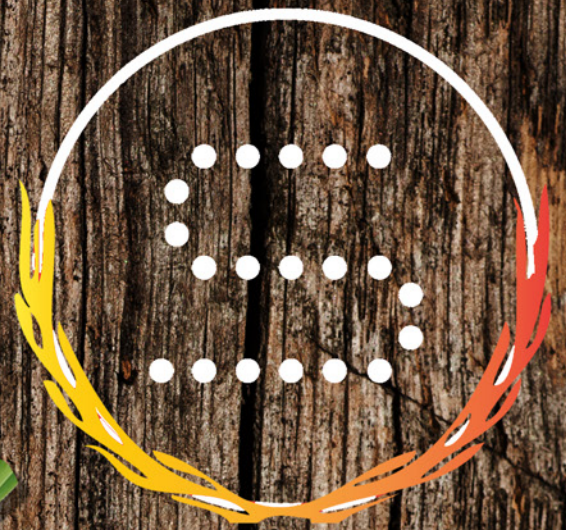


Martin Luther wrote that "...heaven and earth must go to ruins before the most significant letter or tittle of his Word remains unfulfilled".

– Jonathan Langerak Jr. in *Speaking the Truth in Love and Boldness*

Under immense pressure, even the threat of death, these three covenant youth confess and stand strong in their faith. – Rev. Rodney Kleyn in *Faithfulness and Courage in Ungodly Babylon*

Often if we don't talk about something, we assume that it is right or assume that remarriage is possible. – Jemima Joy Boon in *Interview with Jemima Joy*



salt shakers

joel 3:16 matthew 5:16

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Continuing
Heritage

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WELCOME TO THE 46TH ISSUE OF SALT SHAKERS!

Dear Readers,

Welcome to another issue of the Salt Shakers!

This issue comes at the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. CERC celebrated this momentous event through a Reformation Day Conference on 11th November. We hope that through this conference, many more will come to know the precious Reformed faith, and that those who know it will be strengthened in their commitment to it. Through the Reformation of 1517, God worked a miracle in His church. He removed much of the wickedness that was present in His church, and raised up godly and faithful men to reform His church, restoring it to the paths of Scripture.

Jonathan Langerak Jr., who recently graduated from the Protestant Reformed Seminary and is now a candidate for the ministry, writes for us in his piece *Speaking the Truth in Love and Boldness*. In this article, he carefully explains what it means to speak the truth with both love and boldness, while drawing lessons from the great reformer, Martin Luther. Out of love for the truth, and the God of truth, Luther spoke the truth boldly. He defended it over against the enemies of the truth, who sought to silence it by every means possible.

Jemima Joy, who is now married to Deacon Cornelius Boon, gives an interview to share her ecclesiastical and personal history. In it, she traces some of the problems that plagued her previous churches, and why she was compelled to leave to seek a church that was faithful to the Scriptures.

In the article *A Difficult Way*, Daniel Tang expounds the words of Prov. 13:5, "Good understanding giveth favour: but the way of transgressors is hard". He explains how and why the way of the wicked is not easy, but in fact difficult from Scripture's viewpoint. Only the way of obedience, that is, the way of Christ, is easy. And that is why believers are called always to walk in that path.

We hope that through the Salt Shakers, the Reformed faith continues to be a faithful witness to all our readers so that they are strengthened in their knowledge and zeal for the truth.

Blessings,
Aaron

WISE FARMERS

>>Chua Lee Yang



Chua Lee Yang is a member of CERC and is the chairman of Salt Shakers.

I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; And lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. —Proverbs 24:30-31

King Solomon is out on a walk, taking time off palace business to tour the byways of his kingdom. As he passes the fields, people come out of their farms to greet him reverently along the way.

At some length, he walks by a farm that catches his eye. The farm is encircled by a stone wall – examining it more closely, Solomon perceives and appreciates its fine workmanship. The king remarks how each stone was carefully cut to size, diligently laid in place and set upon the best mortar. The wall might have been built by the owner of the field in earlier days, or perhaps the land and its accompanying wall was inherited from a thorough and hardworking ancestor.

On the occasion of the king's inspection today however, the wall is in bad shape. Thick, messy ivy covers much of it so that its excellent original construction is all but obscured. The wall has holes

in some places, in others it is completely broken down. It is derelict and useless for its intended purpose of protecting the farmland. The fields within the wall are no better, lying fallow; most of the land is overgrown with thorns and weeds. Solomon does not need to meet the farmer to know what manner of man he is; the forlorn state of the property testifies to his character. Solomon records his findings; the farmer is a lazy man, one dispossessed of any earthly and spiritual understanding.

“...how ought we to live wisely and as individuals and members of our church?”

The book of Proverbs has much to say about the exercise of wisdom in our personal and church lives. The question is this: how ought we to live wisely and as individuals and members of our church? This is a really broad question, but the record of Solomon in Proverbs 24 offers some important and specific insights.

Let us take a closer look at the ruined farm Solomon came across, from the perspective of the farmer himself. As was mentioned, the wall was a fine edifice, and perhaps it was even well-

maintained for generations. The fields were once fruitful and productive. How came the farm to its present state? Could it be that the farmer was down with a temporary illness, or was on a journey, soon to be back to restore things to rights? Perhaps an enemy had battered down the walls, and driven the farmer and his family away? However, Solomon indicates that these are not the explanations. The run-down state of the farm was not due to a sudden unexpected event or a temporary absence of attention, but due to years of gradual neglect. The fine stone wall was worn down by the heat and the frost, exposed to the elements season after season, and little was done to maintain it. The farm was within the realm of Solomon, which had enjoyed lasting peace, free from raiders and roaming bands, so the sudden work of an enemy could be ruled out as well. No, what had happened was a slow and steady surrender, a quiet degeneration and a serene abdication of crucial responsibilities.

Contemplating Solomon's verdict, this is how I imagine the story behind the ruined farm unfolded.

Maybe, the decline began once upon a time amidst the farm's original prosperity, almost imperceptibly. Perhaps one day, the farmer arose from his bed, having just completed the back-breaking work of bringing in the season's harvest the week before. There was much to rejoice and be thankful for in the farmer's household. The harvest had been bountiful and had made the farmer's family rich. They had enough

to eat for subsequent months and some more besides. They could afford to give the tithe comfortably and still have left over for the poor, and perhaps even to buy some new things. As respectable Israelites, they gave thanks to God for this prosperity (outwardly, at least) and celebrated with their neighbours. They hoped for many more of such good years to come.

It was in such a time that the farmer awoke that morning and looked out his window – something caught his eye. Along the farm's well-kept wall, there seemed to be a small hole. A single stone had fallen out of its place.

On another day, the farmer might have made fixing the hole the first priority of the morning. The wall was an important installation, for it served many crucial purposes. It kept out the weeds from the surrounding forest and plains, as well as the rabbits and deer away from the juicy crop. It would prevent a wild boar from wandering in and goring the farmer's children as they played in the fields. It marked the boundaries of the property clearly, and in less secure times, served as a defence against bandits, thieves and wolves. It would be a vital routine of the farm to maintain the wall regularly.

Not today however, the farmer thought. It was only a small hole, and he deserved a break. Today would be a holiday. The harvest was safely in the barn. Perhaps he would wait till a few more stones fell out before repairing them all at once, for it took some effort to mix the mortar and cut the stones. No repairing today.

Several months elapsed, and now it was time to begin planting again. As the farmer had decided, the wall's

accumulation of damage was allowed to build up a little. The eventual repair job became considerably larger however, and took more effort than planned. The eradication of weeds and vermin was an unending job, but this year it seemed more pronounced. Before the wall had been repaired, hungry conies had climbed through and had made their burrows in the farmer's fields. Evicting them was necessary but took valuable manpower away from other important activities.

Not long after, the farmer made another decision: he would not plough all the fields this year, but allow a plot or two to lie unplanted. It was, he felt, too difficult to cultivate all of them continually as he had in years past. There was other work that needed doing on the farm. He was himself getting by in years and did not feel as energetic as before – the harvest last year had been more than plentiful enough anyway.

Next harvest therefore, the crop yield was somewhat smaller than the previous year. The farm's quiet process of decline had begun, and continued inexorably and fatally until the day Solomon passed by on his royal tour.

Was a hole in the wall that to blame for the farm's eventual ruin, the precipitant

of an unstoppable chain of events? Was the farmer trapped by a cycle of unfortunate circumstance? We might be inclined to think so; but the judgment of Solomon tells us otherwise. However the farm's visible decay began, its origin was spiritual and had its roots in the farmer's heart.

“Decline often begins not from a position of poverty but from abundance...”

This same rot is in our own hearts too, and the discerning soul will see how this text in Proverbs personally convicts us all. Decline often begins not from a position of poverty but from abundance, just as the otherwise faithful church in Ephesus was in danger of fatally losing her first love. A little folding of the hands – and the ruin begins.

“However the farm's visible decay began, its origin was spiritual and had its roots in the farmer's heart.”

It might come in the form of “little” sins, almost imperceptible to ourselves and to others around us – however little, no crack in the armour goes unnoticed by Satan and these are rapidly exploited. “Small” little sins, personal sins that we commit every minute of the day, some unconsciously, others presumptuously – yet each is ultimately fatal to the farm, a single stone out of place; a clump of weeds; a little hungry, wandering rabbit. Except we get down to the hard task of restoring the farm, by running

constantly to the cross with our sins and turning from them, begging God for strength to do so – our sins and weaknesses will all enlarge and multiply. Small secret sins turn inevitably into bigger, unmanageable and public ones. Satan enters in and sows more weeds. Our once-fertile plots begin to lie fallow. Our vineyards that have the God-given capacity to produce fruit a hundred-fold, now produce fifty or thirty, or less. I am frequently conscious of where these holes appear in my wall, even if I often choose to suppress them from my own conscience. After all, they are so insignificant that no one else notices; or maybe if they do, they won't say anything. The farm is doing well. No repairing today – maybe tomorrow, and so my wicked old nature deceives my heart and lulls it into spiritual slumber.

In the faithful church however, it can look like this. Members, cherishing secret sins unrepented of, quietly lose their zeal and first love. A strain of worldliness creeps into the lives of the members, and this is reflected in the fervency of worship. A false doctrine is tolerated – perhaps a committee is drawn up to “study” it, from which there is no position taken after long deliberations. “Good” biblical hymns and other uninspired songs wriggle their way alongside the psalms in the worship – surely they do no harm? The Lord's Supper is trivialized, members are often absent and no sincere examination is done on the part of those that partake. Members struggle to explain the doctrines. Perhaps they are taught, but they are not really interested. Involvement in the life of the church quietly becomes secondary to career, success and leisure. Public, chronic sins on the part of members go unrebuked by other members and by

the consistory.

However, in other outward respects the church appears to remain strong. It bears the name “Reformed”. The creeds are mentioned every now and then. She expresses some energy for missions and evangelism. She appears orthodox, even if certain of the church's fields lay fallow, growing only weeds – all faithful churches on this earth in any case are imperfect and possess weaknesses. But with weaknesses swept under the rug, never discussed to any reformatory effect, covered up in the name of “love”, God has somewhat against her. Her works are ready to die, and soon Christ will remove the church's candlestick and spew her out of His mouth.

What is to be done? There can only be the constant work of repairing the breaches, continually repenting and turning to the cross. This could be called the work of “reforming”, as individuals and as a church. This is hard work, much more easily said than done. It is work that requires endless prayer and tears. It is work, but not in our own strength or merits; it is the work of Christ alone who gives us both the ability and the will to do it.

Only then are we kept faithful and the church kept in strength, though

often from a worldly perspective, she remains small and despised. What are the breaches in our own lives and our church? What must be done to repair them? How can we encourage and pray for each other? Perhaps these are questions that will be profitable for us to discuss further in our spiritual conversations and in the societies.

Having received from the Lord a spiritual inheritance, through the Reformation, through godly parents, through our conversion by the Spirit – we possess an inheritance that we must daily cry for God to preserve. Our sins against this inheritance, our farm, are not insignificant – let not Satan deceive us – but all of them fatal, and we must run to the cross for forgiveness and reformation constantly. There is no other way. Let not a church that is strong take its ease, even for a moment, and let not one that has slid, decline further or despair, but let both return again and again to the Lord.

“Break up your fallow ground”, the prophet cries. “Sow not among thorns!” (Jer. 4:3) Let us pray for grace and encourage one another in this work, tirelessly repairing the walls of Christ's beloved church and the walls of our own hearts. May Jehovah alone be our strength, and may we all, by His grace, be accounted wise farmers in the final reckoning – for the glory of our Lord and King.

“There can only be the constant work of repairing the breaches, continually repenting and turning to the cross.”

SCRIPTURE'S COVENANT YOUTH (IX): SAMUEL

>>Prof. Herman Hanko



Prof. Herman Hanko is a professor emeritus of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary. His present work consists of authoring new books for the RFP, writing for the Salt Shakers, and maintaining an online forum for the young people in Singapore. He has been to CERC many times and is dear to the people here.

Scripture does not give us more information on any one person in the history of the nation of Israel than it gives to David, the son of Jesse. He occupies a central place in sacred history for he is a special type of Christ. Christ is the Son of David and the fulfillment of David as a type. David points to Christ more directly and clearly than almost anyone else.

Many books have been written about David; many sermons preached on the life of David and many covenant children have been taught the dramatic victory of David over Goliath when these children were barely able to understand the language of their birth. In spite of his sins of adultery, murder and numbering the people, he is called "the servant of the Lord", "the beloved of the Lord", "a man after God's own

heart". He is given a central place in the revelation of Jesus Christ contained in the Scriptures.

It is not our intent in these articles to write a sort of biography of David: that would require many pages to explain his life in the light of the pre-eminent place the Scriptures give him. I will concentrate on David's youth as a keeper of his father's sheep and on the thrilling story of David's battle with Goliath when still a youth, for in it are to be found many reasons why David is a powerful example to the covenant youth of the church in all ages.

The condition of Israel at the time David was born was sad. He was born at the end of the doleful history of the judges when in Israel "everyone did that which was right in his own eyes". Again and again the nations that Israel did not destroy during the conquest of Canaan under Joshua gained dominance over parts of the nation. These terrible times were sent by God because of the nation's sin of worshipping the idols of the heathen. After each judge died, Israel returned to the wicked ways of the heathen.

When Israel asked, at last, for a king, they demanded a king like the other nations had. God gave them Saul, but Saul did little that helped Israel escape the horrors of having wicked nations rule over them.

Toward the end of the period of the judges, God sent the Philistines against Israel, a nation that plagued Israel for over a century. The Philistines, at the

time of David's birth had made inroads into Israel's possession in Canaan and had made the life of the people in the south-western part of the nation miserable.

God had given Samson to the nation. He killed thousands of Philistines, but he could not defeat the enemy alone. It showed the sad state of affairs in the nation of Israel that not only would any in Israel, including his own countrymen, help him, but treacherously they were willing to tie him up and hand him over to the Philistines as a prisoner to do to him what they wanted.

Samson himself was a wicked man who cared for unbelieving women from Israel's worst enemy rather than faithfulness to God. Yet, the amazing part of it all is that he was still a man of faith and is listed among the heroes of faith.

The Scriptures remind us again and again that there was no king in Israel and every man did that which was right in their own eyes.

Israel was the church of the old dispensation. God gave the church a king of God's choice even though they were an unworthy people; a king who was a type of the church's true king, our Lord Jesus Christ. He gave the church David, a man after His own heart.

While we cannot be like David as a type of Christ, we, in the new dispensation, have Christ as our king. We can and must learn that David is our example as well for we live in the end of the

“...Christ is the true king of the church. He is given authority to rule over all God’s creation in heaven and on earth, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings.”

ages and are specifically admonished by Paul to follow the examples of Old Testament saints (1 Cor. 10:6).

David was a type of Christ because David was God’s warrior who fought against all Israel’s enemies and defeated them. It was not Joshua who was the full type of Christ to destroy Israel’s enemies; it was David. Under his rule the nation finally, after almost 500 years, extended the boundaries of the promised land to the boundaries promised to Abraham.

Those boundaries were from the River Euphrates on the north to the Nile River on the south; from the Mediterranean Sea on the west to the great desert on the east. However, not even David could be the real king the church needs, nor could he even be a full type, for, though he wanted to build the temple, he was not permitted to do this because of his bloody hands (2 Sam. 7:1-17, 1 Chron. 17:4).

There is one point that needs to be made: Because David was the type of Christ, Christ is the true king of the church. He is given authority to rule over all God’s creation in heaven and on earth, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings. But Christ rules over all in two different ‘ways. Usually these two ways are designated as “the rule of Christ’s power” and “the rule of Christ’s grace”.

The rule of Christ’s power is over all the wicked on earth, but also all the devils in hell (Ps. 2). The rule of Christ’s grace is His rule over His church by means of

which He saves His people and makes them willing citizens of His kingdom, the kingdom of heaven.

Those who believe in the heresy of common grace confuse this matter: they claim that Christ rules in grace over every man so that He gives every man a chance to be saved. He also gives the grace to them that is necessary to make the right choice. And He rules over every man in His grace so that every man can do good that pleases God.

I have talked about the whole of David’s life, rather than about his youth only. But it is my judgment that we cannot understand how David can be an example to us without understanding the circumstances of his life. Bear with me and we shall come to the latter in our next article, God willing.

ARE UNBELIEVERS IN GOD’S IMAGE? (III)

>>Rev. Angus Stewart



Rev. Angus Stewart is the minister of Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland.

The articles in this series oppose the widely held view that the ungodly are the image of God. Our first three arguments were based upon the nature, the number and the idea of the *imago dei*. We also reasoned from the inseparable connection between divine sonship and the divine image. In addition, we pointed out both the amazing incongruities and the dangerous consequences which arise from the notion that the wicked are God’s likeness.

In this installment, we shall consider two additional arguments from two verses from the Book of Psalms: Psalm 17:15 and Psalm 73:20. The first was penned by David and refers to God’s “likeness”, while the second was written by Asaph and speaks of God’s “image”.

Psalm 17:15

Psalm 17 is a Psalm of David, as its heading indicates. The man after God’s own heart prays, “Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow

of thy wings” (v. 8). David was a divine image-bearer, one who was confident that he was precious to, and preserved by, his covenant Lord. In this assurance, the earthly king of Israel makes his petitions to Israel’s heavenly King.

The Psalmist asks the Almighty to keep him “From the wicked that oppress me, from my deadly enemies, who compass me about. They are inclosed in their own fat: with their mouth they speak proudly. They have now compassed us in our steps: they have set their eyes bowing down to the earth; Like as a lion that is greedy of his prey, and as it were a young lion lurking in secret places” (vv. 9-12). Is one to think that the perverse opponents of holy David really image God as those who are like Him?

Next David prays against his ungodly persecutors: “Arise, O Lord, disappoint him, cast him down: deliver my soul from the wicked, which is thy sword: From men which are thy hand, O Lord, from men of the world, which have their portion in this life, and whose belly thou fillest with thy hid treasure: they are full of children, and leave the rest of their substance to their

babes” (vv. 13-14). Are David’s worldly enemies really divine image-bearers?

This question is all the more pointed because, in the very next verse, the Psalmist refers to himself—and *not* his enemies!—as in the image and likeness of God: “As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy *likeness*” (v. 15). Here the divine image or likeness includes “righteousness”, as it does in Ephesians 4:24. Paul, the human penman of that epistle, may even have been thinking of Psalm 17:15.

We share David’s confident hope that we, who are in the divine image (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10; 1 Cor. 11:7), and who are being more and more conformed to Christ’s image (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18), will be completely righteous as those in the perfect likeness of God in the new heavens and the new earth. Then we, along with the man after God’s own heart, will “awake” on the resurrection day (Ps. 17:15; Isa. 26:19), as those who “bear the image of the heavenly” (1 Cor. 15:49).

Psalm 73:20

Psalm 73 is the first of eleven inspired hymns written by Asaph (Ps. 73-83), who also penned Psalm 50, as all their headings reveal. It is also the first chapter in the third book of the Psalms (Ps. 73-89).

Geoffrey W. Grogan even reckons that “the message of the Psalter can be seen in its essence in [Psalm] 73” (*Prayer, Praise and Prophecy: A Theology of the Psalms* [UK: Christian Focus Publications, repr. 2009], p. 245). He adds,

It is increasingly recognized that [Psalm] 73 is of great importance in

“Whatever the image of the wicked may be, in despising the image of the wicked God despises the wicked themselves.”

the structure of the Psalter. It has in fact been well suggested that it virtually sums up the message, not only of whole Book of Psalms but of the whole Old Testament, and so becomes a kind of Old Testament theology in microcosm (pp. 211-212).

For the purposes of this article, the key verse in this God-breathed song is Psalm 73:20: “As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their *image*”.

Asaph here is alluding to common human phenomena: sleeping and waking; dreaming and partially remembering one’s dream when one regains normal consciousness. We are all very familiar with this.

In Psalm 73:20, Asaph makes a daring comparison between human beings, who wake after a dreamy sleep, in the first part of the verse before the semi-colon; and God’s remembering the image of a dream after He wakes from slumber (so to speak), in the second part of the verse after the semi-colon: “*As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image*”.

“It has in fact been well suggested that it (Psalm 73) virtually sums up the message, not only of whole Book of Psalms but of the whole Old Testament...”

“...the truth of particular grace fits beautifully with the graces of spiritual knowledge...”

The God who, in reality, neither slumbers nor sleeps (Ps. 121:3-4) is here pictured as a man who has a dream. When He wakes up, He cannot remember all His dream. He merely recalls an image of the wicked people He dreamt about. But He loathes *even the image of the ungodly*: “thou shalt despise their image”!

Prof David Engelsma comments on this:

Whatever the image of the wicked may be, in despising the image of the wicked God despises the wicked themselves. Their image is themselves in a certain respect. Despising their image, God despises them. This adds something to the divine hatred of the prosperous wicked. God holds them in contempt. He regards them as despicable, shameful creatures (*Prosperous Wicked and Plagued Saints: An Exposition of Psalm 73* [Jenison, MI: RFP, 2007], p. 63).

Would the Holy Spirit inspire these words: “O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt *despise* their *image*,” if the wicked were truly the image (and likeness and glory) of God?

In his earlier reckoning that the outward prosperity of the ungodly meant that God was blessing them (Ps. 73:1-16),

Asaph tells us that he was actually being “foolish”, “ignorant” and brutish (v. 22). This unbelieving thinking was only rectified when the Psalmist returned to worship Jehovah, the Holy One of Israel: “Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end” (v. 17).

Their “end” or destiny is described in the next two verses: “Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors” (vv. 18-19).

The awfulness of eternal punishment! The truth of hell as the destiny of all the reprobate wicked destroys, consumes and makes desolate (to use Asaph’s language) the false doctrine of common grace, which claims that the earthly prosperity of the wicked means that God loves and blesses them.

Thus Psalm 73 is of service on two fronts. First, it militates against the notion that unbelievers are in the divine image. Second, it opposes common grace.

This is especially significant if, as Grogan posits, Psalm 73 presents the “essence” of “the message of the Psalter” and is “a kind of Old Testament theology in microcosm”. Both grace and the *imago dei* are not common, according to the Psalms and the Old Testament!

On the one hand, the erroneous ideas of common grace and a universal *imago dei* go together theologically. All those who hold to common grace believe that everybody is God’s image. They invariably use the latter to support the former, like Abraham Kuyper, the father of common grace.

On the other hand, the truth of particular grace fits beautifully with the graces of spiritual knowledge, infused righteousness and true holiness—the image of God!—being wrought by the Holy Spirit in the hearts and lives of Jehovah’s elect and redeemed people alone. This happens initially in regeneration, progressively in sanctification and perfectly in glorification—all in Jesus Christ, *the image of God* (2 Cor. 4:4)!

The combined testimony of Psalm 17:15 and Psalm 73:20 is compelling. Both verses speak of *awaking*. First, Psalm 17:15 speaks of David’s waking with spotless righteousness in God’s perfect likeness at the very start of the eternal state of bliss (believers *are* in the *imago dei*). Second, Psalm 73:20 refers to Jehovah’s waking at the very end of the earthly lives of the impenitent wicked, and despising and destroying them (unbelievers are *not* in the *imago dei*).

But what about the texts that people appeal to in order to “prove” that unbelievers are God’s image-bearers? We will turn to these verses next time, Lord willing.

OUR CONTINUING HERITAGE: INTERVIEW WITH JEMIMA JOY

>> Jemima Joy Boon



Jemima Joy Boon is a member of CERC.

Salt Shakers: Thanks for agreeing to do this interview with Salt Shakers! First of all, can you tell us a bit about your family's background with regards to church membership?

Jemima Joy: We came from a church in which I was born. I grew up there. It was a church that called itself reformed, but really was not. We left that church and ended up at a reformed church for about two years, but decided to find another church. That's when we came to CERC.

SS: So how did your family come to CERC and why did you decide to stay?

JJ: We thought that CE had very firm doctrines, from the preaching of God's

Word on the pulpit every Sunday. Actually there were many issues that we considered before membership that hindered us from joining earlier as members. Because on one hand, we saw that there's faithful preaching of God's Word, but on the other hand, we were uncomfortable with some aspects of practical living that we observed in the church. Though as man it seems like we should not judge what we see on the surface, I think as the Bible tells us to judge righteous judgment, this is one of the very important ways through which we can tell a church that follows her Shepherd from one that doesn't. So other than the faithful preaching of God's word, the sacraments, the Lord's supper that is done every...

SS: Once in two months.

JJ: Yes, once in two months, and the offices and all, everything is in place but the only other thing we can see is how the people of God lead their lives. So at one point of time we were very worried about joining because we felt that some things weren't kept as strictly as they should be. Like in terms of Sabbath-keeping, people observe it in a very wide spectrum. There are some people who keep it very strictly and some people who don't. We didn't know why there could be such varying strictness to the keeping of the Sabbath. And then there started to be a lot of questioning about how Christian liberty can be used as an excuse to sin. That is a big issue. And the other thing – why the need to join a church? I think a lot of people who just come to visit a church don't know

exactly why we need to join a church. We weren't taught why we needed to join a church. We thought we could just, like, worship at home and get everything we need from sermons we hear online. Only until we joined the camp last year in June in Malacca, about the need to join a church and how important it is to join yourself to the body of Christ.

SS: Yes, yes.

JJ: Yeah so that's one big thing that made us realize we need to join a church no matter what. We also had some other questions on various matters which we asked Pastor about.

SS: I see. So why then did you decide to join?

JJ: We joined because all these reasons were... not that they were not important, but just, categorized under Christian liberty and different families can interpret these things differently. How sure we are now cannot be as sure as when we go to heaven. So these are things we cannot say for sure that we are right and not join the church because of them. So the main reason we joined is because this church is a true church and it preaches the faithful doctrines of what the Bible teaches, and there are sacraments and offices. And we pray that if it is God's will to keep the church, that God will continue to preserve all these in the church.

SS: I see. Thanks for sharing!

“...there were many issues that we considered before membership that hindered us from joining earlier as members.”

"...what we can do as a church is to be very observant on each other's lives. Not in terms of judging each other, but more to encourage our brethren."

JJ: I think the most important thing is that Christian liberty cannot be used as an excuse to sin. And the other thing is that besides the other two marks of the true church, I think church discipline is very important. We often don't see this because church discipline is something that is usually done by Session; in a way we can't always see that it's there. But I guess what we can do as a church is to be very observant on each other's lives. Not in terms of judging each other, but more to encourage our brethren and always look out for them in case they step onto the wrong path. Not knowingly, a lot of us just get complacent when we are in the church. Like for me, even just after my first year, I feel like I can get complacent. I don't really look out for others as much as I did in the past when I first came in and felt burdened for people. But now it's just like, okay, settle down, Sunday comes, Sunday goes, little thought about others and how your fellow brothers and sisters are doing spiritually. I think the other thing other than Christian liberty is that our Christian life shouldn't be walked complacently and we should always look out for each other.

SS: Can you think of some ways to improve the organic life of the church so that we are more closely knit? Like what you mentioned about looking out

for each other – that would be one way – to help us be more closely knit as a church?

JJ: Hmmm... no, I don't think so.

SS: Okay, I have another question then. What's your favourite part about the life of the church in terms of like... the fellowship, activities, camps? Like what do you look forward to most in terms of life within this church besides the worship services?

JJ: That means the organic life of the church?

SS: Yeah, the organic life of the church. What's the BEST part for you?

JJ: I think spiritual fellowship. Encouraging each other and being able to pray for each other. If I were to compare with other churches, this church definitely has more of that than other churches, but I think there should be a lot more, not just fellowship like normal conversation, but fellowship on the Word of God.

SS: Yes. How can we improve this? I guess it doesn't come very naturally to a lot of people, to sit down and discuss something spiritual.

JJ: Yeah, like how are you? How are you spiritually? (laughs) I think it's more of being courageous... It's more like a pattern of life, so the moment you start it, and if your circle of friends does this often, then you will not be worried to just start doing it with other people also.

SS: That's true. And I suppose if we all encourage each other to talk about spiritual things then it becomes a part of life?

JJ: Yup. Previously we had the prayer meeting which was quite good I thought, but now there's no prayer meeting... Maybe that can be one way to help, because it's an opportunity for us to share about these things. Because sometimes it's so difficult to start sharing informally. I do think that a lot of people like to share, just that they feel uncomfortable.

SS: Yeah... Okay, another question on a different topic. Being a relatively new member of our church, what's your perspective on the history of CERC in general?

JJ: It's good that the church made the decision to split, because that's when we all know what's right and wrong about the issue. If not, we would still be oblivious about these things and often if we don't talk about something, we assume that it is right or assume that remarriage is possible. But when we talk about it then everybody knows.

SS: Another question. What do you feel is the most exciting thing that's going on in church right now? Like maybe the Kolkata mission work, or all the babies being added to our church recently, or the Christian school work or something?

"...mission work is exciting. Because it's very, very miraculous, not something that we will do on our own."

JJ: Exciting? Hmm... exciting? What's exciting? (laughs) I think the camps are exciting! (laughs) Church camps are exciting. Actually I think the mission work is exciting. Because it's very, very miraculous, not something that we will do on our own. Like we can plan for church camps and other things but we never planned for a missionary. And it's somebody whom God brings... amazing!

SS: Okay, let's end off by talking a bit about the future of the church. What are your thoughts and hopes regarding the future?

JJ: That we will all be faithful to the Word of God, and will stand up for

what is right and wrong especially as the world grows very grey in a lot of things... that we will differentiate the truth from the lie and even through the trials and tribulations that will come our way, that we will hold fast to the Word of God.

SS: I think this is especially important to preserve and pass on to the next generation, isn't it? How do you think we can help the future generation? I know there's work going on for the Christian school but it's not up yet, so...

JJ: I think it's about the current youths that need to be trained up in the Word of God, and then only can the next

generation follow. Then only can we teach them the right things.

SS: Yes. Is there anything else you'd like to share?

JJ: No.

SS: Okay then, thank you!

SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE AND BOLDNESS

>> Jonathan Langerak Jr.



Jonathan Langerak Jr. is a member of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Wyoming, Michigan. He is currently a candidate for the ministry in the PRCA.

Ephesians 4:14, 15: "That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive, But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ."

The voices of the reformers whom God used in the sixteenth-century Reformation of the church call down the centuries to Reformed churches today to speak the truth of God's Word with love and boldness. First among these voices is the thunder of the man whom God used to begin the Reformation on October 31, 1517: Martin Luther. The truth of God's Word that Luther recovered for the church is summarized in what we as Reformed people know and call the "five *solas* of the Reformation" or of the Reformed (biblical) faith: salvation from sin is by *grace alone* through *faith alone* in *Christ alone* as revealed in *Holy Scripture alone* to the *glory of God alone*. In his 95 Theses, Martin Luther asserted that this truth is "the true treasure of the church... the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God" (Thesis 62).

The heart of the gospel truth that the Reformation calls the church today to proclaim in love and with boldness is the truth of justification by faith alone in Jesus Christ. Martin Luther, the first among the reformers whom God used to restore this precious, God-glorifying, Christ-exalting, Spirit-inspired, soul-comforting doctrine to his church, called this doctrine of justification by faith alone "the article of the standing or falling church." Luther loved this truth with his whole heart, putting all the tremendous gifts God gave him in the service of this truth, exerted himself to exhaustion to teach this truth to the church, and relentlessly resisted the attacks of the pope, the Anabaptists, the devil, and the world who were against this truth. Luther proclaimed the gospel truth of justification with love and boldness!

But what does it mean to speak the truth in love and with boldness? What is love? What is boldness? Can they go together? In other words: Is it possible to proclaim the truth in love and with boldness? And if so, how do we do it?

The text in Ephesians 4:14, 15 is often quoted to caution or even to rebuke the man in the church who speaks the truth with boldness—what others judge in their worldly wisdom to be *excessive* boldness. The text in Ephesians 4:14, 15 is quoted for that purpose by those *in the church herself* who are uncomfortable with another member *of the church*, boldly setting forth the truth of the Word of God and defending that truth from her enemies of the old, but especially of the new day.

Such a use of this text belies a grave misunderstanding of this Word of God. The grave misunderstanding is that speaking the truth *in love* and speaking the truth *with boldness* are mutually exclusive activities and attitudes. Where the truth is spoken in love, boldness is to be excluded. When the truth is spoken with boldness, love is not there. Such a misunderstanding of this text is held by many, many even who claim to be children of the Reformation and will have conferences this year celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. Whatever many today understand by “love,” it does not include or have room for “boldness.” At the same time, whatever they may understand by “boldness,” it does not include “love.” But this is wrong.

Speaking the truth in love and with boldness was really summed up by Luther when he said: “A good preacher [we could add, “a good Christian”, JL] must be committed to this, that

nothing is dearer to him than Christ and the life to come.”

Speaking the Truth in Love

Love in the text in Ephesians 4:15 is first of all love for the truth itself. This is clear from the verse itself. “In love” modifies “speaking the truth.” In order to speak the truth in love, you must first of all love the truth that you speak. If you do not love the truth, you will not speak the truth. Or, you will try to camouflage or color or shade the truth or try to rub the sharp edges off or blunt the force of the truth. All of this amounts to not speaking the truth in love. To love the truth means that you hold to the truth with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, make a conscious choice to speak the truth wherever God gives you opportunity, and a conscious choice to reject the lie.

To love the truth is to love the true God and the God who is the truth, as Deut. 32:4 teaches: “He is the Rock, his word is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.” Love for God is possible because God first loved us, when he chose us in eternity as His elect people in Jesus Christ. We love Him because He first loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. We know this because God has revealed Himself and His love to us in His Holy and Divine Word. To love the truth is to love the Word of God which is the divinely inspired (God-breathed, II Tim. 3:16) and infallibly written Scriptures. To love the truth of the Word of God means, as Reformed people, that we also embrace the summary of the Word of God in the Reformed creeds: the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards.

“In order to speak the truth in love, you must first of all love the truth that you speak.”

From all of this it is evident therefore, that speaking the truth in love is purely a gift of God’s grace. By nature we are liars, love the lie, cleave to the lie in our hearts, speak the lie, and live the lie. The lie always boils down to what Satan told Eve in the Garden: “Ye shall not die, but ye shall be as gods [really, “as God”], knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:4, 5). What this means practically is that we abandon God’s revealed way of salvation in Christ Jesus alone, and seek to save ourselves by our works, and mount up to heaven by our own merits. The result of this foolishness is uncertainty, doubt, and despair.

The apostle Paul uses two vivid figures in Ephesians 4:14 to illustrate what happens to those who do not love the truth. The first is of a ship tossed to and fro on the waves of the sea. The second is of a leaf or a straw blown by the wind. The southern United States was recently struck by two massive hurricanes, Harvey and Irma. These hurricanes

“To love the truth is to love the true God and the God who is the truth...”

"Boldness in speech arises out of a free and fearless confidence in the heart."

caused great waves to form on the waters of the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico. Hurricane winds were registered at speeds as high as 140 miles per hour! Photographs of the aftermath showed sailboats tossed by the waves onto beaches and reefs, their sails in tatters, and widespread devastation on account of the screeching winds. One who does not love the truth is like a sailboat without a sail, rudder, or captain on hurricane-force waves, or like a leaf or palm branch tossed on hurricane-gales. Moreover, one who does not love the truth, and thus cling to the truth with all their heart, is an easy target for the "sleight of men" that is, liars and deceivers—heretics—who in their cunning craftiness lie in wait to deceive them.

In contrast to the destruction that threatens those who do not love the truth, those who love the truth and speak the truth in love grow up into Christ their Head in all things. They mature in their knowledge of God's Word, their understanding of who Christ is and what He has done for them, and what this means for them, namely, that they edify one another in love in thankfulness for the love of God shown to them in Christ. This is the blessing of God that attends those who speak the truth in love.

Speaking the Truth with Boldness

The most common word translated "boldness" in the New Testament means simply to be free and unreserved in speech (2 Cor. 3:12), speaking openly and frankly (John 7:13, 26; 18:20), i.e., without concealment or ambiguity (Mark 8:32; John 11:14). It means to have freedom and confidence in speaking, as Peter preached on Pentecost (Acts 2:29), as Peter and John spoke before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:29, 31), as Paul spoke during his first imprisonment in Rome (Acts 28:31), and as our Lord Jesus Christ Himself spoke, so that the people were "astonished at his doctrine, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matt. 7:28, 29). Boldness in speech arises out of a free and fearless confidence in the *heart*. This confidence has its source in and relies upon God, and in the truth of God's sovereignty in all things. Such boldness comes from being thoroughly convicted of the truth of the Word of God. The utterly courageous and fearless man, woman, young person, or little child is the one who takes his or her stand absolutely upon the Word of God. The captive little Israelite maid that waited on the wife of Naaman the Syrian was bold when she told her mistress "Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy" (II Kings 5:2, 3)—as bold as Elijah who thundered against Ahab: "I have not troubled Israel; but thou [Ahab], and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and thou hast followed Baalim" (I Kings 18:17, 18).

Martin Luther wrote that boldness means "no matter what happens, you should say: 'There is God's Word. This

is my rock and anchor. On it I rely, and it remains. Where it remains, I remain too; where it goes, I go too. The Word must stand, for God cannot lie [Heb. 6:18], and heaven and earth must go to ruins before the most insignificant letter or tittle of his Word remains unfulfilled" (*What Luther Says*, ed. Ewald Plass, p. 68).

Boldness insists on the Bible's teaching concerning our salvation: that it is by faith alone in Christ alone, without any works or merit of ours at all. Said Luther:

Now if a different way to heaven [than Jesus Christ alone, JL] existed, no doubt He [God] would also have recorded it—but there is no other way. Therefore, let us cling to these words, firmly place and rest our hearts upon them, close our eyes, and say: 'Although I had the merit of all saints, the holiness and purity of all virgins, and the piety of St. Peter besides, I would still consider my attainment nothing. Rather, I must have a different foundation to build on, namely, these words: God has given His Son so that whosoever believes on Him whom the Father has sent out of His love shall be saved.' And you must insist confidently [that is, boldly, JL] that you will be preserved; and you must boldly take your stand on his words, which no devil, hell, or death can suppress... "

(*What Luther Says*, ed. Ewald Plass, p. 67-68).

"Such boldness comes from being thoroughly convicted of the truth of the Word of God."

Boldness, therefore, *is love*, love of God and His Word set on fire for God's glory. Boldness is to speak the Word of God in all its fullness out of faith in God. Thus, boldness also is not natural to any of us, anymore than love for God is natural to any of us. It is a work of God's grace alone. Boldness is given, preserved, and exercised through the power of the Spirit of Christ who unites us to faith to Christ, our bold Savior.

Boldness, Not Pride

Here, then, is how we answer the question: "But, how does boldness differ from pride?" Pride is confidence in ourselves; boldness is confidence in Jesus Christ alone. A proud man, woman, young person, or child relies upon what he has done, is always thrusting his works in God's face, and trumpeting his own merits; a bold man, woman, young person, or child looks only unto and rejoices in what Christ has accomplished—both in His active obedience to God's law His whole life, and His atoning death on the cross in our place by which He satisfied God's justice and merited for us eternal life—and rejoices in the free imputation of what Christ has accomplished to all God's elect. Pride forsakes the Word of God for the doctrines of men and of devils, man's philosophies, man's archeological findings, man's science, man's reason, man's feelings, man's experiences, or tries to add all of these things to the Word of God. Boldness clings to and takes its stand upon and abides by faith in the Word of God alone and the Word of God as it is summarized in the Reformed confessions.

Boldness, therefore, *is* humility. Boldness *is* love: love for God, for Christ

"Loving God, we are bold in God..."

and for the gospel that our salvation is "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us" (Titus 3:5). Boldness is evidence that that love of God dwells within us, for "there is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love him because he first loved us" (I John 4:18). Loving God, we are bold in God, which is to say, humble before Him and His Word, so that we speak it.

Martin Luther was humbled by the truth of God's grace to him, an unworthy sinner, and thus was bold in preaching Christ and His cross as the central message of Scripture and the only way of salvation for all who repent and believe in Him. "We preach always Him, the true God and man who died for our sins, and rose again for our justification. This may seem a limited and monotonous subject, likely to be soon exhausted, but we are never at the end of it."

Luther also preached to the people in the pew to be bold in Christ and to demand that their minister preach Christ to them. In a sermon on Matt. 11:25-30 that he preached on February 14, 1546, shortly before his death, in his birth-town of Eisleben, Germany, Luther declared: "The hearers must say, 'We do not believe our pastor, unless he

tells us of another Master, one named Christ. To Christ he directs us; what Christ's lips say we shall heed. And we shall heed our pastor insofar as he directs us to the true Master and Teacher, the Son of God." Luther was not giving hearers, his or any hearers today, free license to disregard their pastor. He was admonishing them to be like the Bereans: to hear him diligently as he alleged Christ out of the Scriptures, and then to search the Scriptures to see that their pastor indeed preached Christ.

Contending for the Faith

Speaking the truth in love and with boldness means contending for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3). This is not only the calling of the minister in his pulpit and the professor in his study and lecture hall, (although it is their calling)! But it is also the calling of the father in the office, the mother in her home, the young person at college or work, and the little child on the playground. Moreover, Luther teaches us that we must contend especially for those truths of the faith under attack at the moment, and that if we do not we are not faithful to the calling of God's Word in Jude 3 to contend for the faith. He declared:

"If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest expression every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little

"...Luther teaches us that we must contend especially for those truths of the faith under attack..."

point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved; and to be steady on all the battlefield besides, is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point.”

Contending boldly for the truth will embroil the minister, professor, and lay believer in controversy. Luther said that the trouble with bold preachers—we could add, also, bold lay believers—is not that they are often misunderstood. To the contrary, they find themselves embroiled in controversy because they are distinctly clear”.

Nevertheless, the believing minister, professor, or lay person who is convicted of the truth of God’s Word, loves that truth with his whole being, and is committed to speaking that truth is of the conviction also that to abandon the truth of God’s Word is to abandon God Himself. Luther said that he could endure everything, by God’s grace and with the comfort of the Spirit of Christ, but he could never abandon the Holy Scriptures, because they reveal God and testify to God’s salvation in Jesus Christ. This is the conviction of every believer which God gives by faith in Christ and strengthens through the means of earnest prayer.

Especially to ministers Luther charged: “The faithful shepherd is one who not only feeds his flock, but also protects it. This happens when he points out heresies and errors.” To point out heresies and errors involves looking beyond the evil lifestyles of people to the *false doctrines* that underpin such ungodly living. It is all very well to condemn sins in the lives of God’s

people, but they must know also the sinful *teaching* and doctrine of devils that gives rise to such living. In perhaps some of his most popular and well-known words, his *Table Talk*, Martin Luther said:

“When I can show that the papists’ doctrine is false, which I have shown, then I can easily prove that their manner of life is evil. For when the word remains pure, the manner of life, though something therein be amiss, will be pure also. The pope has taken away the pure word and doctrine, and brought in another word and doctrine which he has hanged upon the church. I shook all Poppedom with this one point, that I teach uprightly, and mix up nothing else. We must press the doctrine onwards, for that breaks the neck of the pope.”

To press the doctrine onward today means that we declare that Jesus alone saves sinners by the blood of His cross and His perfect obedience imputed unto them. This doctrine alone breaks the neck of the pope yet today, and the neck of the Federal Vision, which is leading even those churches which call themselves Reformed and Presbyterian back to the pope in Rome. The Federal Vision teaches that God establishes His covenant in His (common) grace with *all* the baptized children of believers, elect and reprobate alike. The doctrine of Rome teaches that the covenant depends for its continuance, maintenance, and fulfillment in heavenly perfection upon the good works of the baptized child, especially the good works of faith and the obedient works of faith. If the covenant depends upon the child, then the child’s salvation is partly based on grace in Christ, and partly upon the child’s own good works. In fact, the child’s good

works are the main thing. This is the doctrine of Rome. To break the neck of this doctrine in our own churches, we must press and preach the heart of the gospel: justification for sinners by faith alone in Christ Jesus alone. Only this gospel boldly declares the Word of God alone, to the glory of God alone.

The opposition that Luther, and all the Reformers, experienced for the truth’s sake only made Luther proclaim the truth more boldly. He said his enemies forced him to take refuge in the Word, like a bear hiding in a cave, where he eagerly read and studied. Then, he emerged more convinced of the truth than ever, more in love with his God, and more determined to defend the truth and his God against the enemies. In love for God, God’s Christ, God’s Word, and God’s people, Luther boldly contended for the faith once delivered to the saints, with the boldness whose confidence is in God and Christ alone by faith.

For all of us, spiritual children of Martin Luther and the Reformation, to speak the truth of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, as taught in Holy Scripture alone, to God’s glory alone in love and boldness means to speak the truth whenever and wherever Christ gives us opportunity, and leave the results to our sovereign God, who works all things according to the counsel of His own will (Eph. 1:11). This is the call of the Reformation of the sixteenth-century to us today in A.D. 2017!

BOOK REVIEW: SIDE BY SIDE

>>Lim Yang Zhi



Lim Yang Zhi is a confessing young adult in CERC.

Another year is coming to a close, and a closing year for most students brings much free time. Before you, my readers, conclude that this is a boring nag to read intellectually heavy books on Reformed theology, please hold back your judgment and realize that the book we review here is on *practice*—godly living based on sound doctrine.

Side by Side, by Edward T. Welch, is the book.

Those of us who have read this book would have recognized that it is not doctrinally sound. Before speaking of the depravity of our hearts, the author claims there is “good” (12) and that man still bears the image of God (88). In addition to the lack of soundness, we do not appreciate the author’s use of the NIV, which is known to be an *unfaithful* translation of the Bible. Yet, the book is not wholly founded upon its doctrinal errors. There is doctrine with which we can heartily agree; in it, we will find the author promotes edifying conversations leading to spiritual counseling that all of us in the church need from each other.

Two themes struck me as I read the book, and I hope an open reflection of those themes will encourage you, my brethren, to pick this book up.

One recurring theme in this short book is fellowship in the church.

The author, in a way, forces us to examine what characterises our conversations in our church. What are our conversations like? Are they made up of laughs and banter only? Are they circled around earthly matters, without any Scriptural insight? Let everyone judge himself; but I know I have missed too many opportunities to steer a conversation for the spiritual edification of my brethren. And the author assumes that that is the case for most Christians.

The author assumes so on the basis of two experiences. As the ones speaking, we are often “afraid of what people will think” when we share about our struggles (p. 11). Hence, to run away from our fear, we avoid such conversations. As the ones listening, when it comes to helping others, “we feel unqualified” (p. 12).

Identifying these common experiences, the author offers encouragement to overcome them. We must not, he writes, be afraid about sharing our “neediness” in life (pp. 60, 63-64). As needy people, we naturally need others to help us; and as the Lord uses us to be a helper to others, we must know that the Spirit qualifies us to have such spiritual conversations and be of help to others in those conversations (pp. 68-71).

The author also realizes that these experiences paralyze our speech; we do not know how to start and maintain spiritual conversations. So he briefly goes through the process of a conversation: Greeting others (pp. 73-77), finding topics to start off with (pp. 79-84), leading the conversation into speaking about the heart (pp. 87-93), etc. Through his suggestions, the author clearly does not intend to teach that every conversation must be aimed at talking about others’ problems. The intent, rather, is that one creates a rapport that, in God’s providence, may be used to help. Not all the suggestions in these pages must be used in every conversation; but they are worth our attempts. Perhaps, through our attempts, we will find better ways to start and maintain edifying conversations.

The second recurring theme in this book is sympathy. Again, the author leads us to examine our sympathy towards our brethren in Christ. Do we show sympathy? Or is there, instead, a cold—perhaps harsh—response to the needs of our brethren? Or, in response to the weaknesses of our brethren, do we jump straight in to a scolding? Again, let every one judge himself; but I know I have not shown sympathy to those who were in need of it. And, once more, the author assumes that that is the case for most. What does the author have to say about sympathy? Our words must express our sympathy for our brethren (p. 103). Even the words of our rebuke must be marked with that sympathy. One cannot go to the brother or sister without sympathy, and the author

shows the need for sympathy by devoting an entire chapter on it (pp. 101-110).

Having established the need to show sympathy, the author points out specific words that do express sympathy, and others that hinder that expression (pp. 104-107). Once again, the author understands how often we lack the wisdom to choose the best words to use, so he offers concrete suggestions for our consideration. Having spiritual talk and sympathy—but overarching them is the one truth that the church is the body of Christ. Having spiritual fellowship, and in such fellowship having true sympathy, is part and parcel of the body of Christ. “We were meant to walk side by side, an interdependent body of weak people.... That is

how life in the church works” (p. 12). Why? Because Christ our Head did so with us! He walked on this earth with us—to experience the weaknesses of our earthly bodies, and even the *temptations* in our hearts—to save us from these weaknesses and temptations (p. 13).

To this truth we give our hearty consent. Discern and disagree with the doctrinal errors of the book; but receive its instruction from cover to cover!

But...perhaps something still bugs you. What good does this book do for us, Reformed Christians?

Certainly, reading a wavering view of total depravity does not add to our knowledge of Reformed doctrine

positively. However, what *does* help is that we discern these doctrinal errors and, in our minds, *replace* them with right doctrine as we read the book.

Yet, what seems to be of greatest help is to keep our confessions in mind as we read the book. What do our confessions say about helping one another in the church? The Belgic Confession has strong language for this: “...all men are in duty bound...” To what? Join the church? Absolutely. To stand for right doctrine in the church? Definitely. But also, “...as mutual members of the same body, *serving to the edification of the brethren.*” We are *duty bound* to serve—to help—one another! Certainly, then, we are interested in learning how to counsel one another. With that interest, read the book!

SOME THOUGHTS ON DATING AND COURTSHIP

>>Samuel Wee



Samuel Wee is a member of CERC.

The Word of God according to Genesis is a revelation about the creation of God, and its focus is about what it was in the beginning or the origins of things. In Genesis 1, we hear the melodious music of how the heavens and the earth were framed by the LORD. When it came to man, man can only in awesome wonder sing, “All that I am I owe to thee, thy wisdom, Lord, hath fashioned me...” (Psalms 139).

As we look at Genesis 2:22, the LORD gave us a first glimpse of how Adam and Eve met. It was not a careless or chance meetup, nor was it an unintelligent or miscalculated move that ended with the meetup. In truth, it had its beginning with the LORD. It is the LORD’s will, ways and thoughts that took a personal interest to consider, and took possession and ownership of the man’s and woman’s needs and relationships in life (Gen. 2:18-25). Therefore, it was by God’s appointment, very objective and purpose driven, and it was the LORD who made the woman, and brought her to the man. It was a match made in heaven and realised in the person of Adam and Eve coming together through the creation and for the institution of marriage.

However, Genesis 2 :22 does not tell us a rich account of their life in courtship, nor is there a clear word about whether they have dated or courted. It is in Genesis 4:1 that we find that their relationship has reached the point that is reserved for man and woman as spoken of in Genesis 2:24. It is in the bond of marriage that they enjoyed the highest form of intimacy, and we are told that Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived, and bore Cain.

Having said the above, the idea of betrothal or espousal (engagement for marriage) seemed to be a practice of the OT day. In most biblical examples, parental involvement, care, concern and love are expressed for the good of their children. We have examples in Eve when the LORD created her, brought

“They must wait with prayers upon the LORD to lead and to provide.”

her, and gave her to Adam. Along the line, we have Isaac with Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel, and Joseph and Mary. Through these biblical examples, betrothal is taken as a commitment to marry (though sometimes it may change according to the Lord's will) and often it was with parental blessings in the Lord.

This is where young people who are called to be Christ's disciples must learn to walk with Christ and in the light of His word. They must wait with prayers upon the LORD to lead and to provide. They must not run before the LORD, and they must consult and communicate their innermost desires with their parents for spiritual instruction and directions in the paths of righteousness for God's glory.

It is here also that parents must also see the design and calling God has given us in relation to our children's desires for a helpmeet in life. Parents must urge and encourage their children with biblical perspectives, taking great efforts to impress and to imprint upon them the importance of acting according to the Christian faith, and to look for a helpmeet from within the household of faith.

While the Bible does not speak expressly on the matter of dating or courtship, we find many biblical principles on dating

and courtship by way of implication throughout the Bible. Some passages for consideration are: 1 Corinthians 6 & 7, 1 Thessalonians 4:1-10, Romans 13:8-10, John 14:15.

Also, as parents and young people, we sometimes ask:

How must our young people get to the point of engagement and be married?

Is dating or courtship biblical – a stepping stone or a stumbling block? What should be the Christian view on dating and courtship?

What are the duties and responsibilities of young people who are dating or courting?

Let us begin by looking objectively at dating, courtship and marriage and liken it to the life of a man. It begins with the LORD who is the Giver of Life, and he has a small beginning. For he is to grow and to develop into maturity, be spiritually strong, be spiritually rational, and be spiritually sensible – there is the need to nurture and nourish him with much care to ensure a healthy and strong growth from strength to strength through time. So it is with dating, courtship and marriage.

It is with the above understanding that we may relate dating and courtship to the development of a covenantal married life and the family. Therefore, taking away the vain teachings and sensual expressions of the world on dating and courtship, we may talk about the antithetical Christian approach to dating and courtship so that our covenantal young people may learn, embrace, and practice it in their dating or courtship life.

Dating is said to be the coming together of a **young** man and a **young** woman for the purpose of exploring the possibility of courtship. It is like the first step in a flight of steps leading to marriage and the family. And **the young** are those whose age range from as early as sixteen years to their late thirties. One example would be Josiah who is said to be young at sixteen years (2 Chron. 34:3) and Joseph at seventeen and thirty years (Gen. 37:2, 41:12).

Having said the above, it does not mean that young people are encouraged or can rush into a date as soon as they reach the age of sixteen years. At this age, it is more important for them to grow in their faith and to serve the Lord, so that they can be shaped and formed as a vessel that is fitted for God's glory, and be made ready in later years for dating, courtship and marriage in the Lord. However, if young people should be dating, they must take it as from the hands of God to know how dating must be characterised:

Devotion towards God, a **Delight** in the eyes of God, and a demonstration of God's grace and mercy (Rom. 12:1).

All activities and actions in dating must be in grace with obedience to biblical principles, reflecting the relationship between Christ and His church. (1 Cor. 10:31).

“... it is more important for them to grow in their faith and to serve the Lord...”

Transforming the heart, souls, and mind of the young (Rom. 12:2).

Into the newness of life in Christ (Rom. 6:4).

Nurturing and nourishing.

Godliness or a godly living in Christ's likeness towards His church. (1 Tim. 4:8).

Now, as we take a step away from dating, we may see that the life in courtship takes a different form as it comes close to a confirmation in marriage, and the establishment of a Christian home. This is where the young Christian couple must act to:

Seek God's approval and blessings according to the promise of His Word. Seek parental approval, instructions, directions, and blessings.

Hold fast to the Word of God to lay foundations in their home.

Talk about marriage plans, the husband and wife relationships, sex in marriage, children and the bringing up of children, etc.

It is with the above-mentioned that

young people who are in courtship need to add grace upon grace to the beauty of courtship, season it with divine loving kindnesses and tender mercies, and as they draw close to take on the realisation of Genesis 2:24 in their life, they must begin to practice good housekeeping behaviours and attitudes towards courtship, marriage and the family. They must now act to:

C- Communicate about the many spiritual needs and support in courtship, marriage and the family; **Commit** to be equally yoked together as one in the Lord, and **consider** one another as we are all sinners saved by the grace of God (Heb. 13:16, Eph. 4:32).

O- set in **Orderliness** the things according to God's Word from courtship to marriage life (so that sex does not come before marriage) and they must watch and pray against the attacks of temptations or youthful lusts (Matt. 26:41, Luke 21:36). That is because God is a God of order and the life of courtship is to follow the order of God's design.

U- talk about the exercise of **Unity** of the Christian faith in courtship, in the worship of God, family and family worship, and many other aspects of the life in courtship and thereafter.

R- Relate the courtship to the LORD, and allow Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, to **Regulate** the courtship through unto marriage (Ps. 119:105).

T- spend much **Time** together in courtship to perfect holiness in the fear of God (2 Cor. 7:1).

I- Instruct and **Interest** one another with the love relationship between

Christ and the church (Songs of Solomon) to draw **Inspiration** to express love in spirit and in truth for one another.

N- Nurture the spirit of Gal. 2:20, "...I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me:" so that there can be the exercise of humility, patience, endurance, faith, love and hope, and a readiness to sacrifice for the spiritual well-being of each other and the good of the relationship.

G- finally, **God**-centeredness must take centre stage and have the pre-eminence over all things in courtship, marriage, and the family.

In conclusion, whether we take reference from the old testament practice of betrothal, or take on the practice of dating and courtship before marriage, we must know that the chief end of man in life and in death is to glorify the LORD our God. It would cover every aspect of our life and that would include the life of dating and courtship that is given to us by the LORD our God.

So, biblical principles must be applied without reservation to ourselves, so that grace, gratitude, and thankfulness may go up to the LORD our God, as a sweet smelling savour of life unto life through Christ who is the one Mediator between God and men.

"...they must begin to practice good housekeeping behaviours and attitudes towards courtship, marriage and the family."

FAITHFULNESS AND COURAGE IN UNGODLY BABYLON

>>Rev. Rodney Kleyn



Rev. Rodney Kleyn is the minister of Covenant of Grace Protestant Reformed Church in Spokane, Washington.

Daniel 3 records the remarkable faith and courage of three covenant young people. These three, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, trusting Jehovah God, are not afraid of the king's wrath. These three have a fear of God that is greater than their fear of man. These three stand out and stand alone over against a godless and anti-Christian culture. Let's pray that our consideration of their faith will be spiritually beneficial for us in a similar day.

Ungodly Babylon and its king Nebuchadnezzar are representative in Scripture of the future kingdom of the Antichrist which will be opposed to the church of Jesus Christ and all true Christianity. The three friends of Daniel came to be in Babylon because of the sin of Judah in worshiping the gods of the Canaanites. Selected to live as princes in Nebuchadnezzar's palace, they were being groomed to take the culture and religion of Babylon back to their own people, and to help Nebuchadnezzar in establishing a universal state religion in which he would be the god.

This is what is happening in Daniel 3.

Nebuchadnezzar, having received and understood the vision of the image with its different parts, and understanding that he is represented by the bust of gold in that image, now sets up an image of gold, 90 feet (30 meters) tall, to represent himself. He then gathers all the important men of his kingdom (princes, governors, treasurers, captains, judges, counsellors, sheriffs and rulers) from all the parts of his kingdom to dedicate this image, and to establish himself as the "god" of the new state religion. Those who refuse to worship him face immediate death in the fiery furnace. In a similar way, the Antichrist will come and set himself up as god who must be worshiped, with the threat that all who do now bow to and worship him will be persecuted and killed (Read 2 Thessalonians 2 and Revelation 13).

Under immense pressure, even the threat of death, these three covenant youth confess and stand strong in their faith. Their stand represents "the patience (or perseverance) and faith of the saints" in the day of Antichrist (Rev. 13:10b, 14:12).

Let's imagine the pressures they experienced. These were men who in their grooming had received immense privileges and prosperity and had already been promoted in the kingdom. What a privilege, from a political perspective, to be invited to this important event for the honouring of the emperor. Not only do they face the prospect of losing all this, but there is a death threat issued and a furnace close by for the non-conformist.

Besides, all their peers – the crowd in front of them, behind them, and stretching out both to the right and the left – are bowing down, perhaps even some of their own countrymen from Judah. Why would one want to stand out? The pressures include a peer-pressure, the loss of prestige and prosperity, the threat of persecution and death. These all are the pressures we face in an anti-Christian world, and that we will face increasingly as the end draws nearer.

How easy it would be to bow down to the image, without having your heart in that act, and to rationalize such behavior. "An idol is nothing, right?" "This is merely a political act. In bowing to the image, are we not honouring the god-appointed authority?" Or, "What good is it to remain standing? We'll be misunderstood and perceived as strange, anyway."

It is characteristic of the apostatizing church and the weak believer to make such excuses. The argument is that we have to be as much like the world as we can be in order that they might understand us. When we think that way, we go along with the world, we remain silent over against blasphemy, we make ourselves, our goals, and our lives look as much like the world as we can. And, all the while, we become weaker and weaker in our stand. That's true also for the church when she caters to the sensitivities and desires of the culture in order to avoid the appearance of being "odd".

"... we are never alone, but stand in solidarity and identity with the people of God from all ages and all places of the earth."

The "patience and faith of the saints" is that they, by God's grace, stand out and speak out against a godless and anti-Christian world, knowing full well the consequences. This is what these three did in their refusal to bow and in their answer to the king. Recognizing that Nebuchadnezzar's demand was not merely political but religious, they refused. In that refusal, they made a clear statement to all. Compromise or a mixed message never brings a true witness of God. They saw, not only that the worship of an image is disobedience to God's law, but that Nebuchadnezzar in demanding the image to be worshiped was usurping the place of God for himself (v. 5, 12b). The king himself understands that they believe that their God is greater and more powerful than any man, able to deliver them out of his hands (v. 15). They know, also the consequences. Immediately they are despised by the other nobles who, wanting to gain favor with the king, "accused them" to the king (v. 8). They understood also the consequence of death, and though they put their faith in God, they did not know for sure that God would deliver them from the fire (vv. 17-18).

We ask, "What explains their resolve?" and "Would I have such resolve?" Four observations are worthy of our consideration here.

First, their resolve and their stand here was built on their earlier resolve, in chapter 1, not to eat the king's meat. In what was a smaller issue, which they could have also rationalized away, they obeyed God's dietary laws and maintained their holiness. Will you be able to stand in the day of Antichrist's persecution? That's really the wrong question. The question is, Are you standing today against temptation?

Second, in their resolve, they stood together. God, wonderfully and providentially, gave them each other for strength and support in the hour of temptation and persecution. We are not called, as Christians, to stand in solitude outside of the communion of the saints, but we are called by Christ into the solidarity of his body, the church, and with others we stand. This is the point of Jesus' own words in Matthew 5:12b, "for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you". Even when in our experience we stand alone, we are never alone, but stand in solidarity and identity with the people of God from all ages and all places of the earth. This is the beauty of believing that the church is "universal".

Third, and most importantly, their confession and stand before the king comes from the work of the Holy Spirit of God. In Hebrews 11 we read of these three, that "by faith they quenched the violence of fire". Faith is always the result of the work of God's Spirit, and is the gift of God to His elect (Act. 13:48; Eph. 2:8, Phil.

1:29). Just as God was with them later in the fiery furnace, so He was already with them by His Spirit in the loneliness of their confession. We are never alone!

And fourth, their boldness of faith is to be explained also from the content of their confession. Their distinctive confession is that their God is the Sovereign of heaven and earth. They say, "Our God is able to deliver us out of the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thy hand, O king" (vv. 17-18). He "is able", that is, he is Almighty. "His power is greater than yours, O king. What you do cannot over rule what He does. What you demand, O king, we can in know way follow, for it is against the command of the Sovereign God." The sovereignty of God is his absolute power as well as his right to rule over all. Confessing this, they were able to withstand the pressures of the typical anti-Christ. Remember, when the Antichrist comes, his power will be limited by the sovereign power of King Jesus (2 Thess. 2:12; Rev. 13:5, 7 – "given unto him...").

In the end, this is the confession that will, by God's grace, sustain us in the face of persecution. Who is on the throne? Believing that God is on the throne, they said, "We are not careful to answer thee in this matter," that is, "we are not anxious or full of cares as we answer". They are saying to the king, "We do not need to reconsider our position, we are sure in our confession, because we trust that our God is sovereign." They did not know God's will, whether He would deliver them from the flames or no, but they did know His power and were confident that He would be with them.

And He was!

In a remarkable and special way, in the presence of the typical Antichrist, Christ Himself came and stood with them in the fiery furnace. This was the “fourth man” in the furnace. A Christophany. “The Angel of Jehovah” came and was with them. The ropes melted away from their hands, but not a hair of their head is singed, nor even the smell of smoke on their clothing. In the fire, they are seen, unharmed, walking, and “Christ in the midst of them”. He sees their suffering and He comes to them, according to His own promise, “Lo, I

am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matt. 28:20).

And the cause of God is vindicated. All the glory goes to God through this. This is God’s purpose with all of history, including the coming day of Antichrist and the great tribulation. God will be vindicated in the end. The challenge here is not against these three who will not bow to the king, but the challenge of Nebuchadnezzar is against God Himself. Ultimately, he is forced to confess that Jehovah alone is the true God. Every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory

of God the Father (Phil. 2:9-11).

And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him. Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows (Luk. 12:4-7).

A DIFFICULT WAY

>>Daniel Tang



Daniel Tang is a member of CERC.

Dear readers, what first comes to your mind when you saw the title of this article: “A Difficult Way”? I am quite certain that some of you would be thinking that this article is probably going to tell you how difficult the way of being a Christian is, and perhaps give you some encouragement to help you along the way. This is quite understandable, because from an earthly point of view, living the Christian life often means that you cannot do as the world does, and you will be made to suffer for it.

For this article, I want to call your attention to the words of Proverbs 13:15, “*Good understanding giveth favour: but the way of transgressors is hard*”. Now read that again. *The way of transgressors is hard!* Not the way of the righteous? Is that shocking to you? Did I type that wrongly? Indeed, the text makes it plain that the way of the evil *is* the difficult way. Let us examine why this is so.

If you look around at the unbelievers in your life, you would probably find it difficult to believe that their life is hard. Perhaps even, they live lives that appear to be far more comfortable and enjoyable than yours. Think of your classmates, for example, having a day of fun at the water park, while you have to sit in church – twice! Think of your colleagues, who earn more than you do because they get paid more to work Sunday shifts, which you cannot do. The Psalmist in Psalm 73

had these thoughts too, as he envied the prosperity of the wicked, until he realized that these riches were not blessings, but “slippery places” that would culminate in the destruction of the wicked (v.18).

In addition, we are also told that the way of sinners is the way of slavery – not the way of blessing! Romans 6, in explaining our redemption by grace, also establishes that we were redeemed from being servants of sin (v.6, v.20). It therefore follows that the unrighteous, having not been redeemed unto Christ, remain the servants – or slaves – of sin and the devil. In John 8:34, Jesus tells the Jews that “*whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin*”, and the only way to be freed from serving sin is the truth (Jn. 8:32).

And at the end of a life of service to sin comes something even more

“... the way of sinners is the way of slavery...”

terrible. The wages of sin is death, as we recall in Romans 6:23. And this death is not merely the end of human life, when one closes his eyes one last time. When God cursed Adam and Eve (and therefore mankind) with the punishment of death for their sin, it was not only a temporal, but also an eternal death (HC LD4, Q&A10). Revelation 21:8 outlines the terrible judgment that awaits the transgressor: *“But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.”*

The way of transgressors is hard indeed! What is there to envy about the life of a transgressor? A life of slavery, that ends in death, is certainly not an enviable life! Shall we then, as children of God, sin like the

transgressors, that grace may abound (Rom. 6:1)?

I think not! Rather, as elect people of God, having been freed from the slavery of sin, we now live to be the servants of righteousness (Romans 6:18). This we do, not because our works of righteousness can earn us merit for our salvation – for salvation is already given, *freely* – but out of thankfulness to God for redeeming us unto righteousness (HC LD32, Q&A 86).

The way of transgressors is hard, but the way of obedience is blessed. According to our text, the godly, who understand the requirements of God’s law and perform their Christian duties out of both discipline and joy, are given favour. This is not favour that results in salvation, but rather, that their works of righteousness, performed *after* salvation has been gifted, are *“accepted of God, and approved of men”* (Rom. 14:18). Matthew Henry calls this favor one that makes the saint “pleasant and agreeable”.

Scripture lists many examples of the favour which our text speaks of. This was the sort of favor that Joseph obtained, when he served in Potiphar’s house (Gen. 39:6). This was the favor that David gained when he “behaved himself wisely” before the nation of Israel when he was made one of Saul’s captains (1 Sam. 18:15-16). This was also the favour that Daniel gained in the sight of his Babylonian masters (Dan. 1:9), so that when he requested not to partake of the king’s meat, his superiors were pleased to consider his request. Finally, our Lord Jesus Christ himself experienced that favour, as Luke 2:52 describes: *“And Jesus*

increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man”.

Our good works, performed out of obedience to God’s law, also have the effect of gaining others to Christ (HC LD32, Q&A 86). If you looked again at the examples given earlier, you would notice that in at least two instances, ungodly men – Potiphar and the Babylonians – were so impressed by the godly conduct of the Christian men under their charge. Although we do not know if they were converted themselves, we do know that it was the Christian testimony that they witnessed that led them to take a favourable attitude toward the lowly captives and slaves under their rule. If even a Babylonian – an enemy of the Israelite – could see the Israelite favourably because of his godly conduct, how much more so could those around us also be impressed by our godly conduct, and give God the glory (Matt. 5:16)!

Finally, the catechism also teaches us that obedience and the performance of good works serves to assure us of our salvation. Q&A 86 draws reference to 2 Peter 1:10 *“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.”* What assurance and blessing! Beloved brethren, why would you choose the difficult way? Choose the way of obedience, for it is the easy way. *“For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light”* (Matt. 11:30).

“Choose the way of obedience, for it is the easy way.”

THE SIGN OF THE ANTICHRIST AND HOPE

>>Josiah Tan



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

Just as the saints of the Old Testament peered through the windows of Scripture, looking for the promised Messiah, so too we look through the windows of the book of Revelation for the promised second coming of our Messiah, the revealed Lord Jesus Christ. Many in the Old Testament church, the nation of Israel, lost sight of the coming of the Messiah even though every page of Scripture testifies of our Lord's coming. So will it be during the time before the second coming of Jesus Christ. Will we be blind to the clear testimony of Scripture, especially in Revelation, just as Israel was in reading the Old Testament?

Revelation 13 gives us one of the prominent signs which occurs very near the second coming of Christ. That is the sign of the rise of Antichrist. Antichrist, which we believe is more likely to be a single male individual rather than a group of individuals, is pictured by the two beasts in Revelation 13. Antichrist will be the solution to the world's political problems. The beast that arises from the sea with the ten horns will

unite even the most polarized political groups. Those ten horns that symbolize the fullness of royal power will have not just hard power or pure brute authority, but will have such an influence over the whole world that it will be entranced by the beast and willingly submit before him.

Not only will Antichrist have political power, but he will also be a religious superpower. This religious aspect of Antichrist paves the way for the deception of many who call themselves Christians. They will believe Antichrist to be Christ Himself. This is pictured by the second beast that comes out of the earth with two horns like a lamb, but who speaks with the voice of a dragon (Rev. 13:11). As the Antichrist performs great wonders, the religious aspect of Antichrist serves the political aspect of his rule. This is shown in verse 12, that the second beast "...causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast".

Matthew 24:24 tells us that Antichrist's power of deception will be so strong that if it were possible, even the very elect will be deceived. How is that even many who call themselves Christians will be deceived? That answer is in the name "Antichrist" (1 John 2:18-22, 4:3; 2 John 7). "Anti" does not just mean against, but also one who seeks to replace Christ. Therefore, Antichrist will show himself to be one who intends to remove Christ in order to exalt himself in Christ's position. Many who call themselves Christians will worship the beast and be deceived that

they are worshiping Christ! Everything outward about Antichrist will look as if he is Christ Himself to the spellbound world.

Another aspect of the rise of Antichrist is that he will usher in the great tribulation. There will be persecution unlike what the church has faced in the past. The systematic violence to God's people will seem to completely overcome the church. This is taught in Revelation 11:1-8, where the two witnesses who symbolize the church lie dead in the streets, having been killed by Antichrist:

"And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them.

And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified" (Rev. 11:7-8).

Why does Antichrist attack the church and kill God's people? Because behind Antichrist is Satan himself, the dragon. It is from the dragon that the beast/Antichrist receives his power. Above everything, Satan hates God and His Christ, and because Christ has conquered death and is risen to heaven, Satan seeks to direct all his hate to the body of Christ through the Antichrist.

If the book of Revelation were not clear on the sign of Antichrist, we would have many reasons to lose all hope when Antichrist begins his great

tribulation. But because the book of Revelation is as clear as the light of day on what will happen before Christ's second coming, we will perceive this impending darkness very differently. For when we see Christendom bow before the Antichrist, we will know all these things have been foretold to us by Christ. When we see the prophecy in Revelation unfold, it will serve to remind us that everything is under God's sovereign counsel. We are assured that there will not be a drop of blood that falls from the necks of God's people that is outside the will of our heavenly Father.

The suffering that God's people will have to go through under Antichrist must not be understated, and at the same time it must be kept in the perspective of God's promises to us. God's people will face an intense persecution. It is dim in comparison to the glory that God's people have in heaven. "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17-18).

The ultimate purpose of God with the rise of Antichrist is that it serves our salvation and His glory. For at the stage where the greatest evil and the darkest night befall the church, then shall the "light of the world" (John 8:12) appear from the sky. When we see the clouds of His glory breaking through the sky, every eye shall see Jesus Christ personally returning, and we will bow in adoration to Him. The elect who remain will say, "Our Lord has come, and we are now going home". The wicked world that hates Christ and His people will wish for the rocks to fall on them, for at that moment they know the one that they hated is here to bring them to their final condemnation. All this only brings glory to God and comfort to His people.

Therefore, the clear sign of the rise of Antichrist only brings greater hope for the child of God. When we do see Antichrist appear for the first time in all the news stations all around the globe, our hope will be strengthened. For God works every event in this world for the salvation of His people

(Rom. 8:28), and the rise of Antichrist is no exception. All these things have been foretold to us, and we rest in the promise and power of the sovereign Redeemer, who tells us that no man shall pluck us out of His hand (John 10:28), not even Antichrist himself. The terrifying fangs of the roaring lion (1 Pet. 5:8) will look like the barely visible first tooth of a child when our Lord appears with His dread terror and majesty.

And because the Lord comes to deliver us, we say with fullness of hope, "Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20).

REMEMBERING 500 YEARS OF THE 1517 REFORMATION

HUGH LATIMER'S QUOTE:

"I thank God most heartily that He hath prolonged my life to this end, that I may in this case glorify God with this kind of death."

Hugh Latimer, in response to his persecutors before being burnt at the stake

Source: Portraits of Faithful Saints by Prof Herman Hanko



News from the Churches

Singapore

On October 22, Pastor Andy Lanning accepted the call from Byron Centre PRC in Michigan. We thank the Lord for His sovereign will, and pray God's blessings on our pastor and his family as they take up their labours there. The Lannings will be leaving Singapore on December 25, Lord willing. Below is a special note from our dear Pastor Lanning:

Dear covenant youth of CERC,

This will be the last issue of the Salt Shakers published while I am still your pastor. Therefore, I would like to take this opportunity to bid a special farewell to you as the covenant youth of Christ's church. The main message that I want to leave with you is the exhortation to continue in the things which you have learned and have been assured of (II Timothy 3:14). God has given you a precious heritage of the truth in CERC. Many of your parents have sacrificed much in order to maintain this truth and hand it over to you. I am thankful that Christ has given me the privilege among you of watering over the past few years what others have planted. For five short years, you have been as my own children to me. It has been my great joy to behold your increase and spiritual growth as youth, which increase was given by the Lord. Now, beloved youth, continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of. Maintain the truths that have been handed to you, that you in turn may hand them to the generation following. Do not be complacent in your confession or your conversation, but speak the truth in love and walk as becometh saints. I know that you will do this, not in your power, but in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I hope that we will have opportunities to see each other again over the years. Perhaps some of you will come visit us in Byron Center PRC. Perhaps I will have the opportunity to come back to Singapore from time to time. In our meetings, as well as in our absence, I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth (III John 4).

Your servant in Christ's love,
Rev. Lanning

We thank God for the safe arrival of Rev. Emmanuel Singh and Sonali to Singapore once again, and for the opportunity that we could have to fellowship with them from November 7-15. The Singhs were able to attend the Reformation Day Conference on November 11. Rev. Richard Smit gave 3 speeches for the Conference on the theme "Remembering 500 Years of God's Faithfulness to the Church". Rev. Smit and Elder Dave Kregel were here from November 6-13 and were able to conduct church visitation with our Session during their time here.

Pastor Lanning travelled to Brisbane, Australia from November 9-13 to speak at the Reformation Day Conference there, as well as to preach both services on Sunday in the Brisbane EPCA.

Philippines

The Lord has provided Rev. Richard Smit as third missionary for the Philippines. Rev. Smit will be installed as missionary in Doon PRC on November 26. The Smits plan to move to the Philippines on December 25, Lord willing. We thank God for providing another missionary for the work there!



Lisa Heystek & Sarah Kleyn at the Night Safari with young people from CERC



Traditional cake cutting by the Session at CERC's 30th anniversary celebrations



Watching a video greeting from Prof. & Mrs. Hanko during the anniversary programme



Group photo of CERC. Thanking God for richly blessing us through these first 30 years!



Justin & Danielle Dykstra visited CERC on two Sundays during their Asia adventure!



Covenant Keepers outing in October - playing water captain's ball after a prayer meeting

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

Editorial Policy

Every writer is solely responsible for the contents of his own articles. Contributions of general interest from our readers and questions are welcome at: cksaltshakers@gmail.com

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