

If we live as members of Christ by faith, the consequence ought to be a willingness "to lay down our lives for the brethren."

- *Rev. Steven Key in Love for God's People*

Just as a passer-by sees an injured person before going to his aid, so we are to look out for brothers and sisters who might have fallen into sin. - *Lim Yang Zhi in Overtaken in a Fault*

And God in His wisdom ordained that mothers be sanctified through the raising and nurturing of His precious lambs in the sphere of the covenant home.

- *Dorcas Lee in The Calling of a Covenant Mother*



salt shakers
joel 3:16 matthew 5:16

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*"My little children,
let us not love in word, neither in tongue;
but in deed and in truth."*

1 JOHN 3:18

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WELCOME TO THE 52ND ISSUE OF SALT SHAKERS!

Dear Readers,

The Salt Shakers committee is pleased to present another issue of our publication. We hope that you will profit from the reading of these articles.

In this issue, Rev. Daniel Kleyn writes an account of the history of foreign mission work in the PRC. CERC is a product of the PRC's foreign mission work in the late 1970s and early 1980s. God used these mission efforts to gather a group of believers out of heathendom into the glorious fellowship of His dear Son. In 1981, the Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore was organised (later named First Evangelical Reformed Church). God blessed the work and gave numerical growth to the church. In 1986, a daughter congregation, Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church (CERC), was organised and instituted – establishing the denomination of the Evangelical Reformed Churches of Singapore (ERCS). Barely twenty years into their existence, the ERCS was wrecked by doctrinal controversy, throwing the entire denomination into turmoil, and finally resulted in a split.

Prof. David Engelsma pens an insightful account of the "Declaration of Principles" – a document that was drawn up in the fires of controversy in the PRC. The document addressed the question regarding the unconditional character of God's covenant. One of the other purposes of the document was that it be used in foreign mission fields. Regrettably, this was never done in the mission work in Singapore. Much trouble could have been avoided had the ERCS deliberated and decided on the question of God's unconditional covenant.

Dorcas Lee recounts the struggles and blessings of a young mother in Singapore, probably one of the busiest and wealthiest countries in the world. The calling to be a keeper in the home, with all of the forces that assault it, is considerable in modern Singapore. Homemakers are rare these days. Most young mothers prefer the luxuries afforded by a career. Yet the calling to be a mother in the home is higher than all other callings God gives to a mother of the covenant. It is weighty, because it serves the cause of God's covenant in the midst of this world. Spiritual warriors are bred from a mother's instruction.

In these evil days, CERC stands as a faithful witness to the truth of God's Word, summarised in the Three Forms of Unity – the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dordt. In November 2018, we celebrate the 400th anniversary of the great Synod of Dordt – the ecclesiastical body that overthrew the heresy of Arminianism and defended the glorious doctrines of sovereign grace and salvation in Jesus Christ. CERC's Reformation Day Conference bears testimony to that celebration, and to the calling to preserve our Reformed heritage.

To that calling to preserve our Reformed heritage and to fight for the truth, the Salt Shakers answers.

Blessings,
Aaron

CHOICES

>>Chua Lee Yang



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

By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter;

Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward (Heb. 11:24-26).

Dear youth,

As I sat down to write this final editorial for you, it was with some difficulty that I deliberated what to write on, for there were two topics to choose from. As our readers may recall, a third instalment on Christian Liberty is due. It was especially encouraging to receive some of your feedback that the past issues were helpful and clear. The last instalment was due to be on the topic of being careful not to stumble the brethren. Important as that series is to finish however, another topic close to heart that I greatly desired to write on was the necessity and urgency of godly zeal among the youth of the church, a topic that has often been discussed within our personal spheres.

It seems that as we talk of zeal, it is often spoken of in the context of change and choice. Looking back upon the past six years or so, how greatly things have changed! The big, vibrant and zealous youth group of back then are the hard-working adults and young families of today. For this group, of which I am a part, the nature of personal relationships and friendships have altered as we adapt to new stages in life, and are forced to make the life choices associated with them. The activities, interests, priorities, struggles and temptations are different. For the new youth group of today, the challenges faced and group dynamics are distinct from the earlier cohort, but this group also faces the upheaval of change, as friends relocate, as individuals transition from secondary school, as some consider vocations and dating relationships – and make life choices. With time too, this group will mature into adulthood and a new generation will take their place as the youth of the church.

In the midst of all this change, we are naturally tempted to be uncertain and afraid, and we become absorbed in the struggles of the new phases of life. We become spent in the pursuits of the world, exhausted from the daily grind. It seems we are increasingly unable and unwilling to spend ourselves in the service of the kingdom. The zeal and fire of the past seems to have faded, and we are troubled.

Zeal and choice are closely related, for each is directly reflective of the other. One who is zealous for God will be

compelled to make godly life choices, while godly life choices always imply deeper investment into the kingdom that inspire further zeal. Thus in connection to the matters of zeal and change, I have decided to write on the topic of life choices, especially the choices of the youth, in order that we may be encouraged.

The Bible text cited above is a striking illustration of the reality of choice, particularly the choice of Moses when he was relatively young. Choice exists in the life of Man, for though our will is in bondage, we possess a will. The wicked do not walk in sin unwillingly, neither are the regenerate dragged by God into the kingdom grudgingly and unenthusiastically. When we speak of choice then, we do not subscribe to the free will theology of salvation by man's choice. Neither do we mean that man has in himself the power to even make a godly choice. We do however, acknowledge that in life, choices are frequently laid before us, wherein there are two or more possible paths to take, and that these choices always carry significant implications.

The text in Hebrews 11, with its historical background recorded in Exodus, clearly sets out the choice of Moses for our instruction as well as our encouragement. Moses was raised as the son of Pharaoh's daughter, at a time when Egypt was the world power and the seat of learning and culture. Perhaps Moses could even have been in line to the throne of Egypt as the son of Pharaoh's daughter – we may never know – but the world was certainly before his feet. Power, prestige and

pleasure were his; he was a literal rags-to-riches story, being the “lucky” Hebrew child that found favour with the king’s daughter. He was extraordinarily well-favoured and intelligent. He could influence many. All he had to do was choose to retain the identity that had been “graciously” bestowed on him by Pharaoh – be an Egyptian, be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter.

Moses threw it all away. Moses refused his high place in the world, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures and power of Egypt for the rest of his long life. Moses gave up his royalty in order to identify with the oppressed slaves, lower in society than even the poorest Egyptian beggars. His peers and friends of childhood, the ministers in court, his adoptive mother; (in our day, we may add, the aunty and uncle, the neighbour, and the social media comments section) – they must all have thought he was a fool, irresponsible, a self-righteous bigot. He did not understand how lucky he was; a reckless, unfilial and mad fellow.

Young people – we may never have the opportunity to be the prime minister or a CEO of a multinational corporation, but certainly in this century in Singapore (and to our readers elsewhere in the world), we are surrounded with the allure of popular culture, fun, wealth, career and more. We have unparalleled access to education and learning. We have more ways to spend our time than ever before in human history. *The pleasures of sin* are dangled before our senses, every single day and hour. Is the choice of Moses so very far away?

By the grace of God, Moses made his choice. It was a miracle, for no human was able to make that choice without

God’s incomprehensible and sovereign power of salvation. Moses esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt. Why? Moses had respect unto the recompense of the reward. How could he see that? As a young man, Moses stood at the crossroads with the world and all that it could offer on one wide and easy path, ridicule, shame and lifelong suffering on the other narrow and uncomfortable way.

The Spirit revealed to Moses that the former was temporary, contemptible and utterly worthless in the end, but with the latter was the everlasting reward. Moses made the two-fold choice – he utterly rejected Egypt and fully accepted the reproach of Christ, knowing full well that he could never have both at the same time.

Dear friends, Moses made his choice, when he was young and every day through the rest of his long life – likewise does God call us to do the same today. Have we by the grace of God, chosen rightly?

Have we decided to make confession of faith and join ourselves to a true church of Christ? Do we live out that confession in the choices we make in life, big and small? What are the choices we make with our time and the people we hang out with and call our friends? What words do we choose to let fall from our lips? What about our choices of hobbies (and the time we spend on them)? Life partners? How we spend our Saturday and Sunday afternoons? Do we choose to speak the truth and confront the lie, or let it slide? Do we choose to study doctrine, or consider it impractical and unnecessary in our lives? Are spiritual considerations determinative of where you choose to

study and work? Beloved youth, what are the choices before your lives and mine today?

Dear friends, the choices are ever before us. Zeal, holiness and good works are on one hand, a slippery slope of backsliding and departure on the other. Reproach, shame and hardship on the left, pleasures of sin for a season on the right. Everlasting glory and fellowship with Christ await the longsuffering people of God; eternal damnation looms to consume the ungodly and unfaithful.

The carnal man, the old man of sin within us, can only ever choose the pleasures of Egypt. Let us pray to God for grace and for His Spirit, and let us never weary to encourage each other. Zeal, good works, godly passion and the fire of first love will naturally evidence themselves. May God help us, for as the kingdom of God draws nearer, the choices will become ever harder and truly impossible, but for the power of God. But God’s people shall be preserved and persevere to the end, and shall never for one moment of eternity regret it.

I have thoroughly enjoyed writing to you all as editor these short four-and-a-half years, and henceforth leave the magazine in the capable hands of Yangzhi and the hard-working committee. All I have written will fade away and be forgotten, but beloved readers, the Word of God shall stand forever. Remember to pass the salt! God’s richest blessings be with you all.

SCRIPTURE'S COVENANT YOUTH (XIV): A NAMELESS GIRL

>>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 RFPA, 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.

Read: 2 Kings 5

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

Nevertheless, I am sure her name, known to God, is written on the passages of the Book of Life, and that we shall see her in heaven. Rather than

even talking about her, we ought to be ashamed of our faith and contentment in comparison with the faith and contentment with the Lord's way that she showed.

What do we know about her?

Well, very little.

She was a "little maid", which means that she probably had not yet reached her teens. What is told about her is that she had been born and raised in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, probably on the east side of Jordan in that area called Gilead. At any rate, that is the area where the Syrian marauders, Israel's worst enemy, were most active. The little bit that Scripture tells us amounts to a thimble-full of information. She had been taken captive by a band of Syrian raiders who prowled in the land of Gilead, burning houses, looting, killing and taking captive the inhabitants. This little girl had been taken captive and sold to the wife of the most famous man in Syria, Naaman by name. She learned that Naaman had leprosy and she told her mistress that she knew of a prophet in her homeland that could cure Naaman of his leprosy, which information prompted Naaman to go to Samaria, the capital of the Northern kingdom of Israel. At that point, Scripture turns away from her and concentrates on Naaman, the king of Israel, and on the prophet Elisha.

Whatever are we to make of this?

It is a remarkable instance of God's providence.

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

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

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

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

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

What would an ordinary young girl do under the circumstances in which we find her? And perhaps what would you do? And what would I do? Her home was destroyed. Her parents – she knew not what had happened to them.

She would never see her homeland or family and friends again. She had to worship her God secretly while refusing to worship the gods of the Syrians. In this environment she had to grow up and live the rest of her life – as a slave!

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

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

What happened to Naaman?

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

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

The ones saved who never became

Israelites were not saved in their generations. Not believers and their seed – just believers, lost again in their generations.

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

It was a little girl of greater faith than most adults in the Northern Kingdom whom God used. May we think that perhaps this little girl and Naaman worshipped together from the time of Naaman's return?

We are brought up sharply to confront the question: Would our faith do what that little girl did? I hope so. By God's grace, I know so.

LOVE FOR GOD'S PEOPLE

>>Rev. Steven Key



Rev. Steven Key is the minister of Loveland Protestant Reformed Church in Loveland, Colorado, USA.

Read: 1 John 3:16-18

Our life in God's fellowship — or as we sometimes speak of it, our life in God's covenant — comes to expression. Such life comes to particular expression. One way that life of fellowship with and love

for God comes to expression is in love for God's people. That is an emphasis of the inspired apostle John in his first epistle.

To live in God's fellowship, to walk in the light, is to love the brother. It is to fulfil the commandment of God which He set before us from the beginning. So emphatically a part of the Christian life is that love for the brother, that the Spirit tells us it is impossible to claim God's fellowship apart from that!

In 1 John 3:16-18, the apostle directs our attention to the way that love comes to expression. It is quite easy to **say** that we love the brother. But let that love be proved by our actions. Let

us love in deed and in truth.

A High Calling

The glorious reality of living in fellowship with God is a reality that comes to practical expression in our lives. It comes to practical expression in this amazing concept called **love**. Scripture describes this love in Colossians 3:14 as the bond of perfectness. The bond of perfectness. You understand immediately, therefore, that we are not talking about love in terms of a natural affection. It is not merely a sentiment, an emotion or feeling. It is a bond that has its sphere in **perfection**. Only those who are **in Christ** can love. Only those who have righteousness and holiness can

love. This love, in other words, comes as a fountain out of our unbreakable covenant relationship with God in Christ and for that reason comes to expression in love for the brother.

There is a necessary distinction to be made between **loving** someone and **liking** someone.

Likes and dislikes belong to the very makeup of our nature. Some like or enjoy the taste of durian. Others dislike it. The same is true of persons. Some are instantly likeable. Others we find hard to like. Those things that move us to like or dislike someone can be, and often are, very superficial. Perhaps it is as superficial as the person's appearance or the way a person dresses. Sometimes a certain characteristic of the person that we observe — whether it be a sour personality, a loud mouth, an appearance of being full of one's self, the way a person behaves, or any number of characteristics — that move us to dislike him or her. And if we really look at ourselves carefully, we can probably find any number of traits that make us pretty unlikeable. On the other hand, our **likes** are formed on the same basis. Liking someone is a focus upon and an interest in the superficial things of appearance, temperament, behavior. It is not even a matter of **effort**. It is simply something natural.

Love, on the other hand, the **biblical** concept of love, is something entirely different. Love is an exercise of the mind and will that goes beyond the superficial and visible. Love is that which comes from the heart which is in union with **Christ**. It is the experience and expression of the love of God which is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us (Rom. 5:5). That is why it is impossible

for a person apart from Christ to have or to exercise this love which **we** are called to express. This love overcomes obstacles and excuses to embrace even the unlikeable. But more, love seeks the **good** of its object.

The Expression of Love for God's People

This love is **active**. Love is **sacrificial**. Love is not just words, even less feelings, but **giving**.

In 1 John, the apostle speaks emphatically of love for the *brethren*. When the apostle speaks not of the neighbour, but of love for the **brother**, his purpose is not to limit the concept *love*. The law of God which is from the beginning calls us to love the neighbour. The neighbour is anyone who crosses our path in the daily course of our life. John, however, speaks of those born of the Spirit, brothers and sisters in the faith. He speaks of that relationship established by the blood of Christ. When the apostle speaks of the brethren, therefore, he is pointing to those in whom God Himself stands before us.

So John would emphasise that when it comes to members of the household of faith, to fail in our calling to love them is a most blatant denial and rejection of God Himself. For that reason, the more that we stand before the question of love, the more careful we have to be not to make it a mere abstraction. Let us not love in mere word. The reference in 1 John 3:18 is not to the speech so much as to the idea or doctrine. The more we get an idea of love in our minds, the more careful we must be not to fall in love with a mere idea and fail to put it to practice.

Often those who most vocally point to

the need for more love in the church and who claim therefore to have an idea of what that love **ought** to be are at the same time those who are most harsh and critical of others. They fail to practice the word. That failure is easy for each one of us. One aspect of love is to reach out in expressions of kindness to our brothers and sisters. Here is just a small example. If we might say of anyone in the congregation, "I don't even know so-and-so," whose fault is that? We certainly are able to speak one to another, to give expression to the most basic expression of love, a care one for another.

The apostle adds, "*neither in tongue.*" Let us not love merely by saying we love. Words are cheap. Shall we boast of our love, while we do nothing to show it? That must not be.

The apostle gives a concrete example. He would bring the necessary doctrine right down to its practical application. "*But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?*" This is a brother, a member with him of the same church, if you will, the body of Christ. How many needs do your brothers and sisters have? There aren't just material needs. There are needs in many different forms — physical needs, material needs, spiritual needs, needs for a friend, for comfort, for spiritual support. How shall we, who know God's sacrificial love for us in the gift of His own dear Son, neglect and ignore the needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ? The positive implication here is that the brother's needs must be taken care of to the best of our ability.

That is the essence of love. It gives; it expresses itself; it **must** seek the welfare

of the brethren. And when you look at this concept in the light of Scripture, you find great emphasis upon this truth that we must be **doers** of the Word. We have a high calling. Love is not self-seeking, but seeks the glory of God and for that reason gives out of a desire to seek the brother's good. It gives in the consciousness of our own fellowship with God because of what He and His Son gave for us.

Our Supreme Example

So John calls our attention to the supreme example of love, the very love of God. "*Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us.*" That love of God, which we have come to know as a matter of our own experience as His children, was revealed very specifically, even powerfully. It was revealed in this, that "*He laid down his life for us.*" He laid down His life, Romans 5 tells us, even though we were yet **enemies**. Not those who were lovable did He love; not even those who were **likeable**. He gave His life for those who were in the bondage of sin and death, consumed with hatred.

I speak of Christ as our supreme example, because that is the emphasis of 1 John 3:16. You realise, however, that Christ's sacrifice was more than an example. He saved us! He did all that was necessary that you and I might

live in God's covenant fellowship as members of His redeemed family. Nor did His love cease there. His love was shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which He has given us (Rom. 5:5). And He continues to abide with us in the unbreakable embrace of His love, even through all the trials and sorrows of our earthly life, providing for our every need according to His sovereign will and good purpose as He knows what is best for us. He is always seeking our good — without fail.

If we live as members of Christ by faith, the consequence ought to be a willingness "*to lay down our lives for the brethren.*" The love of Christ in us is bound to show itself. It cannot be contained. And obviously if we are prepared to lay down our lives for the brethren, we certainly cannot refuse to assist them when they have some temporal, physical or material need. If we should do the greater, then certainly the lesser must be something we do spontaneously.

So you see from the greater to the lesser, love in deed and in truth embraces everything in between, looking to the spiritual and physical benefit of our brothers and sisters in Christ. It provides for the elderly in their needs, as well as the church's children in their spiritual nurture. It also seeks out the brother

or sister who has gone astray from the pathway of life, and spares no expense or hardship in the attempt to bring them back. Galatians 6:1-2: "*Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.*" And if we love in deed and in truth, we will even seek out those brothers and sisters who have yet to see the wonder of this gospel, who have yet to be called out of darkness into God's marvellous light.

A Blessed Result

Hereby perceive we the love of God (1 John 3:16). When we live in fellowship with God and with His Son Jesus Christ, we know His love. We know the extent of that love. We know the power of that love. We know the sacrifice of that love as it embraced us. We have that love not only in our minds, but in our hearts. For the life of that loving Saviour is in us. It is sure. It comes to expression by our love for the brethren.

So God is glorified by us, over against a gain-saying and unloving world. And so, as we see in verse 19, "*we know that we are of the truth*". May God so work in us.

Love is an exercise of the mind and will that goes beyond the superficial and visible. Love is that which comes from the heart which is in union with Christ.

QUIT YOU LIKE MEN (III)

>>Woon Tian Loong

Woon Tian Loong is a member of CERC.

Previously, we looked at the characteristics of a man, the source of his strength, other parts of Scripture, and the temptations for a man not wanting to be a man. Let us continue with a discussion on the form of a man.

Form

Although the essence of a man is in his core (as discussed at the very beginning) – that is, his soul and spirit – God gives to man a manly form as well. Much of this we observe in nature. “Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man...” (1 Cor 11:14). However, as this is my observation of nature and given that I can be fallible in my interpretation of it, and that my interpretation can be skewed by upbringing, culture, and personal experiences, there might be many disagreements between us. Even so, let us agree that 1) God delights in manliness, and 2) a man is a man both in form and substance, exceptions notwithstanding. Also, I understand that not every man is called to be the “alpha male” and that there can be wide differences in their forms.

Generally, a man, physically, has a broader frame – his shoulders are broader, his posture is broader, his actions are broader, and so on. In this regard, while it is not necessary for a man to intentionally broaden his frame, he should at least not deliberately try to collapse his frame or wear clothes that do so.

A man has a deeper voice. A man with a deeper voice commands respect and sounds more convincing. Once again, as God gives to every man a different pitch in his voice, there is no need to intentionally deepen his voice, although he should also not artificially pitch it higher.

There ought also to be energy in his eyes and in his movement. He does not look lost or without ambition. A man ought to be driven – driven by things that matter. He cares for those around him, and certainly, he cares about the things of God – the church, his fellow saints, his family life, and his spiritual life; and it shows.

He does what he can to excel and be skilful in his work and abilities. Strength is skilfulness, after all. This means that he puts in the time and effort to be good at what he is convicted he is called to do. A man is given many abilities by nature. He considers what he is capable of, asks himself what would be of benefit, and hones the skills related to them. Granted, he would not be able to be good at everything he could possibly do or have the time or resources to hone them all. In all the abilities that could possibly be sharpened, I recommend chiefly the command in 2 Timothy 2:15: “Study (that is to say, put in the effort to be good at) to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”.

He has a form of confidence because he is confident in his soul. It is not the confidence of his carnal strength

but the confidence in the Lord. Thus in form, for example, his posture is straight, and those that are around him are encouraged by his confidence. This confidence, however, is also one that is clothed with humility and gentleness, for it is a confidence in the Lord who gives us all strength, due to nothing in a man. Related, he is confident also because, in the strength of the Lord, he is skilful and has a history of faithfulness in his callings.

He behaves in a respectable way. He behaves thus as he understands that God made man respectable. The Belgic Confession Article 14 states that Adam was created in honour and in excellence. Understanding that he is now a new man in Christ, he has the honour and excellency that comes from Jesus Christ, and thus he behaves accordingly.

In opposition to the proper form of a man, there exists (in my opinion) three wrong forms that a male can possibly take.

The first is the boy who never grows up. As his soul is yet immature, so is his form. He has yet to put aside childish things. Seeking to avoid the responsibilities of a man, he dabbles in distractions and things that do not profit. His concerns and speech are rarely about the responsibilities that he has, but the fun that he can acquire.

The second is the effeminate male. It does not mean that he puts on girls’ clothes, necessarily. However, there is the way that he talks and the way

that he walks that bears much perverse resemblance to a form of a girl. He is nothing like a girl, however, try as he might, but a highly exaggerated form of being feminine, as God gives to women a feminine disposition so that what is generally natural for a woman is either impossible or extremely difficult for a man to imitate.

It is my opinion, therefore, that ordinarily men should not wear pink in our culture, where it is the established norm that pink is the colour for girls. Pink, like any other colour, is a good colour and exists for the glory of God. However, a man ought not to seek to adorn himself with things that are

established in a culture to pertain to a woman. Further, when I look into my own heart of why I would do such a thing (and I certainly hope that it is not true of you), even though I might not be trying to be effeminate, I find that I would have been sinfully motivated by a desire for attention, or a spirit of rebellion, or both. “You say that pink is a colour for girls? I’ll show you otherwise!”

Third, there is the “man wannabe”. In many respects, his appearance matches that of a good man. He has an appearance of manliness and strength. His frame is broad. He puts on a bold face and is undaunted by what others

consider daunting. However, in a show of toughness, he is prone to exaggerate his abilities or puffs himself up with pride and arrogance. His impulsiveness is a cheap imitation of decisiveness; his recklessness, a cheap imitation of being willing to bear the consequences. Perhaps, his words are laced with profanity to show that he is not to be taken lightly.

We are reaching the conclusion (but only in the next instalment). We will conclude this series with *the* godly example, a gentle encouragement to parents, and some final words.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

>>Rev. Joshua Engelsma



Rev. Joshua Engelsma is the minister of Doon Protestant Reformed Church in Doon, Iowa, USA.

The cause of Christian education is a massive undertaking. It takes a great deal to start a school: support has to be raised, money has to be pledged, government hoops have to be jumped through. And then, once a school has been established, it demands an equal amount of money and effort to keep it going. This is no small thing, done thoughtlessly on a whim.

But this cause of Christian education is one of the grandest, most worthwhile

endeavours in which we can be engaged. The amount of effort required is paid back one-hundredfold in spiritual benefits to believers and their seed.

In this article I want to lay out what I see as the two main reasons why Christian education is so important. In so doing, I hope to encourage those living in an area where there is no Christian school (such as Singapore) to continue to pray for and work towards the establishing of a school, if the Lord wills. And I hope to encourage those living in areas where there are Christian schools (such as in many areas in the United States) to continue to support and cherish them.

The Instruction

Without question, the single most important reason why Christian education is so precious is the nature of the instruction given in the classroom.

Christian schoolteachers teach all

the same subjects that are taught in a public school. They teach students to read and write. They teach math and science, history and geography, and all the rest. Part of their work is seeing to it that the children have a handle on the facts and have the ability to work through the problems.

But the job of Christian schoolteachers is much more than teaching facts. They have to teach all these subjects in the light of God’s Word. They have to show how each area directs us to God. For example, they teach the facts of history and make students memorise names and dates, and then they show how God is in control and is preparing all things for the coming of Christ. They teach all the math facts, and then they show how it reveals the orderliness of God. They teach all the intricacies of science, and then they show how it points to God’s work of creation. They teach reading and writing, and then

they show how this is important as we study about God and His Word.

This is what sets a Christian school apart. What makes the Christian school different is not just that there are devotions and Bible classes, although we are thankful for these things. What sets the Christian school apart is that it teaches all the subjects in the light of God's Word.

Amazingly, the Christian schoolteacher does even more. The teacher is concerned about the all-comprehensive nurture of the child.

The instruction of our children may not be limited to mere head knowledge. That is true because of who the covenant child is. Parents do not send to school merely a brain, but they send the whole child with a mind, heart, soul, and body. That is also true because of the place of the teacher. The Christian schoolteacher stands in the place of the parents (*in loco parentis*), and since parents are concerned with more than just their child's head, so also is the teacher.

This means that, in addition to teaching the children the various subject areas in the light of God's Word, teachers also instruct the children in their godly life of obedience. They teach the children love for God and love for their neighbour. This goes so far as to include even the attitude of the children. The teachers instruct about laziness, impatience, disrespect, anger, and a general bad attitude. They promote hard work, patience, respect, kindness, and a general good attitude.

For that reason, discipline is administered in the Christian school. Children need positive instruction,

but they also learn important lessons when they sin by means of discipline. Just as parents discipline, so also must the teachers. The children are viewed as covenant children, but this does not mean they will not sin. We will see sin in them, and when they sin they must be disciplined. It might be a stern reprimand, writing lines, a spanking, serving a detention, being suspended for a time, or even being expelled.

Here too the Christian school is different because the nurture and discipline is done with Christ at the center. All the instruction is given in the light of the Word of Christ. All the discipline is administered in the light of the cross of Christ who forgives and calls to repentance.

Such an all-comprehensive education is a tremendous blessing. The covenant children are equipped by it to stand as God's representatives in the midst of the world. They are "thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:17). They serve their covenant God in the midst of this world with all their abilities, and they will praise him in eternity.

The Fellowship

The primary reason why Christian education is so important is the nature of the instruction. This in itself ought to be enough to convince us of the value of the Christian school. But there is another, secondary reason why Christian education is important: the atmosphere of Christian fellowship.

The essence of God's covenant is that we enjoy communion and friendship with God. But we also enjoy fellowship with the other members of God's covenant, since we are united together in the Head of the covenant, Jesus Christ.

Because the Christian school is a grounded in the truth of God's covenant, this means that the atmosphere of the school must be a warm, loving atmosphere of friendship. The school is not a fearful place with angry, unapproachable teachers and stubborn, rebellious students. It is a place of love and kindness and service and happiness.

There is fellowship between the teachers and students. Both must remember that the teachers are the authority and the students are called to be in submission. They are not equals. But neither may they forget that they are friends. The teachers are not the enemies of the students and vice versa. They are covenant friends.

The students also enjoy friendship with their classmates. The Christian school gives covenant children the opportunity to establish friendships with others of the church rather than children of the world. Bonds of friendship with other like-minded Christians are established that last a lifetime. Some even end up marrying someone that they went to school with for many years.

The classroom gives the opportunity for children to learn from each other. They interact with each other in their studies. They have opportunity to express their views and listen as others express different views. One child's opinion can be challenged, but this helps them work through issues. In this atmosphere their thinking can mature and develop. This happens in a safe, controlled environment under the watchful eye of the Christian schoolteacher.

The interactions of children in school teach them to be kind to others, to

help those in need, to put others before themselves, to confess wrongdoing, and to forgive as we have been forgiven.

This is an incalculable blessing! Life in the Christian school is the communion of the saints, and it serves also as preparation for the communion of the saints as the children learn to live together as members of the church.

Conclusion

Knowing the importance of Christian education, what ought to be our response?

First, for those who do not have access

to Christian education, keep working towards that goal. Perhaps there is not enough money at present to proceed. Maybe there is not enough supporting families and children. Perhaps government regulations are a hindrance. It may not be possible at this time to begin a Christian school. But keep praying for and working towards that goal.

Second, for those who do have their own Christian school, be thankful for it and continue to support it. It is possible to lose sight of the blessing of these schools. Parents might wonder if all the money is really worth it, or get

discouraged by how small the school is. Teachers might look up against all the work that is required for such little pay. School boards might be discouraged by the struggle to find teachers and the complaints that they receive. No school is perfect. Not everything is going to go easy or the way that we want. The cause always requires a tremendous amount of sacrifice and patience. But it is worth it! Christian education is such a blessing to the church and home!

So, continue to pray.

And work.

THE CHRISTIAN IN THE WORLD (II): THE CALLING OF A COVENANT MOTHER

>>Dorcas Lee



Dorcas Lee is a member of CERC.

“We need women in the workforce!” “Women are necessary to the growth of the economy.” “Women have equal opportunities as men in the working world.” We hear the call of the world. Childcare subsidies, income tax reliefs, and many government schemes are attractively laid out to entice mothers to return to work or continue in their jobs. And closer to our hearts, as parents who think we know what is best for our children, we heed the voice which murmurs, “How can we survive on a single income with Singapore’s exorbitant standards of living? How

can we provide the best for our children with just the salary that Dad brings in?” And the even tinier and more subtle voice that whispers to the mother, “Is that all you want to be – ONLY a mother?”

Being content in my calling

“Isn’t it quite a waste to get a degree and stay home? What do you do anyway – change diapers, cook, shower the kids, spend endless hours trying to get your kid to nap...?” and “Did you hear that so-and-so is working in this company and doing so well... I bet you would have done as well if you hadn’t given up your job.”

The life of a working lady does seem appealing at times – hour-long lunch breaks, the quiet work space, and financial power. The grass on the other side does look greener when you have lunch burning on the stove, an unreasonable toddler, a wailing baby, sick kids, and vomit on the

floor – all happening at the same time. Twenty-four hours never seem enough. Everyone wants a part of you. Where is the ‘ME’ time? I become discontent and complain about the calling God has placed me in. I forget that each vocation has its difficult times as well as its joys. I look around me instead of UP to the ONE who has my entire day and life in His hands.

Being content involves praying, “*Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven*” (Matt. 6:10), and meaning it. In all our lives, the question we ought to be asking is, “How does God want me to serve Him?” We must submit to His will for us by His grace alone. Staying at home to mind the home and the children is not ultimately for us or even for our kids will turn out good; for we are just a little sliver of thread in God’s huge tapestry of history which culminates in the redemption of His Church. Being “keepers at home” must serve His purpose for the furtherance

of His kingdom directly or indirectly. It is a fact that my husband and children did interrupt my plans and dreams for further studies and a career. However, a sovereign power moved all of these into place. His plans for me were not interrupted. In fact, I must humbly acknowledge that wherever He places me now, in whatever point of my life, it is perfect for me with respect to His eternal counsel in history. And I must be and will be content, for it most certainly is good.

Leaving a legacy for our covenant children

At 6, I wanted to be a teacher because I had wonderful teachers. At 9, I dreamed of being a detective largely due to the fiction I was reading. At 13, I wanted to be a psychologist or social worker, influenced by the news and the reality of poverty and calamity surrounding me. At 16, I wanted to be a child psychologist / therapist, due to the studies I was pursuing. However, throughout my childhood and youth, being a “mother in Israel” was always the constant. The other vocations I dreamed about were secondary, which might materialise if God did not give children. That was probably because I had a mother who was entirely devoted to her calling, a father whose life revolved mostly around the church, not on his career, and ministers who delivered many sermons on the high calling of motherhood.

What messages are we sending to our children as parents and as a church? “If you don’t study hard...your future will be ruined.” “Doctors, lawyers, and engineers are the way to go.” These are probably remarks many of us have heard from well-meaning adults. Does a low education equate a ruined future? Our children and young people

consciously or unconsciously gain direction for their vocations from our instruction and the preaching, but more importantly through our daily walk. What we hold to as important in our lives, how we respond to their successes and failures, how we submit to God’s will for us in our own callings in life – all contribute to the building up of their dreams and aspirations. What are we instructing our children about their chief end in life? Are they clear that, “...*whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God*”? (1 Cor. 10:31). This admonition comes to us regardless of whether we like our callings or not. We are ambassadors of the kingdom above and represent our King in this temporal abode. We must do our best, not to gain earthly credit, the praise of men, and good grades for a promising future, but our driving force must be God’s glory. Our chief end: His glory alone!

Saved in Childbearing

As a young person, I had always wondered at this verse: “*Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing*” (1 Tim. 2:15). How in the world are women saved when they bring forth children? A minister explained that the text refers to mothers being sanctified through the raising and nurturing of their children. Well, that made things clearer. However, the verse

only hit home when I had children of my own.

Indeed, I can see now how the sleepless nights, the dirty diapers, the tantrums, and the weariness all contribute to my sanctification. Many lessons I have learnt in this short journey of motherhood, but the greatest one would definitely be: “*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me*” (Phil. 4:13). I can do all things ONLY because Christ gives me strength to do them. The apostle Paul wrote this epistle in bonds, awaiting certain death, and in the verses preceding this verse he says, “*For I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content*” (Phil. 4:11). When we are content with God’s lot for our lives, we will know His unwavering, victorious, and resolute strength to face each day and its battles in our respective callings in life.

Our vocations, whatever they may be, are part of our sanctification, to make us ready to be fitted as lively stones in His kingdom above. And God in His wisdom ordained that mothers be sanctified through the raising and nurturing of His precious lambs in the sphere of the covenant home. Hence, He will certainly grant us sufficient grace to fulfil our callings as covenant mothers for His glory alone.

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SIGNS OF OUR LORD'S RETURN: NORTH KOREAN RELATIONS

>>Daniel Tang



Daniel Tang is a member of CERC.

On 12 June this year, our country played host to a significant event: the DPRK-USA Singapore Summit. This was the first ever meeting between a sitting U.S. president and the leader of North Korea. The one-day event, held on the resort island of Sentosa, included a one-to-one meeting between U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, bilateral meetings between American and North Korean officials, and a lunch meeting. At the end, the two countries made a joint declaration of peace. All of this was widely covered by international media and televised to millions worldwide.

Why is this meeting so significant in the eyes of the world? To understand its importance, we have to look back some seventy years. After World War II, the Korean peninsula was divided in two: North Korea, ruled by the Communists, and South Korea, ruled by an American-supported government. Both parties claimed to be the legitimate rulers of the entire Korean peninsula, and in 1950, North Korea invaded the south to try to unify the entire Korean peninsula by force. They did not succeed, in part due to American intervention. The peninsula

remained divided, and the two Koreas remained hostile toward each other.

In early 2018, relations on the Korean peninsula began to improve. We will not be able to go into the details here for lack of space, but the North Korean leader made an offer to meet the American president, an invitation that was quickly accepted. Singapore was decided as the location for the meeting, as it was deemed to be sufficiently neutral, accessible with the limited transportation options available to North Korea, and able to provide the U.S. entourage with sufficient security. After a number of initial setbacks, the meeting did eventually take place. At the end of the meeting, both sides announced a four-point agreement to establish peaceful relations between the U.S and North Korea, work toward lasting peace on the Korean peninsula, denuclearise North Korea, and return the war remains of American soldiers still in North Korea since the Korean War.

Naturally, the world rejoiced at this large step toward peace and unity. Surely, this new improvement in relations with North Korea would be nothing but good news in the attempt to build a safer world for all.

However, now we get to the point of this article. What does this development mean for us?

We should view the unity of the world, or any step toward accomplishing that, with great concern. The unity of the world is nothing to rejoice about. The

day that the world is united is the day when the devil will have succeeded in forming the antichristian kingdom. We know this from Revelation 13, which gives us a description of the antichrist and his powers.

In Revelation 13, the apostle John sees a vision of two beasts. The first, described in verses 1–8, is the beast rising out of the sea, has seven heads and ten horns, and appears to have a combination of body parts from the leopard, bear, lion, and dragon. Rev. Herman Hoeksema, in his commentary on Revelation, notes that the different animals represent the different kingdoms and powers of the world who have come together in unity.

Verses 11–18 describe the second beast, the beast out of the earth. John describes this beast as having two horns like a lamb and speaking like a dragon. This second beast serves the first, portraying a softer image and convincing men to serve the first beast. It is this second beast that will give all men the mark that will distinguish those that serve the antichrist and those that will not. And on that terrible day, those who are still faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ will find themselves in terrible hardship, for they will be unable to buy and sell (v. 17) – ostracized from society, persecuted, and even killed.

Presently, the antichrist is not yet able to fully manifest its powers, for in God's perfect plan, the time for the antichrist has not yet come. However, the power of the antichrist is already in the world (1 John 4:3), always trying to work toward its goal of uniting the world in

the service of the devil. We see evidence of that already near the beginning of history, when man tried to unite at Babel (Gen. 11). However, because it was not yet time for the antichrist, God confounded the language of men so that they could not be united. This caused the deadly wound on the beast of the sea (Rev. 13:3) that would be healed when the beast arises out of the sea, because then the time has come for the antichrist to come to power.

The events at Babel did not dissuade the devil from his quest to unite the world against the true King. Over the course of history, he would try again and again. We think of the Romans and the Greeks in ancient history, in their attempt to

rule the world. We think of the Roman Catholic Church, which tried to use religion to unite and control the world. In modern times, organisations like the United Nations are effectively the power of the antichrist trying to unite the world under popular themes like achieving world peace, ending world hunger, equality for all, saving the environment, and so on.

The unity of North Korea and the United States is nothing to rejoice about. Or viewed from another angle, we may rejoice, but not as the world rejoices. We do not join the world in applauding this historical event, glorifying these world leaders for their amazing breakthrough in bringing the

world one step toward world peace, for even this is the work of the antichrist, because the antichrist knows that in order to come to power, the world cannot remain divided.

When we see North Korea and the United States – once arch-enemies – trying to make peace, we know that this only brings us one step closer to the glorious day we watch and pray for: the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is what we hope for. This is what we rejoice in.

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OVERTAKEN IN A FAULT

>>Lim Yang Zhi



Lim Yang Zhi is a confessing young adult in CERC.

One Sabbath noon, between two spiritual brothers:

“Have you seen ____?” *No*.

One week later, between the same brothers.

“Hey, I still haven’t seen ____ lately. Have you?” *No*.

Three weeks later, among the same brothers with another brother.

“Is there something wrong? I’ve not seen ____, and he hasn’t been replying my Whatsapp. Do you know anything?” *No*.

One full month: Nothing seen or heard of ____.

Then this: “He’s not coming. He will not come to church.”

What to do? What will *you* do?

Brethren, above is a chilling, common situation. Chilling, it is, because we are facing with a spiritual brother (or sister) adamant to forsake the church — seemingly adamant, at least. Yet it is also common, because *every* instituted church of Jesus Christ has faced, is facing, and will face backsliding members — a Cain, an Esau, an Absalom, a Judas, a...prodigal son.

Then there is Galatians 6:1: *Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault...* Under inspiration, Paul calls the church to think of this if. Really, Paul does not mean, “If this happens, then...” But “This will happen; and when it does, then...” A brother *will be* overtaken!

Overtaken: Paul calls our attention to a figure. A man walks on a path. The path is difficult—pebbled with gravel of little friction, surrounded by a suffocating heat, and snared with potholes. The man walks on this path, and, soon enough, he falls. He is *overwhelmed* by the difficulties of the path.

Every child of God walks on this earth, in the path God has set out. Every child’s path is wrought with the earthly afflictions and spiritual temptations. Every child walks, but soon stumbles and falls.

What caused the child to fall was one particular danger — sin. Sin is the fault Paul speaks of. Sin sometimes refers to our *sinfulness*, that everything we do is tainted with our *sinfulness*. But Paul refers here to a particular thought, word, or deed that goes against God's law. Into *that* thought, word, or deed, the brother falls.

Paul does not refer to a particular sin (lying, idol-worship, etc.), because *any* sin can cause us to fall — from the outrageous (pornography) to the subtle (procrastination); from the physically violent (abortion, physical abuse) to the emotionally hurtful (gossip and verbal abuse); from the visible (swearing) to the invisible (doubting God's existence).

Pause. What is your fault, and what is mine? What is the fault you see in that backsliding brother? Let us take heed to God's Word: *Every* child of God has his fault.

Every fault — whether yours or mine — is serious. Just as a man fallen on the path is injured, incapacitated, and certain to die in a few days; so our sins cripple us on life's path, and do worse by consuming our souls unto everlasting damnation (if not for Jesus Christ!). Above these effects of sins, however, stands the fact that our righteous God is defied when we sin. The sin we fall into violates His righteousness.

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault...what will we do?

What *should* we do? That is, I assume, what you seek to know more.

Certainly, we must watch. Just as a passer-by *sees* an injured person before going to his aid, so we are to look out for brothers and sisters who might have fallen into sin. Let us *be vigilant*, as the devil *seeks whom he may devour*. Vigilance starts with the daily reading of the Word and daily prayer, and vigilance *meditates* on the Word amidst our busyness *day and night*. Vigilance increases when we make it a point to be part of spiritual fellowship with fellow *iron-sharpening* believers. (Do the italicized words sound familiar? Find the passages in your Bibles, and begin your vigilance by reading those passages!)

Vigilant, we will be moved to restore the fallen brother. *How* we restore the fallen brother is our consideration next time, DV. Recognising there are many ways to approach the brother improperly, we will consider the proper way Paul teaches in Galatians 6:1.

For now, consider, in general, how willing we are to approach the fallen brother. To some extent, our Chinese culture shies away from such confrontation. 爱面子 is the predominant attitude. Colloquially,

the phrase refers to hide a fault in order to preserve a person's reputation and harmony in the community. In other words, if talking to a brother about his sin means ruining his reputation, I would not talk to him about it. I would maintain the façade among others that everything is fine.

Pause again. Has this been your attitude? Has this been mine?

Nowhere in Scripture does God call us to this attitude. Rather, God calls us to rebuke as Paul rebuked Peter (Gal. 2: 11-14); to admonish as Paul admonished the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:10; 3:3; 5:1; 6:15-20). Failure to rebuke or admonish in the way God commands us to incites our brother to become an Absalom — a man unrestrained in his sin, due to David's failure to rebuke or admonish.

爱面子, in hiding (really, ignoring) sin, claims itself to be an expression of love (爱). Is that true? Consider Hebrews 12:6: *For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth*. Love *chastens* and *scourges* (spiritually) in the way of confronting the fallen brother. Does 爱面子 fit with this perfect love of God? Hardly.

What fits God's chastening and scourging love is the act of restoring the brother. More than that, next time, DV.

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault...what will we do?

HISTORY OF THE PRCA'S MISSIONS IN FOREIGN FIELDS

>>Rev. Daniel Kleyn



Rev. Daniel Kleyn is a missionary of the PRCA to the Philippines.

Soon after their beginning in 1924, the Protestant Reformed Churches also began doing mission work. However, the PRCA did not immediately do foreign mission work. Initially they focused on domestic missions.

At its beginning the PRCA was small. In light of that, as well as in light of its recent separation from the Christian Reformed Church over the issue of common grace, the denomination was busy at first with “church reformation”. In the first few decades of its existence, the PRCA focused especially on reaching out to “the lost sheep of Israel” (Matt. 10:6). Their burden was to call back to the truth the members of the Christian Reformed Church. The PRCA also laboured among groups of believers in the USA and Canada who were interested in being established as Protestant Reformed churches. Through the Lord’s blessing on these domestic mission labours, many new churches were organised and added to the denomination. The PRCA thereby not only increased in size, but was also able to expand its presence and thus its witness throughout the USA and Canada.

The natural result of the PRCA’s focus on domestic missions was that the denomination did not have the energy or resources to take up work in foreign fields. That changed, however, in the 1940s.

Before directing our attention to the specific details of the foreign mission work that the PRCA has done and is now doing, it will be helpful, I believe, to note especially two things.

First of all, there is the matter of the division that the PRCA has made between domestic mission fields and foreign mission fields. By this we refer to the fact that certain countries were designated as domestic, and others as foreign. These designations were made by Synod 1993 of the PRCA and are as follows:

Domestic Fields: U.S.A., Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Europe, Russia
Foreign Fields: Africa, Asia, South America, Central America, Caribbean, Middle East

One other thing to keep in mind is the PRCA’s definition of foreign mission work. That definition is found in the “Constitution of the Foreign Mission Committee” and reads as follows:

Definition: *Foreign mission work is that work of God through His church whereby He sends forth His gospel unto the ends of the world and gathers into His church those who in their generations have not belonged to the covenant.*

As stated earlier, it was in the 1940s that the PRCA began to direct some attention to foreign mission work. They did so first of all by establishing a fund and beginning to set money aside for foreign missions. In the 1940s and 1950s, the denomination considered doing foreign work in China and/or the Netherlands, but no decisions were made to take up work in either of these countries.

Protestant Reformed foreign mission work did not really take off until the 1960s. Since then the denomination has engaged in foreign mission in a number of foreign lands. The list of countries is as follows.

- **Jamaica:** 1963 to 1993 (when the field was closed)
- **Singapore:** 1979 to 1987 (after a church was instituted)
- **Northern Ireland:** 1990 to 1996 (when a church was instituted)
- **Ghana:** 1996 to 2005 (when the field was closed)
- **Philippines:** 2001 to the present

The PRCA’s work in **Jamaica** began in response to a request in 1962 from a pastor in England who asked that the Protestant Reformed churches take over the work he had started there. After numerous delegation visits, a missionary (Rev. G. Lubbers) was called and laboured there from 1970-1975. The next missionary (Rev. W. Bruinsma) laboured there from 1984-1989. Due to numerous difficulties with the work and little positive fruit on the labours, the field was closed in 1993.

Mission work in **Singapore** began through some young believers contacting the PRCA and a subsequent visit by two representatives of the PRCA in 1975. Much contact and communication took place in the years that followed. A missionary (Rev. A. den Hartog) was then called to Singapore and laboured there from 1979-1987. Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore was organised in 1986. A number of ministers on loan have served there: Rev. J. Kortering from 1992-2002, Rev. A. den Hartog from 2002-2005, and Rev. A. Lanning from 2012-2017 (first as minister on loan, and then as pastor of the CERC). A sister-church relationship was established between the PRCA and CERC in 2012. Space does not enable me to say much more, except to express thanks to the Lord for the many ways in which He preserved CERC through various struggles and greatly blessed and prospered this work and this congregation. The PRCA is very thankful to have this sister in Southeast Asia.

Although designated as belonging to domestic missions, we also consider the mission work done in **Northern Ireland**, since this involved overseas mission work. Initial contact with Reformed believers in Northern Ireland occurred in 1984. In 1990, the PRCA Synod declared Northern Ireland a mission field. Rev. R. Hanko served as a missionary there from 1993-2001, continuing beyond the time when a

congregation (Covenant Protestant Reformed Church) was instituted in 1996. In 2001, after being trained for the ministry in the seminary of the PRCA, Rev. Angus Stewart, a son of the congregation, was ordained as the pastor of the CPRC. The CPRC has its own mission work in the Republic of Ireland, with Rev. M. McGeown serving as missionary there since 2010. The CPRC has been a sister church of the PRCA since 2007. More recently (in 2015) a sister-church relationship was established between the CPRC and the CERC. We thank the Lord for such relationships, clear evidence of His sovereign work in uniting our churches together in the truth (John 17:11).

The PRCA's work in **Ghana** began through communication with a contact there already in 1974. This communication continued for many years and included sending materials (cassettes and literature) in order to provide instruction in the Reformed faith. With Synod's approval, delegations were sent from 1991-1996. Eventually, in 1996, the PRCA Synod declared Ghana a mission field. Three different men served as missionaries in Ghana: Mr. R. Moore (1999-2002), Rev. W. Bekkering (2001-2004), and Rev. R. Miersma (2003-2005). The work in Ghana was characterised by many difficulties, and after six years of having missionaries on the field, it became clear there was little possibility of establishing a congregation there. In 2005, the PRCA Synod approved

the Foreign Mission Committee's recommendation to close this field.

Protestant Reformed mission work in the **Philippines** began in the mid-1990s when correspondence was received from the Philippines in which interest was expressed in the Reformed faith as confessed and taught by the PRCA. From 1997-2001, the Foreign Mission Committee sent seven delegations to the Philippines to meet with numerous contacts and to evaluate the expressed interest in the Reformed faith. In 2001, Synod declared the Philippines a mission field, appointed Doon PRC as the calling church, and authorised the calling of a missionary. The following missionaries either have or are currently serving there: Rev. A. Spriensma (2002-2007), Rev. R. Smit (2009-2015, 2017-present), Rev. D. Kleyn (2009-present), and Rev. D. Holstege (2016-present). The Berean Protestant Reformed Church was instituted in 2006. Another church also became the object of our mission work, namely, the Protestant Reformed Church in Bulacan. In April 2014, these two churches united to form the Federation of Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines. A third congregation, the Maranatha Protestant Reformed Church, was added to the denomination in 2015. And the Lord willing, a fourth church (Provident Christian Church) will be added in 2019. The Lord has richly blessed this work. The PRCP is now a sister church of the PRCA, and has recently begun

Foreign mission work is that work of God through His church whereby He sends forth His gospel unto the ends of the world and gathers into His church those who in their generations have not belonged to the covenant.

the process of working toward a sister relationship with CERC. The PRCP has three of its own pastors. It is also engaged in its own mission and outreach work. The three PRCA missionaries in the Philippines continue to labour especially in the PRCP, but also with other contacts with a view to having them become part of the PRCP one day, the Lord willing. A major goal of the PRCP and thus also a significant

work of the PRCA missionaries is the establishment of a seminary. We pray that the Lord may prosper this work, since the need for pastors in the churches and on this mission field is indeed great (Luke 10:2).

Over the years the Lord has given the PRCA many opportunities to be engaged in foreign missions. The PRCA has also needed to learn many

things about doing this mission work well, often through errors that we have made. We thank the Lord that in spite of our weaknesses, He has been pleased to use the PRCA for the running of the white horse of the gospel with a view to the gathering in of the elect and the return of our Saviour on the clouds of glory. Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!

FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD (I): GROUNDED ON JUSTIFICATION

>>Rev. Nathan Langerak



Rev. Nathan Langerak is the minister of Crete Protestant Reformed Church in Crete, Illinois, USA.

The editorial staff of the *Salt Shakers* asked me to write on the subject of the believer's fellowship with God.

It is necessary to begin by defining fellowship with God. Fellowship with the Father is the covenant. The covenant is the gracious relationship of fellowship and friendship between God and His elect people in Christ. So God said to Israel throughout the Old Testament, "I will be your God, and you shall be my people". This covenantal formula teaches that the essence of the covenant is that believers have fellowship with God. To have the covenant is to have the experience of the covenant, which is fellowship. To

have fellowship with God, which is the covenant, is to have the experience of fellowship with God. There is no separation that can be made between the covenant and the experience of the covenant or between fellowship with God and the experience of fellowship with God. The inseparability of the covenant and its fellowship must be clear when fellowship with God is explained. Fellowship with the Father is to know God as one's God and to walk with God as one's God in the world and finally in the perfection of that covenant in the life to come. The fellowship of the covenant is that the believer through God's gracious work knows God, experiences God, and walks with God as his gracious God in the world.

Equally important as the definition of fellowship with God is the confession that the covenant is salvation. The covenant is not the means or instrument that God uses to save believers, but when God incorporates believers and their seed into his covenant that is their salvation. It is the highest good of man to be in covenant with God. In that covenant with God man has

been delivered from sin, death, and damnation, and he enjoys God forever as his God. The salvation that God appointed to the sinner in election and that Christ merited for the sinner at the cross comes into his possession in the covenant.

The Reformed describe the benefits that God bestows on the elect sinner in the covenant as regeneration, calling, conversion, faith, justification, sanctification, and glorification. The order of these benefits is important. The order gives the logical and experiential order in which the Holy Spirit bestows these benefits on the elect sinner. All these benefits are blessings of the covenant of grace. Because God is the God of the believer and because God has made with the elect sinner an eternal covenant of grace, God regenerates, calls, converts, bestows true faith, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies the elect sinner.

The believer's experience in the covenant is the enjoyment of God's gracious work to bestow all these blessings on him and save him. By the reception of these benefits he experiences God

as his gracious God and enjoys God's fellowship. For example, in regeneration he experiences God as the one who raises him from the dead. In the calling he experiences God as the one who speaks to his heart and summons him from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son. So it is true for all the benefits of the covenant of grace. The point is that the covenant is salvation. In the covenant the elect sinner is saved in his own mind, heart, and conscience by God's gracious work to bestow Christ's benefits on him.

Because the covenant is to have God as one's God, to have fellowship with God and to have full salvation, the covenant is also life. Life is the grand benefit that God promised in Christ Jesus. In Adam all whom he represented died. In the garden Adam departed from God who was his life and being guilty God inflicted the punishment of death on him and all his posterity. So all men are conceived and born dead in trespasses in sins, far from God, and outside God's covenant. To live apart from God is death. Death is the experience of the sinner in Adam. In Christ all whom He represents shall be made alive. To be a member of the covenant of grace is life. It is specifically life with God. God alone is life and to live with God is life for man. The life promised in Christ is eternal life so that the believer in the covenant on this side of the grave has in principle what he will receive in perfection in heaven.

Thus the covenant is essentially also union with Christ. To have fellowship with God is to have fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ. God incorporates the elect sinner into his covenant of grace when God incorporates the sinner into Jesus Christ and makes him a member of Christ. To be in Christ is to

be in God's covenant of grace. To be a partaker of Christ is to be a partaker of the fellowship of God in the covenant and thus also a partaker of all the benefits of the covenant.

The fundamental question, then, is this: What is the ground and foundation of the believer's reception of salvation and of all the benefits of salvation and of the covenant and the fellowship of the covenant? What is the ground now in the believer's conscience and experience? What is the only ground in the world to come when he receives the perfection of the covenant? The answer is the cross of Jesus Christ, who merited salvation for the elect sinner and reconciled him to God by the death of his cross. At the cross specifically Christ merited righteousness for the sinner. This righteousness is God's verdict that the sinner is perfect in God's sight and worthy of every blessing. God blesses — God always blesses and God only blesses — the righteous.

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How can an elect sinner be righteous before God? The answer is the justification of that sinner before God by faith alone. In justification God declares the ungodly sinner who believes in God to be righteous and worthy of eternal life and of every

blessing of salvation. By faith alone the believer receives from God in his own conscience the forgiveness of his sins and the gracious imputation of the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Jesus Christ as his very own. That gracious verdict of God overcomes the testimony of the believer's conscience that he has broken all the commandments of God and is worthy of condemnation. By His justification of the believer, God cleanses the conscience of the believer and establishes peace with God in his conscience.

Peace and the covenant are synonyms. Always the promise of God's covenant is the promise of peace with God. This was the very form of the original covenantal promise in Genesis 3:15. The promise was enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. Enmity is hatred and leads to warfare. The promise of Genesis 3:15 positively stated is peace with God. So God calls his covenant "the covenant of my peace" because peace is the covenant's fundamental and all-embracing benefit (Isa. 54:10). For the same reason God says in Ezekiel that he will make with Israel "a covenant of peace" (Ezk. 34:25; 37:26). The reign of the Messiah is prophesied as a time of "peace" (Ps. 72:7). At the birth of Jesus, the angels sang of "peace" (Luke 2:14). And the fulfilment of the promise given in Genesis 3:15 is described as peace: the "God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly" (Rom. 16:20). The good news is the "gospel of peace" because it proclaims and brings this peace to all who call on the name of the Lord (Rom. 10:15).

This peace, which is the covenant, comes into the believer's conscious possession by justification. This is the

testimony of Romans 5:1: “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”. Peace with God is the grand benefit of justification. The believer knows God as his God and understands that God is for him and that nothing can be against him. To be at peace with God is to understand that God is one’s covenant-God and to live in that reality. To put it another way, the believer is reconciled to God in his mind.

The same relationship between justification and the covenant is stated in James 2:23: “The scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God”. In the first part of the verse, James quotes from Genesis 15:6, the great Old Testament passage on justification by faith alone. In the second part James gives the benefit of Abraham’s justification: he was called the friend of God. He was called that by God and he was called that in his own conscience and experience because God justified him by faith alone. Scripture establishes here that in the believer’s own conscience and experience the benefit of justification for the believer is that he is at peace with God and is called the friend of God. It is as if in justification God says, “I forgive your sins, friend. I impute to you the righteousness of Christ, friend. On this basis and for this reason you are my friend now and for eternity”. To be the friend of God is nothing less than to have the covenant and to enjoy God’s fellowship. Abraham was called the friend of God because he was justified by faith alone.

Before God justifies the elect sinner in his conscience, there are several gracious works that God works in the

sinner’s heart: God engrafts the him into Christ, which is the essence of the covenant; regenerates him with the life of the covenant; calls him from fellowship with sin into God’s fellowship in the covenant of grace; and works faith in his heart, both the will to believe and the act of believing. But the ground of these gracious works remains the same: the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ. So the ground, the only ground, of all of the believer’s salvation is that perfect righteousness of Christ Jesus merited at the cross. Consider any benefit of salvation and always the ground of that benefit remains the same: the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ. This is true whether one considers the elect sinner’s regeneration, his sanctification, or his glorification and the reception of the reward of grace. The only ground and foundation of that gracious bestowal of salvation and the grant of every reward and blessing of salvation is the righteousness of Christ alone merited at the cross and imputed to the believer by faith only.

In the believer’s justification God brings that truth into the conscience and possession of the believer by faith. By faith God acquits the believer of his sins and sinfulness and justifies him, freeing him from the guilt of his sin and dreadful sense of liability to divine punishment. In so doing God also causes him to understand that God is his God, that God does him good, and will always do him good, and that he is the friend of God. When God justifies him, the believer understands that God has loved him from all eternity, that Christ has died for him personally, that God has united him to Christ, regenerated him, called him, and given him faith, and that God will also sanctify him and

glorify him and present him in heaven among the assembly of the elect in life eternal.

This is what Zacharias said concerning the ministry of John: “To give the knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins” (Luke 1:77). The knowledge of salvation means the knowledge of all of God’s merciful and gracious acts of salvation. That knowledge comes into the consciousness and experience of the believer by the remission of sins, or his justification. If we understand knowledge as experience of salvation, then we experience God as the gracious God of our salvation by the remission of sins. If we understand that the covenant is salvation, then the knowledge of fellowship with God comes through justification. The justifying work of God is the entrance into the experience of salvation and all the experience of salvation comes by it and is founded upon it. The reason is that every benefit of salvation rests solely on the righteousness of Jesus Christ accomplished on the cross and that righteousness becomes the believer’s only by faith.

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This is the same thing that the apostle Paul teaches in Romans 5:2: “By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God”. The apostle here adds to the truth that he taught in verse 1: “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”. He adds the truth that those who have peace with God, or justification, also have access by Jesus Christ into this grace wherein they stand, and they rejoice in hope of the glory of God. The apostle speaks of the all-embracing effect throughout the whole life of the believer and into glory of that justification by which he has peace with God. By “this grace” the apostle means that by faith the believer is justified and has peace with God. To have that peace is basically the same as to have the experience of God as one’s covenant-God — the one who loves him, the one who is for him and is never against him, and the one who averts all evil or turns it to his profit. A believer has that peace being justified by faith.

The apostle calls justification “this grace” because justification is a wholly gracious act of God itself and because justification is the believer’s introduction into the sphere of God’s favour and wonderful grace. Being justified, the believer lives in the presence of God

in God’s favour. Paul says that the believer’s access, or introduction, is “by Christ” because Christ provided the righteousness that is the basis of this introduction into divine favour and further because Christ by His Spirit brings believers into that favour. He says this access is “by faith” because the believer is a partaker of Christ’s righteousness in no other way than by faith only, and by faith the Spirit also works in the believer and brings him into God’s gracious presence.

The apostle’s point with the words “wherein we stand” is that this position of standing in the favour of God on the basis of Christ’s righteousness alone by faith alone is that in which the believer constantly abides. He stands always in the presence of God in God’s favour. The believer stands in this life. He stands in the judgment every day. He stands over against every affliction, sorrow, tribulation, and suffering. He stands over against the wicked world and the kingdom of Satan. He stands over against his own sinful flesh and his own actual sins. He stands in the final judgment. He stands and abides in God’s covenant, in his peace, and in his favour. The believer stands to all eternity in God’s grace. The believer stands in life and to all eternity on the basis of Christ’s righteousness alone received by faith alone. To say this in another way:

the believer stands as God’s covenantal friend in this life and to all eternity on the basis of Christ’s righteousness alone received by faith alone.

By “and rejoice in hope of the glory of God,” the apostle means that because the basis of the believer’s standing in God’s favour is Christ and His righteousness and because that basis is sure and unchanging, the believer also rejoices in hope of the glory of God. Because he stands in grace through faith alone on the basis of Christ’s righteousness alone, the believer rejoices in the sure and certain expectation that he shall see the glory of God in eternal life.

Always in all his life he stands in God’s grace because always in all his life the only ground and foundation of his salvation and of every benefit of salvation is Christ’s righteousness received by faith alone. Christ alone is the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father but by Christ. The one who has Christ has the Father also. The one who has fellowship with Christ has fellowship with the Father. The one who believes in Christ is called the friend of God. The one who is justified by faith shall live, live now in God’s covenant and live in eternity in the perfection of that covenant when God’s tabernacle will be with men.

**The one who is justified by faith shall live, live now in God’s covenant
and live in eternity in the perfection of that covenant
when God’s tabernacle will be with men.**

THE (PROTESTANT REFORMED) "DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES"

>> Prof. David Engelsma



Prof. David Engelsma is a professor emeritus of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary. He was Professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament Studies from 1988 to 2008, and has been an ordained minister since 1963.

Introduction

The Protestant Reformed "Declaration of Principles" is a lengthy decision by the Protestant Reformed synods of 1951 and 1953. It states important truths about the covenant of grace on the basis of the Reformed confessions, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dordt. The decision is an official declaration, or expression, by the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) of the teaching of the creeds about the covenant of grace.

It is not a new confession. It is only a declaration of what the confessions teach. The declaration states the "principles", or main elements, of the truth of the doctrine of the covenant. It is by no means a complete theology of the covenant.

The complete "Declaration" can be found in the "Acts of Synod [of the] Protestant Reformed Churches in America 1951", pages 201-208, and in my book, *Battle for Sovereign Grace in the Covenant: The Declaration of*

Principles (Jenison, MI: RFPA, 2013), pages 197-219.

History

The "Declaration" became necessary in the PRC because of controversy over the doctrine of the covenant. Some ministers were introducing a new and different doctrine than that taught in the confessions and held by the PRC from the beginning of their history as churches in 1924. The new, heretical doctrine was the teaching that God graciously establishes His covenant with all the children of believers by gracious promise to all the children alike. But the continuation of the covenant and its salvation are conditional, that is, they depend upon the will of the child. All alike are able to fulfil the condition of believing. However, only some do believe. With them, because they choose to believe, God continues the covenant, and saves them in the covenant.

The PRC judged this doctrine of the covenant to be a form of the Arminian heresy condemned by the Canons of Dordt. This doctrine makes covenant-salvation dependent, not on the sovereign grace of God originating in election, but upon the will of the child.

Against this false doctrine of the covenant, which was troubling and dividing the PRC, the PRC adopted the "Declaration". It adopted the "Declaration" provisionally in 1951. It ratified the adoption in 1953. The result was schism in the PRC. More than half of the ministers and members split from the PRC. The

cost to the PRC of the adoption of the "Declaration" was high. Those who broke with the PRC over the doctrine of the covenant soon rejoined the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), from which the PRC had been expelled in 1924. In the CRC, the doctrine of a conditional covenant and a conditional covenant-salvation reigned supreme, as they do to this day. In fact, there is good reason to believe that the CRC's doctrine of common grace originated in its prevailing doctrine of a covenant of universal, conditional grace.

Doctrinal "Principles"

The fundamental issue in the controversy settled by adoption of the "Declaration" was salvation by grace alone, having its source in divine election. The "Declaration" confesses

The covenant and its salvation are unconditional. It and its salvation do not depend upon the will of the baptized child, but upon the gracious will of God.

**The promise of the covenant, “I will be your God and the God of your children”, is particular, not general and universal.
God makes the promise to elect believers and to the elect children of believers, which children are the true seed of Abraham and the true seed of believing parents.**

and defends this gracious salvation, specifically regarding the salvation of baptized children in the sphere of the covenant of grace.

The content of the “Declaration” is almost entirely quotations of the Reformed confessions. In fact, there is very little explanation of the quotations. The “Declaration” intended to be, and is, simply the “expression” of the creeds with application to the precise issue of salvation in the covenant. Whatever churches or theologians dissent from the “Declaration” thereby dissent from the Reformed confessions.

Specifically, the “Declaration” establishes the following truths concerning the covenant. First, the promise of the covenant, “I will be your God and the God of your children”, is particular, not general and universal. That is, God makes the promise to elect believers and to the elect children of believers, which children are the true seed of Abraham and the true seed of believing parents. This is the confession of Canons 2.5: “The promise of the gospel is that *whosoever believeth in Christ crucified* shall not perish, but have everlasting life” (emphasis added). Although the promise is *heard* by all, God makes the promise to the elect in Jesus Christ.

Second, election governs the covenant and its salvation, as it also governs

salvation in missions (cf. Acts 13:48: “as many as were ordained to eternal life believed”). This is the Reformed confession in Canons 1.9: “Election is the fountain of every saving good, from which proceed faith [and] holiness... and finally eternal life itself, as its fruits and effects...”

Third, the covenant and its salvation are unconditional. This is to say that the covenant is gracious. It and its salvation do not depend upon the will of the baptized child, but upon the gracious will of God. This is the teaching of Canons 1.10, as indeed of the entire first head of the Canons: “The good pleasure of God is the sole cause of this gracious election, which doth not consist herein, that out of all possible qualities and actions of men God has chosen some as a condition of salvation...”

The only alternative is that the covenant depends upon the will of the child.

Fourth, God’s promise to a person, in this case a baptized child, includes that God will give the child faith. Faith is not a work of the child upon which the covenant and its promise depend, but the gift of God to the child, which gift of faith is part of the promise. When God promises to be the God of a child, He promises to give the child the faith by which the child is adopted and saved. Faith is included in the promise, according to the Heidelberg Catechism,

Q. 74 and Canons 3, 4.14.

Are infants also to be baptized?

Yes; for since they, as well as the adult, are included in the covenant and church of God; and since redemption from sin by the blood of Christ, *and the Holy Ghost, the author of faith, is promised to them no less than to the adult...*(Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 74; emphasis added).

Fifth, God always fulfills His promise. The promise is not a mere offer, dependent on the will of the child. It is as sure of fulfillment as God is true, keeping His promise, and as God is almighty, able to keep His promise. This is the teaching of Canons 3, 4.10-17.

But that others who are called by the gospel obey the call and are converted is not to be ascribed to the proper exercise of free will...but it must be wholly ascribed to God, who as He has chosen His own from eternity in Christ, so He confers upon them faith and repentance...and translates them into the kingdom of His own Son, that they may show forth the praises of Him who hath called them out of darkness into His marvelous light, and may glory, not in themselves, but in the Lord...(Canons 3, 4.10).

None of this declaration of God’s sovereign grace in the covenant denies,

or even weakens, the important truth of human responsibility, any more than sovereignty rules out or weakens responsibility in any aspect of the gospel. This, of course, is always the charge of those who oppose divine sovereignty. With appeal to the confessions, the “Declaration” affirms that the promise of God “confronts us with the obligation of love, to walk in a new and holy life, and constantly to watch unto prayer” (*Battle for Sovereign Grace in the Covenant*, 213).

The alternative doctrine of the covenant teaches that God graciously promises covenant-salvation to every baptized child, the Esau as well as the Jacob (see Romans 9), and even establishes the covenant with every child at baptism. This realizes the gracious will of God to save all the children. But this covenant and God’s gracious will are conditional. They depend upon the will of the child. If he fulfills the condition of believing, he will enjoy covenant-salvation. If he refuses to believe, he breaks the covenant, renders God’s promise ineffective, and loses his covenant-salvation. The covenant, the covenant promise, and covenant-salvation are conditioned upon the child’s will.

Every Reformed believer, indeed every Protestant Christian, can see that this doctrine of the covenant overthrows the gospel of grace, which gospel was proclaimed by the Reformation of 1517. Every knowledgeable Protestant

recognizes this doctrine of the covenant as the theology condemned by Luther in his great work, *The Bondage of the Will*. No Reformed believer has any excuse for failing to discern this false “gospel” as the heresy rejected by the creeds of Reformed and Presbyterian churches. All Christians must judge this doctrine of the covenant in light of the apostle’s declaration in Romans 9:16: “So then it [salvation, whether in the covenant or on the mission field—DJE] is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.”

Benefits

The benefit of the “Declaration” is great. First, it settled a heated and vitally important controversy over the gospel in the PRC in the early 1950s, and preserved a denomination of true churches of Christ in the gospel of grace. Second, in the wise providence of God it enabled the PRC, some fifty years later, to withstand a popular, powerful heresy in Reformed and Presbyterian churches. This is the heresy now ravaging these churches that calls itself the “federal [that is, covenant] vision”. This heresy openly and boldly denies the “five points of Calvinism” — the content of the Canons of Dort and of the Westminster Standards. The origin and basis of the denial are the very doctrine of the covenant that the “Declaration” condemns, namely, the teaching of a gracious, conditional covenant with all the baptized children

of believers alike. For a complete description and refutation of the federal vision, see my book, *Federal Vision: Heresy at the Root* (Jenison, MI: RFP, 2012).

But there is yet another benefit of the “Declaration”. It is a compelling witness concerning the truth of the covenant to the entire world of Reformed, Presbyterian, and Calvinistic churches. From the time of the Reformation to the present day, there has been a lack of consensus concerning the covenant. The creeds do not develop the truth of the covenant at any length or pronounce explicitly on the orthodox doctrine of the covenant. The result is that the false doctrine of the covenant can find acceptance in Reformed churches.

The “Declaration” can be, and ought to be, helpful in clarifying the issues of covenant doctrine and in leading theologians and churches to the orthodox understanding of the vitally important doctrine of the covenant.

Admittedly, this account of the “Declaration of Principles” is (necessarily) brief. It is merely a sketch. For the full account of the history and of the doctrinal content of the “Declaration” I refer the readers to my book, *Battle for Sovereign Grace in the Covenant: The Declaration of Principles*. The book includes a brief commentary on the “Declaration” (pp. 221-267).

The “Declaration”... is a compelling witness concerning the truth of the covenant to the entire world of Reformed, Presbyterian, and Calvinistic churches.

BOOK REVIEW: DECISIONS, DECISIONS: HOW (AND HOW NOT) TO MAKE THEM

>>Chang Zi Hui



Chang Zi Hui is a youth in CERC.

Decisions, decisions -- we have to make countless decisions every day, some harder than others. While this book will not help you to decide on what to eat for lunch, it can certainly guide you in making some of the tougher decisions in life. *Decisions, Decisions: How (and How Not) To Make Them* is a book written by Dave Swavely. The book comprises of two main parts – what we should not do when making decisions and then what we ought to do instead.

The author starts off with a personal story – how one decision to eat lunch with his school’s administrator eventually led to marriage with his wife. Small decisions in our everyday lives can impact our lives in ways that we cannot see at that time. When discussing what we should not do, the author first educates us on what things are explicitly and entirely wrong approaches in decision-making -- those being sinful motives, chance, spiritual revelation outside the Bible and supernatural signs. Then, he moves on to those factors that have a place in the process of decision-making but may be used wrongly – namely, the will of God, feelings and impressions and circumstances, counsel, desires and prayer. In particular, regarding the

will of God, the book points out the difference between the sovereign will and the moral will, as the author calls it. One should not try and discern the predestined counsel of God and try to make decisions in accordance with it but rather act in accordance with the law of God and the commands that He reveals to us. Furthermore, concerning the role of feelings and desires, the book warns against the worldly view that says, “Just follow your heart”. It also cautions against taking certain circumstances, counsel and prayers to be a revelation from God. These things, however, as the author states, do play an important role in the process of decision-making, as the book explores in the second half.

The second half of the book talks about the four P’s of biblical decision-making: Prerequisites, Principles, Process and Picture. The author provides a very useful flowchart here that illustrates the order of significance each factor should have in our decisions. Of utmost importance is that we always walk in the Spirit and in accordance with the Word of God. We must always first and foremost ask ourselves: *What does the Bible say about this?* However, sometimes the Bible does not directly (or even indirectly) condemn or commend a certain act. This is where we cross, as the author terms it, the Line of Freedom. Past this line, the next question asked should be: *What is the wisest choice?* These two questions cover most of the more important decisions in life. In the case that the choices to a certain decision are equal in the past two standards of Scripture and wisdom,

it is then indeed appropriate to ask: *What do I want to do?*

This book clearly explains the reasons behind each and every point the author makes in that it provides many scriptural texts (although not in KJV) as evidence and grounds for its points. Furthermore, there are also many examples and illustrations that help the reader better understand the topic. However, in an effort to make the text more comprehensible, the author sometimes puts them across in a misleading way that may lead the reader to come to a wrong conclusion, so do be careful when reading and always remember to seek counsel in the Word of God! The book is also structured very well and the way the author explores the topic makes it clear and easy to understand. The flowchart on how to make biblical decisions is especially helpful as it consolidates the most important takeaways of the book. Another good point is that the book gives a list of discussion questions after each chapter, which allows the reader to meditate on the points raised in the chapter, take the time to internalise them and think about how they can apply the principles to their own lives. All in all, this book is a good read that helps to compile and order all the factors we should take into consideration in decision-making.



News from the Churches

Singapore

Grandville PRC nominated a trio of Rev. Steven Key, Rev. Garrett Eriks and Rev. William Langerak as Minister on Loan to CERC, of which Rev. William Langerak was called, but declined the call. We look forward to and place our trust in God to provide us with a minister in His good time.

In the meantime, we thank God for the continued providence of pulpit supply from our sister churches in the PRCA. In October, Rev. Joe Holstege helped with this work. It was Rev. Holstege's first time in Singapore and we greatly enjoyed the fellowship we shared with him, his wife, Lisa, and his son, Jacob.

We look forward to the return of Rev. Arie den Hartog and his wife in November as he helps with pulpit supply once more. Rev. den Hartog will also be the speaker for this year's Reformation Day Conference titled "By Grace Alone – Commemorating 400 years of the Canons of Dordt".

CERC's oldest member, Mdm. Lo Bee Giok was taken home to be with the Lord at the age of 100 years old. We thank God for preserving this elderly saint and rejoice that she is now free from her earthly suffering.

CERC celebrated her 31st anniversary on 23 September 2018 with the theme "Wall of Fire", based on Zechariah 2:5. We thank God for His continual faithfulness and blessing on us as a church, and pray that He will guide us to continue walking in His way.

India

The Kolkata Fellowship held their church camp from 16 to 18 October 2018. The speaker was Rev. Lanning, who spoke under the theme "I will Build My Church". Members of CERC sent greetings of encouragement to the saints there specially for this event.

Philippines

Monthly delegation visits continue to be made by the PRCP to the mission field of the PRCP, the Protestant Reformed Fellowship in Albuera, Leyte. Rev. Ibe and Rev. Holstege are scheduled to make this visit from November 9-12.

During that same period, Rev. Smit and Rev. Kleyn plan to continue the monthly visits to Sipalay in Southern Negros Occidental in order to teach the pastors there. Usually a group of 12 to 15 pastors attend these monthly classes. We pray that God continues to bless the work in the Philippines.



CERC group picture at our 31st anniversary celebrations (spot Rev & Mrs Spriensma!)



The Session of CERC



Rev Holstege, Lisa & Jacob enjoying a Singaporean meal with some of our members



Rev Andy Lanning speaking at the church camp in Kolkata, with David translating the message



A group discussion after the messages

Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church

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

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

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

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