGAPORE

We thank God for the safe arrival of Josiah and Huiqi back in the States. On 29 August, Josiah started attending classes in the PRC Seminary. Lord willing, he will be taking classes that include Greek and Church History with Professor Dykstra, Hebrew and Dogmatics with Professor Cammenga as well as Homiletics and Hermeneutics (interpretation of scripture) with Professor Gritters.

CERC has much to be thankful for as she celebrates her 29th church anniversary on 18 September. Elder Leong will give a short message on the theme “Grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” based on 2 Peter 3:18.

PHILIPPINES

Pastor Daniel Holstege, who has accepted the call to be a missionary in the Philippines, plans to visit the Philippines from 8-18 October. This visit will enable him to become better acquainted with the mission field and the work, as well as to make some preparations for his and his family’s move to the Philippines in early 2017, the Lord willing.

The regular Classis meeting of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines is scheduled for Monday, 31 October. The PRC in Bulacan will host this meeting of the Classis.

KOLKATA

Lord willing, the examination of Emmanuel Singh will be held on 29th October (Deepavali public holiday) in CERC.



Ordination of Bro. Paul Liu as deacon



Bro. Cornelius Boon was also ordained as a deacon last month



CERC had a National Day hike at MacRitchie Reservoir



Two of our younger members on the trail!



Covenant Keepers outing to the Asian Civilisations Museum for an exhibition on "Christianity in Asia"



Another Covenant Keepers outing - this time to Tampines Eco Park

Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church

We are a Reformed Church that holds to the doctrines of the Reformation as they are expressed in the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dordt.

Place of Worship
11, Jalan Mesin #04-00
Standard Industrial Building
Singapore 368813

Time of Worship
Morning Service:
9:30am to 11:00am
Afternoon Service:
2:00pm to 3:00pm

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