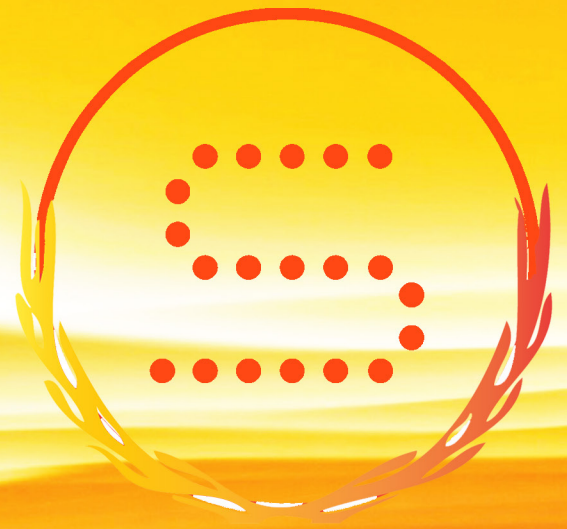


Orderliness in the church,
for all time, is the will of the
unchangeable God of order Himself.
Lee Kong Wee - Order, Please

For Christian parents, the birth
of a child is a moment of great
rejoicing, for notwithstanding the
many trials and sorrows that
accompany childbearing, covenant
children are added to the eternal
congregation of believers.
Chua Lee Yang - A Murderous Scourge

The pilgrim is merely passing through
this earth, heading towards his final
destination - heaven.
*Boaz Leong - A Pilgrim's Path:
A Stranger in the World*



salt shakers
joel 3:16 matthew 5:16

Issue 40 | Nov 2016



Strangers and pilgrims
on the earth.

H E B R E W S 1 1 : 1 3

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WELCOME TO THE 40TH ISSUE OF SALT SHAKERS!

Dear Readers,

With this issue of the Salt Shakers, the year's theme comes to a close. The Christian pilgrim's path on earth is indeed not an easy one. He is called to live as a stranger in this world. He must forgo many comforts in this life so that he does not become entangled with the things of this world and set his affections on them. At the same time, the pilgrim is a warring pilgrim, called to do battle with all the enemies of Jesus Christ. In this lonely, uncomfortable journey to heaven, the pilgrim must fight with all his might, giving testimony to the precious truths of his Master. Joining in this fight is the Salt Shakers magazine.

What makes the Salt Shakers a unique Reformed magazine is that it reflects the catholicity of the church. Our writers range from different nationalities. There are Singaporeans, Americans, Irish, and a number of others. The writers are of widely contrasting races – Eastern and Western. There are young and old among them, men and women besides. This gives vibrancy and diversity to the magazine. Yet all of them confess the same Reformed truth, which is summarised in the Reformed confessions.

In this issue, Elder Lee explains the profound importance of the Church Order that CERC adopted in 2011. It is not only a historical document, but one that does great good to the church of Jesus Christ. Where the Church Order is followed faithfully, and its principles embraced, good and sound order prevails in the church. Conversely, when Reformed churches do not have Church Orders, or only hold on to them nominally, there is likely to be chaos.

Closely related to the pilgrim's hope are the precious truths of eschatology. Prof. David Engelsma from the Protestant Reformed Churches in America gives distinctively Reformed instruction on these truths, in a class that he conducted at Faith Protestant Reformed Church between 2015 – 2016. The Salt Shakers is grateful that he is willing to allow us to publish recorded notes from his class, and hope that they will be of profit to our readers.

In these last days, the call to read good and distinctively Reformed literature is urgent. Reading arms us with the weapon to do battle with our enemies. "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand" (Rev. 1:3).

So take the salt, and pass it on!

Blessings,
Aaron



A MURDEROUS SCOURGE

>>Chua Lee Yang



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

“Fears over the Zika virus have contributed to a ‘huge’ increase in the number of women in Latin America wanting abortions, researchers say.” (Gallagher, 2016) At the time of this writing, a great scourge of death is sweeping the world – and no, it is not Zika. The Zika advent, however, does shed light on history’s greatest ongoing genocide: today’s worldwide culture of murder in abortion.

In the BBC article cited above titled “Abortion demand ‘soars’ amid Zika fear”, published on 23 June 2016, it was estimated that abortion requests have at least doubled in Brazil and increased by a third in neighbouring countries. Some of the responses from affected women are recorded. In one woman’s words: “We are all very alarmed and I do not want have a sick baby, please, I do not want to continue my pregnancy because it is very dangerous.” Another said: “I love children, but I don’t believe it is a wise decision to keep a baby who will suffer. I need an abortion. I don’t know who to turn to. Please help me ASAP.” In the article, it was lamented that the illegality of abortions in many

parts of Latin America are turning many to unsafe underground providers, and the governments of said countries were roundly criticised for sparking panic and fear.

All this is not very far away from us here in Singapore, although by the time of publishing in November, Zika might well be almost last year’s news. Shortly after the outbreak was first reported in early September and the first local pregnant mother diagnosed with Zika, the topic of abortions (which is legal in Singapore under 24 weeks of pregnancy) was raised. A public health director was quoted: “If the scans are totally normal, I think all is well. If the scans are very abnormal, then I think the result is clear. But sometimes there will be borderline cases and I think that’s where there will be very difficult decisions.” Another medical professional added: “Whether or not to terminate the pregnancy is “a very personal decision” (Khalik, 2016).

Few clearer signs of the nearness of our Lord’s return are there, when men assert that the decision to commit the murder of other human beings is “a very personal decision”. Indeed, our Lord tells us plainly that “because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold” (Matt. 24:12). Indeed, the widespread acceptance of abortion in our day is a prime example of how men “think to change times and laws”, as will Antichrist in grand fashion when he arises (Dan. 7:25). The issue is no longer about whether it is wrong to kill, but when. Words like “kindness”,

“mercy” and “circumstances” readily find their way into abortion morality debates – how cruel are the tender mercies of the wicked (Pro. 12:10)! Love worketh no ill to the neighbour (Rom. 13:10) – which clearly includes not slaying the neighbour.

Recently, my wife and I had our own personal experiences encountering the abortion zeitgeist. At the first visit to our gynaecologist early into the pregnancy of our unborn son, our doctor who is herself a Christian and opposed to abortion, was at pains to explain to us the details behind common prenatal abnormality testing. A battery of extra tests are routinely offered in many clinics to parents that enable the confirmation of birth defects such as trisomy 21 (Down syndrome) and various others, if routine checks show up abnormal (routine checks alone are not enough to confirm birth defects). This article will not delve into the details of these tests except to state that, as there are no pre-birth interventions available for such babies at present, the main purpose of such testing is for parents to deliberate the possibility of abortion. (Another reason parents may opt for the checks if they are not considering abortion, could be to prepare themselves mentally for the task of raising a child with disabilities after the child is born. However, the tests are not without risk to the child, so tests for this reason are not often recommended, as I understand.) Our doctor wanted to know from the outset whether we might consider abortion in the scenario of a child with defects. As

I gather, there were probably personal limits to how far she would go to assist couples in taking that path. We did not need to find out, as we asserted that abortion was out of the question. We decided against undergoing the extra testing and left it at that.

Some time afterwards, however, while I was on an internship, I happened to speak to a colleague who had given birth recently, and who claimed to be a Christian herself. She was surprised that we had chosen not to undergo the abnormality tests from the outset, to which I replied that we saw no point if the sole purpose was to consider abortion, which we would never consider an option. This colleague then took it upon herself to counsel me that the huge costs of raising a child with abnormalities should give us pause to consider carefully. At the time, I asserted in reply that the challenges were not trivial, but that God would certainly give such Christian parents the necessary grace to bear the trial. Perhaps it could have been added too that the costs in this life, however immense, cannot for a moment compare to having to stand before the Almighty God in the last day to answer for the wilful murder of one's own child. Now, this is not to say that abnormality testing is wrong in itself or that those who chose to do so necessarily sin. However, judge for yourselves the nature of the decisions that such tests purport to help parents deliberate.

Our rejection of abortion as murder does not in any way minimize the great difficulties that parents who are tempted to consider abortions may face. Often, crushing problems – poverty, lack of family/community support, crippling disabilities like microcephaly (which can be caused by Zika) – lead women to have abortions. While circumstances

can never be a sufficient excuse to commit murder, these are nevertheless real problems and real temptations, and we must not think that these could never become a temptation for us as Reformed Christians. For mothers who do fall into the terrible sin of abortion, the consequences, apart from the slaying of the baby, are often severe. There are emotional, psychological, physical and spiritual traumas, and some women may be haunted by their conscience and the ghosts of their decision for the rest of their lives (McGeown M., 2015). We must be prepared to reach out to such women with the gospel and with compassion when we encounter them. As a church, we rightly condemn abortion when we preach Lord's Day 40 of the Heidelberg Catechism on the sixth commandment, for abortion is murder – and yet, the blood of Christ is sufficient to cover even the sin of murder for the broken, repentant sinner. Our responses must contain these two truths: Christ condemns the transgression of his commandments, but He does not condemn the penitent sinner for whom His blood has covered all sins.

Having covered at length in this article the negative fulfilment of the law “Thou shalt not kill”, it would be a shame if we did not take the opportunity to look at the positive aspect of the law as well – that we love our neighbour, which includes loving our children who are gifts of God. Focused solely on the horror of wilfully slaying babies for which millions have their consciences grievously seared, we may lose sight of the incredible wonder and blessing that is a child brought into the world by God, through the astonishing intricacies of conception and birth. The changes in the body of the mother, feeling the movements of the child in the womb – these are but some of

many ways that we realise anew that we are fearfully and wonderfully made, and we confess that “marvellous are thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well. (Ps. 139:14).

We need not fear Zika, or any other birth defect, sickness or disease, for all these are sovereignly held in the hand of our Almighty Father. This is not to say that such conditions may never affect our children, but that if it is the Lord's will that they do, they are His specific trials that are given to us in love and for our purification. All children are brought into this world in exactly the way the Lord has designed, whether healthy or with “defects”, down to the smallest cell. This is a tremendous comfort to Reformed Christians, all of whom can sing with truth: “All that I am I owe to Thee, thy wisdom Lord, hath fashioned me” (Psalter 383).

For Christian parents, the birth of a child is a moment of great rejoicing, for notwithstanding the many trials and sorrows that accompany childbearing, covenant children are added to the eternal congregation of believers. While we know that in the sovereign counsel of God, not every single one of our children may be elect, we know of a certainty that the covenant promise is for us in our generations (Gen. 17:7). Truly, it is a great privilege for parents to be used by God in the raising of the next generation of the church.

As the Lord's return draws near, ever more will these views be at odds with the culture and world around us. We live in the midst of a society obsessed with death. As pilgrims, our confession will be as a blinding irritant to the ungodly. Though we shall be mocked and hated for speaking the truth on abortion, let us reflect that it is for the Lord alone to kill and make alive (1 Sam. 2:6). Even

as the world rapidly darkens around us and the ungodly are apparently ascendant in all aspects of society, let us remember that the Lord is coming with ten thousands of his saints to execute judgment (Jud. 14-15). Let us pilgrims take heart, for Christ is coming swiftly on the clouds of glory.

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WORD OF THE ISSUE:

Zeitgeist

Meaning: The defining spirit or mood of a particular period of history as shown by the ideas and beliefs of the time.

Origin: Mid 19th century: from the German words *Zeit*, meaning "time," and *Geist*, meaning "spirit".

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SCRIPTURE'S COVENANT YOUTH (III) JACOB: A SINFUL SAINT

>>Prof. Herman Hanko



Prof. Herman Hanko is a emeritus professor 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.

There are certain people of whom Scripture writes whose lives make us shake our heads in thinking that they could be children of God. I am sure Scripture does this to assure us that God is even able to save us in spite of our sins; but we must then also acknowledge that we are no better than these sinning saints of whom Scripture speaks. Jacob is one of them.

Jacob was not only a youth of weak faith, but he was also something of a sneak who used cunning tricks to gain his ends. He was not a man we would like very well. His brother, Esau, was just the opposite. He was a very manly person, healthy, strong, straight-forward and probably handsome. He loved the outdoors while his brother Jacob was a sort of boy who preferred to

be by his mother in the kitchen rather than working or being outside to play or hunt. If we would meet the two boys, we would be attracted to Esau, but we would have difficulty liking Jacob. Isaac saw this and loved Esau above Jacob.

Yet God loved Jacob and hated Esau!

“...we are no better than these sinning saints of whom Scripture speaks. Jacob is one of them.”

“But Jacob was not saved because of his good life; he was saved because God loved him in spite of all his sins..”

The list of Jacob's sins is long. It began when Jacob bought the birthright from Esau for a bowl of lentil soup – as if the birthright, the blessing of God could be bought with a bowl of soup! He connived with his mother to lie to his father so that Isaac, who was blind, would think he was blessing Esau whom he wanted to bless, rather than Jacob, whom God had said should receive the birthright – as if God would bless Jacob when he obtained the blessing with a lie! He refused to marry Leah when she was a very spiritual and godly woman because he lusted after Rachel, who loved idols. He tried every way he knew how to get the majority of Uncle Laban's flocks and herds. It was not a very good record for a child of God.

But through it all, Jacob's motives were right and good. He wanted the birthright and would do anything to get it. Although at times he rightly wanted the birthright for its covenant blessing, he frequently seemed to want it for the wealth it would bring him and riches his soul coveted.

How like Jacob we can be! We claim to love the Lord and to seek his blessing in all our life when in fact we have our lives aimed in the direction of earthly possessions, and wealth means more to us than God and His church. We need a university degree, we think. And we

need to graduate with honours. We need to have a high-paying job with power and high wages. We need a car and a nice home. We need vacations and trips abroad. We are willing to study overseas where there is no church in which to worship to gain our goals.

And yet, with priorities all wrong in our lives, we do want, sometimes desperately, God's blessing.

Jacob did learn, but it took a long time. He learned at the brook Jabbok when he wrestled all night with the angel of the Lord and got nowhere. He did not know this, but God was showing him that this was the story of His life: wrestling with God. Finally, when all he could say was that all his efforts were in vain and only God could bless him (“I will not let you go until you bless me”) did he learn how futile his former life had been.

Jacob was an elect child of God; Esau was reprobate. God's election and reprobation lie behind it all.

Election is God's eternal plan to save from sin and death a certain and definite number of people who are redeemed in Christ's blood and are destined to live in covenant fellowship with God eternally in the new heavens and the new earth.

Reprobation is that eternal and unchangeable determination of God to reveal His holiness and justice by punishing sinners eternally in hell.

This truth of election and reprobation, which almost no one wants in our day, is the central truth of Scripture. One is Reformed only if he believes this truth. It is shown to us to be the case with Jacob and Esau.

We are saved. Are we saved because we are better than others? Because God finds some good in us? Because we have earned our salvation? Never! We are saved because of God's sovereign decree of election and reprobation. This is the clear teaching of Scripture, of all the reformers, and of God's people through two thousand years of church history.

Election means that God saved Jacob. God chastised Jacob when his sons did very wicked things and took Joseph away from him. But Jacob was not saved because of his good life; he was saved because God loved him in spite of all his sins.

And so, God loves us – from eternity and saves us from the moment we are conceived in the womb of our mother. He knew us eternally. He loved us and loves us not because of what we are and do, but only sovereignly.

We are not to try to save ourselves or persuade God that He ought to take us to heaven because we are so good. We are not saved because we are better people than the pagans around us. Election forces us to our knees and puts within our hearts a humble prayer of thanksgiving to God who has saved us by grace.

And election actually begins God's work of salvation in our hearts so that we forsake our sins, flee to the cross of Christ and walk in holiness, and live in grateful obedience to God.

But because we are sinning saints (or, if you will, saintly sinners) we must daily run to the cross and seek both pardon for our sins and grace to live to God's glory.

SINGING THE CANONICAL PSALMS (I)

>>Rev. Angus Stewart



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

The Uniqueness of the Psalms

The book of Psalms occupies a special, even unique, role in all the Scriptures. First, only the book of Psalms was penned over a period stretching some thousand years, all the way from the Psalm of Moses in the wilderness (Ps. 90) to Judah's captivity by the rivers of Babylon (Ps. 137). This covers almost all of the period in which the Old Testament was written.

Second, this canonical book stands out in that many human penmen—Moses, David, Solomon, Asaph, Ethan, Heman, the sons of Korah, etc.—wrote it.

Third, it is the longest book in all the Bible, Old and New Testaments, by a long way, consisting of 150 chapters. As is evident in the King James or Authorized Version, the 150 Psalms are arranged in five books (Ps. 1-41; 42-72; 73-89; 90-106; 107-150).

Fourth, this book excels in its comprehensiveness, as the great fathers

of the church have observed. Athanasius called it “the epitome of the whole Scripture;” Basil the Great reckoned it “a compendium of all divinity;” for Martin Luther, it was “a little Bible;” John Calvin saw in it “an anatomy of the soul.” Franz Delitzsch declared, “There is no essential New Testament truth not contained in the Psalms.”

The Only Canonical Book for Singing

The four previous qualities in various ways serve the fifth: The book of Psalms or the Psalter is unique in that it alone of the 66 biblical books is written with the express divine purpose of it being sung by God's people. All the books of Scripture, including the Psalms, are to be read and preached, and are of service in rightly framing prayer, but only the Psalms have the canonical function of a songbook.

First, it is evident that they are songs because the Psalms (except their titles, of course, which are not to be sung) consist exclusively of lyrical poetry with parallelism. Some Psalms even contain refrains, especially Psalm 136.

Second, and even more obviously, in the Psalm headings there are references to “the chief Musician,” to singers (“the sons of Korah”), to musical instruments (Neginoth, Sheminith, Gittith and Alamoth) and various melodies or tunes (Muthlaben, Aijelet Shaha, Shoshannim, Jonathelemrechokim, Altaschith and Mahaloth Leanoth).

Third, the book is arranged in the form of 150 separate songs from as long as 176 verses (Ps. 119) to the shortest, just 2 verses (Ps. 117).

Fourth, in the Psalter, there are literally scores of commands to sing God's praise (e.g., Ps. 47; 95-96).

Fifth, King David, the principle penman of the Psalms, is called “the sweet psalmist [or singer] of Israel” (2 Sam. 23:1).

Sixth, the very title of the book in Hebrew is Sefhir Tehellim, the book of praises. In the Greek Septuagint translation, used by the apostles and the early church, this canonical book is called the Psalms or the Psalter.

Seventh, these Psalms are called in Scripture “the songs of the LORD” in at least three different places (1 Chron. 25:7; 2 Chron. 29:27; Ps. 137:4). The Lord gave these songs and they are to be

“The book of Psalms or the Psalter is unique in that it alone of the 66 biblical books is written with the express divine purpose of its being sung by God's people.”

“The Lord of hosts would have us sing His praise with the canonical Psalter in this New Testament age.”

sung to His glory. They are also called “the songs of Zion” (Ps. 137:3) and “Zion” is God’s church. These Psalms are the Lord’s songs for Zion to be sung by the people of God in His praise.

David has a key role in all of this in that he penned the majority of the Lord’s songs for His church, as 2 Samuel 23:1 explains. First, he is called “the man who was raised up on high,” that is, given this exalted position as the psalmist for God’s church. That is an office in Jehovah’s service and no man can take that to himself (cf. Heb. 5:4). Second, He is called “the anointed of the God of Jacob.” He was raised up on high by being anointed, that is, authorized and equipped by God’s Spirit to write these Psalms for us. Thus, third, he is called “the sweet psalmist of Israel.”

Their Use According to the Old Testament

What does the Old Testament tell us about the historical use of the Psalms? Psalm 30, as indicated by its title, was sung “at the dedication of the house of David,” his royal palace. Psalms were sung when the ark of the covenant was brought up to Jerusalem (1 Chron. 15:16-22, 27-28). David instituted Psalm-singing at the tabernacle for the ark in Jerusalem in 1 Chronicles 16,

which quotes, in order, various parts of Psalms 105, 96 and 106. The Levitical Psalm singing was also appointed at Solomon’s temple (1 Chron. 6:31-47).

David appointed 4,000 Levites as musicians (1 Chron. 23:5), including 288 worship leaders (1 Chron. 25:7-31) to praise God with singing (1 Chron. 16:37-42). These men sang the Psalms at the daily morning and evening sacrifices on Jehovah’s altar (1 Chron. 23:30), at the weekly sabbath (cf. Ps. 92), at the monthly new moons and the yearly feasts, such as Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles (cf. Ps. 81:1-5). 1 Chronicles 9:33 says that the Levites sang the Psalms “day and night” at God’s sanctuary in Jerusalem (cf. Ps. 134:1).

When the Old Testament church was reformed under kings Joash (with Jehoiada, the high priest), Hezekiah and Josiah, the church sang the Psalms appointed by David and Asaph (2 Chron. 23:13, 18; 29:25-30; 35:15-16). We read of Psalms being sung on other occasions: at the dedication of Solomon’s temple (2 Chron. 5:12-13); as the battle songs of Jehoshaphat’s army when they marched out to fight the Ammonites, the Moabites and the Edomites (2 Chron. 20:21); at the laying of the foundation of

Zerubbabel’s temple (Ezra 3:10-11); and at the dedication of Jerusalem’s rebuilt walls (Neh. 12:24, 27-29, 45-47).

More generally, Psalms were sung when God’s people went up to Jerusalem to keep the three great pilgrimage feasts. Each of fourteen special Psalms were called “A Song of degrees” or ascent or going up, namely, to the temple in the holy city (Ps. 120-134). Certain Psalms were especially sung when the saints were afflicted (Ps. 102) or in “the depths” (Ps. 130). Psalm 137 was first sung by the rivers of Babylon.

The Psalms themselves tell us that they are to be sung by us, the “Gentiles,” in the New Testament age. Psalm 117:1 commands, “O praise the Lord, all ye nations [i.e., not just ethnic Jews]: praise him, all ye people [literally, peoples in the plural].” This is quoted by the apostle Paul in support of his missionary work among the heathen: “Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud him, all ye people [literally, peoples in the plural]” (Rom. 15:11). Psalm 100:1 declares, “Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands,” including the lands of Singapore and N. Ireland.

The Lord of hosts would have us sing His praise with the canonical Psalter in this New Testament age—an age about which the Psalms themselves speak (e.g., Ps. 22:22-31; 45; 67; 110; etc.). Moreover, God wills us to sing them until the end of the world, which the Psalms describe (e.g., Ps. 50; 98; 102; etc.). All of this is in accordance with David’s being raised up on high as “the sweet psalmist of Israel,” God’s church (2 Sam. 23:1).

“Certain Psalms were especially sung when the saints were afflicted (Ps. 102) or in “the depths” (Ps. 130).”

A PILGRIM'S PATH: A STRANGER IN THE WORLD

>>Boaz Leong



Boaz Leong is a confessing young adult in CERC.

A pilgrim is a person on a pilgrimage. A pilgrimage is a journey, usually a long one, made to some sacred place for religious reasons.

Living in a multicultural society such as Singapore, there is a certain degree of exposure to various other religions. In particular, the Muslim's religion of Islam and the Muslim's pilgrimage to Mecca, is known as the Hajj. The Hajj or pilgrimage to Mecca is essentially a re-enactment of the rituals of the prophets and teachers of old. Pilgrims symbolically relive the experience of exile and atonement undergone by Adam and Eve after they were expelled from heaven, wandered the earth, met again and sought forgiveness in the valley of Mecca. They also retrace the footsteps of Abraham's wife, Hagar, as she ran between the hills of Safa and Marwa searching for water. Lastly, the pilgrims also commemorate the willingness of Abraham to sacrifice his son. In summary, the Muslim's pilgrimage to Mecca is a physical journey with the purpose of bringing about a deep spiritual transformation, one that will make him or her a better person. If such a change from within does not occur, then the Hajj would

just be a physical and material exercise devoid of any spiritual significance.

A Christian's pilgrimage is not a 'once-in-a-lifetime' journey to Mecca but instead, a 'lifelong' journey towards heaven. The Bible relates a pilgrim to a stranger on the earth (Heb. 11:13 and 1 Pet. 2:11). A pilgrim is therefore not just taking a break from his earthly endeavours but one whose citizenship is in heaven. Thus, this pilgrim is one that has no place on this earth. The pilgrim is merely passing through this earth, heading towards his final destination – heaven.

“Thus, this pilgrim is one that has no place on this earth.”

It is important to emphasise that this journey towards the “city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God”, is made by travelers eager to return home and not by tourists who are in a foreign land taking a holiday from their busy and hectic life. Pilgrims are also neither like expatriates who choose to settle in a foreign country due to career choices. Most 'ex-pats' are where they are because that is where they want to be, but a Christian sojourner has no desire to be where he is, except to serve God in the calling he is placed in.

Although the pilgrim is not of the world, he is in the world and he needs to live

in the world. However, the pilgrim is a stranger in this world, a foreigner who has a different culture and a different language. The true Christian pilgrim is therefore always struggling with how he should live a life in a world that he is called to live in and yet not belong to it. How can a Christian pilgrim then be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, and at the same time a stranger to the world? The answer to this seemingly paradoxical question is simply in the question itself.

A Christian pilgrim witnesses by living a 'strange' life. In Hebrews 11, the heroes of faith lived lives that were in contrast to the teachings of the world. Their attitude towards this earthly life and the things associated with this earthly life was represented by the tents they lived in. The tent-life demonstrated their contentment to live upon the surface of the earth. They had tents which did not have any lasting foundations. The tent-life allowed the sojourners not to be weighed down, to be able to move at a moment's notice. It was not that Abraham could not afford to build a house for himself and his family. Genesis 13:2 tells us that “Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold.” But rather, Abraham knew that he was not called to hold onto earthly possessions of silver and gold. Imagine how hard it would be for us if we were to be the rich men of this world and live in rugged tents, denying ourselves earthly treasures when such treasures would come so easily. Indeed, “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man

to enter into the kingdom of God.” (Mk. 10:25)

“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Heb. 11:13).

Another important point to note from this verse is that the pilgrims listed in Hebrews 11 “all died in faith”. The heroes of faith taught us by their examples that we are to be faithful in our various callings even though our lives are short and temporary and we are but passing through. A calling is simply the current vocation one is in. It can be a student, a parent, an employee or an employer, a husband or a wife. The way to be faithful in our earthly callings or in all that we do is found in Romans 12:1 – “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”. As Martin Luther once said, “The Christian shoemaker does his duty not by putting little crosses on the shoes, but by making good shoes, because God is interested in good craftsmanship.” In other words, being a faithful pilgrim means that we are to do our best in all that we do for the Lord, not just in the church, but in our pilgrim's journey. To be a faithful pilgrim is to serve God faithfully in our earthly callings.

To remain faithful as pilgrims requires God's grace. The path for a pilgrim is long and treacherous, filled with temptations which the devil sets about us to destroy the church and the people of God. Again, this is nothing new to the Christian pilgrim as the Bible has already forewarned us in 1 Peter 5:8 - “Be sober, be vigilant; because your

adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour”; and in Matthew 7:13-14 – “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” Therefore, it is necessary for a pilgrim to prepare for the journey ahead.

There are many ways in which God preserves the Christian pilgrim through this difficult journey. One of which is through means of fellow pilgrims to encourage each other on the path towards heaven. (Heb. 10:24-25 - “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”) What then is fellowship? The word fellowship denotes a relationship that is dependent on more than one individual. It is an action word that involves doing something together and not just being together. The meaning of Christian fellowship goes further in that the basis for such fellowship is Christ. (1 Cor. 1:9 - “God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.”) Therefore, Christian fellowship is not just doing anything together, but doing God's will together.

Christian fellowship is first built up in the church where fellow pilgrims confess the same truth. This has to be the case because the church on earth is a picture of home to the pilgrim as he journeys to his true home in heaven. The life in the church is a small taste of what life in heaven would be like for the Christian pilgrim. The fellowship

a pilgrim has with other pilgrims in the church serves to strengthen him as he makes his pilgrimage home. The analogy of a tourist comes to mind again. A Christian pilgrim is not like a tourist because tourists pays others to carry his luggage along the trip. For instance, on a hiking trip a tourist pays a porter to carry the load up the mountain. Pilgrims, on the other hand, share each other's burdens along the difficult path. A better picture would be an illustration of fellow soldiers making a long march together. Not only do soldiers share one another's load, but they also have to encourage each other throughout the entire journey, to push each other to press on and even carry an injured comrade if need be.

There is, however, an end to this earthly pilgrimage. The pilgrim will not have to wander forever in a strange land. By God's grace, and only by God's grace, the pilgrim will enter into the “house with many mansions” that is prepared by Christ. This is the hope that a Christian pilgrim has that causes him to endure through this pilgrimage.

2 Timothy 4:7-8 - “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”

“To be a faithful pilgrim is to serve God faithfully in our earthly callings.”

INTIMACY IN A COURTING RELATIONSHIP

>>Josiah Tan



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Is your relationship with the one whom you are courting carrying you away or towards your covenant God? Are your hearts pushing forward into the open seas of a godly life? This article will focus on how we should be intimate with the person whom we are courting. First, we will focus on the heart because out of it flows every aspect of our relationships. Second, we will examine the great snare that has destroyed true intimacy with those we are courting – sinful intimacy. Last, we shall examine the true intimacy that follows out of the new heart that God has given us.

In this article, we must be very honest and acknowledge that in the relationship there are always two principles inside of us. They are diametrically opposed to each other. The one desires Jesus Christ while the other desires sin. The new man desires Christ to be at the heart of every thought, deed and word in the courting relationship. The old man desires only sin and deception in the relationship. Therefore, we must not be surprised at the real threat of lust when courting. Although we badly wish to impress our partner, we must be downright honest. Our hearts desire Jesus Christ alone,

but our depraved old man desires lust and pride. Discussing our temptation to sin and how to battle against it is important. Spiritual wisdom will guide us as to when and how to do this with our partner. “Perfect” as your partner may seem, he or she still has to daily wrestle with the old man of sin, and we must not ignore but live wisely in light of this truth.

The heart

The heart is the key issue in every relationship. It is the spiritual centre, the deepest core of man. Proverbs 4:23 reveals to us that *“out of the heart proceeds all our thinking and willing, our loving and hating, and our desires and inclinations”* (Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics, Chapter 27, Reformed Free Publishing Association, under the section: the “seat of faith” E-book*). Therefore, all decisions and emotions with respect to relationships flow out of the spiritual character of our heart. When our heart is truly, wholly, undeniably set on Jehovah, the streams of our relationship will be filled with living waters (Jn. 7:38). When our hearts are set on God, lust will be violently pushed out. When our hearts are set on God, we will humbly use the whole relationship for the glory of God and the service of His church. But when our heart is not wholly set on God, we can expect our relationships to fall apart spiritually. May God work in us to desire Him more and more, so that every precious second we spend with our partner be in the fear of God. May every date be characterized by the mesmerisation of the loveliness of God.

Beloved, we must fight against the constant bombardment of the world that tries to define for us Christians what true and holy intimacy is in a relationship. Instagram cannot capture a Christ-centred date. What it can and does capture is the good food in a nice restaurant. Facebook cannot capture the spiritual closeness of the couple. But Facebook can and does capture how physically close the two are with a background of a beautiful location. When we are repeatedly shown the physical details of relationships, we deceive ourselves that these are what define a relationship. We forget how our relationships are to be defined in Jesus Christ alone.

Couples that press themselves to improve their courting relationship spiritually should not simply focus on modifying behaviours in the relationship. Do not start first by planning more devotions together or attending more church activities, as these should bear fruit naturally. Start first by seating together under the cross of Jesus Christ. Know your complete inability to have a godly relationship and at the same time behold the power of Christ. Ask God to work in the depths of your being to long for Him. A greater desire for Jesus Christ is central in the relationship. Pray and ask God for your heart to be fixed on Jehovah, the Alpha and the Omega, the God most High. Satan, the world, and our flesh immediately cry out: “being fixed on God in our relationship is ridiculous”. However, what is truly ridiculous in relationships is the obsession with things that are vain and unholy, ignoring the matters that

are of true and weighty importance. Let the others mock your relationship as being “God-intoxicated” as the world mocked the Reformer John Calvin. Let your hearts be filled with the Word and Spirit. Set the heart of your relationship on the things above, not on things on the earth. Be fixed on God, not with each other and you will experience the sweetest date – the sweet communion with God and each other.

The snares of the heart in a relationship

One of the greatest dangers that flows from our hearts that threatens courting relationships is sexual sin. God hates sexual sins that arise from our hearts. Now that you are courting, consider what ways the sexual temptation you face will be different and similar as compared to when you were single. Sexual sins range from the inappropriate physical closeness of the couple to sexual intercourse before marriage. Yet, the heart of the matter is the ensnaring temptation of lust, from which no one is spared. I met a young man once, studying to become a pastor in a conservative church. He mentioned that he enjoyed watching a fantasy show of kingdoms warring against each other. When his friend accusingly asked whether that show contained nudity, he defended himself by saying, “yes, that is true, but the girls are so ugly that I am not tempted by the sexual scenes”. Who is spared from the temptation of lust? A seminarian? A pastor? A professor of theology? You and I? Even the wise King Solomon caved in to gross sexual sins and fell into idolatry. King David, the man after God’s own heart, stole another man’s wife for his own lust and committed adultery. When I glance into my own heart I confess, “oh wretched man that I am”! Before God’s holy throne,

relationships are not a game. To live in sexual purity is to seek your and your partner’s salvation. To live in sexual sin is to seek your and your partner’s damnation.

Now let us discuss some excuses our old man of sin by instigation of the devil might come up with. The young man watching “mild nudity” may think that he is not committing any sexual sin before God just because the main plot of the show is not sexuality but the drama and violence. Therefore, he tries to ease his conscience. Similarly, couples may try to reason that the main purpose of touching one another has nothing to do with intercourse. Besides, although the plan was to meet in a place where no one else is, they may claim that sexual immorality was never part of the agenda in the date. They may say, “In fact, I am strongly against intercourse! The old man of sin may go so far as to say, “Touching the one I am dating is right and glorifying before the thrice holy God!” The Scriptures, as it were, looks at us in the eye ... and yells: “flee fornication for your lives!” (1 Cor. 6:18, 1 Thess. 4:3-5, 2 Tim. 2:22, Pro. 5, 6:25, Gal. 5:16, Js. 1:14-15, Col. 3:5, Job 31:1 – It may be a good idea to discuss these passages with the one you are courting. Brothers and sisters, let us not flirt with any form of sexual sin, not experiment with it, but absolutely, and categorically flee from it. For the fruit of any lust is always the grieving of the Spirit and deep anguish in one’s soul. All it took for David was a quick glance at Bathsheba from a distance and lust burned in his heart. If you are the slightest bit uncertain if your gesture will stir lust in the heart of your partner, leave it far away, be humble and tell your partner, “I am not greater than David, Solomon or Samson”. The call to flee sinful physical intimacy is a divine warning. Sexual sins are a most

deadly snare of the heart.

To return to the young man that had an excuse to watch “mature” content, his answer was given with great confidence, and even a boasting of sorts. As if to say, “Come on, I am above that! I am a strong Christian; see how I can flex my Christian liberty”. The world equates violence and sexual explicitness with maturity. The label for movies with fornication is not “wicked before the eyes of God” but instead, “mature content”. It is as if the mark of maturity is the ability to flirt with sin. But how can flirting with that which is from the pits of hell demonstrate that we are spiritually strong? One thing is certain: God did not save us with the blood of Christ so that we may flirt with the lusts of the heart. Prove to your partner that God has given you spiritual wisdom, that you understand thoroughly the nature of sexual sin. Show your partner your spiritual strength by sprinting away from sexual sin. Glow as children of light if your partner as fallen into the darkness of lust. Display your understanding of true love. Loving God in your relationship means seeking holy intimacy, not the intimacy between you and your partner’s depraved old men of sin.

Unchaste physical intimacy outside the marriage always gives the illusion of closeness. In a certain sense, an unmarried Christian couple that ventures physically where they should not be will experience a kind of closeness than if they did not. That is the closeness when the old man of sin unites with another. They unite for a moment against God’s laws and therefore against God Himself. They share and assist each other in the works of the Devil. It is the closeness that Solomon experienced with his heathen wives when he worshipped their gods

instead of Jehovah. It is the closeness of Ananias and Sapphira when they shared the secret of their hypocrisy, right before they were slain by the Spirit. But sinful physical closeness is spiritual distancing from the God we love. A life of sin is coldness and isolation from God. Others may buy into this illusion the couple creates. The relationship looks perfect from the outside, but what is inside, behind the closed doors, is a rotting corpse. Let us seek true closeness with our partners and repent when we have chased after sin and illusions of intimacy.

A New Heart, A real intimacy

Thankfully, we come to the realization that we cannot depend on ourselves to develop a desire to love and not lust after the one we are courting. The Spirit of God reveals to our spirit that only God can give us such a desire and save us poor sinners. Relationships are

spiritually difficult with the many new responsibilities and temptations, but we must remember that the beating inside of us is not a heart of stone. It is a new heart that God has given us. The giving of this precious new heart is rooted in eternal election. He gives us a new and holy heart because He has established His unbreakable covenant of love and friendship with you and me. God swore by Himself that your heart and mine will be His own personal workmanship. True intimacy is a giving of oneself to the spiritual edification of another. True intimacy is what Jesus Christ did for us, while we were yet sinners, living a life of lust and pride. Christ gave us life for us, that we might spiritually live. While we foolishly turn again in to our sin, and committed spiritual adultery, God still maintained His unbreakable covenant with us. He chastens us, lovingly brings us to our knees in repentance, that we may once again enjoy spiritual intimacy

“...true intimacy in the relationship is when a couple seeks every way possible to show not lust but Christ’s true love to each other.”

with God. Therefore true intimacy in the relationship is when a couple seeks every way possible to show not lust but Christ’s true love to each other. This is the covenant view of a relationship. This is the secret to true intimacy which the world has no clue about. I close with this verse hoping you may reflect on it with the one you are courting – “The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant” (Ps. 25:14).

“ORDER, PLEASE”

>>Lee Kong Wee



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Introduction

Young people, do you know that CERC adopted our own Church Order in 2011? It is almost identical to the Church Order of our sister church, the

PRCA, whose Church Order is based upon the original Church Order that was adopted by the Synod of Dort in 1618-1619. Since adopting our own Church Order officially, we have seen the great benefit of doing so.

The focus of this article would be on the necessity and importance of the Church Order for a church, as well as its uses. As to its history, structure and content of the Church Order, I refer interested readers to other excellent sources that are readily available (see bibliography), which we would all do well to read or refer to for our own spiritual profit.

Necessity and Importance of the Church Order

Why is the Church Order necessary and important for CERC, and indeed for any church? The **reason, in the first place**, can be found in Article 1 of the Church Order itself: “*For the maintenance of good order in the church of Christ*”.

Our God is a God of order. He never does anything in a disorderly or haphazard manner. He never does anything arbitrarily, according to His whims and fancies, just because He

'feels like doing it'. That is simply impossible, because He is infinitely wise and does all things with a clear and definite purpose and goal in mind – His glory (Eph 1:11-12). Whether in creation or redemption, God's orderliness is unmistakable.

Therefore, it follows that the church of Jesus Christ, Who is very God of very God, is an orderly church. She ought to be. When Jesus gathers His church by His Spirit, He does not bring His sheep into an institution that is loosely organised, where there is no clear code of conduct and whose directions and goals change according to popular opinions or personalities. Rather, the child of God is brought into an institution that is governed according to scriptural principles by lawfully appointed leaders, whose members behave themselves as becoming great sinners saved by Almighty grace, and whose one unchanging goal is the honour and glory of God. That the church is an orderly institution is evident in the way God ruled His church in the Old Testament (i.e. the nation Israel) by many strict rules and regulations that governed every detail of her moral, civil and religious life. In the fullness of time, when the redemptive plan of God extended beyond national Israel to gather His elect from every nation, tongue and tribe, God continued to ensure that there is order in the New Testament church by instituting the offices of ministers, elders and deacons as representatives of the **three-fold** office of Jesus Christ to rule the church on behalf of her ascended Lord. We know God takes order very seriously in His Church, because of the weightiness of the authority that Jesus gave to His apostles, and by extension to all office-bearers in the NT, when He said, "*Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and*

whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 18:18,16:19).

Orderliness in the church, for all time, is the will of the unchangeable God of order Himself. The church that understands this will see the necessity and value of adopting a Church Order. The Church Order, as a document laying down clear principles derived from Scripture, for regulating the life of the church in an orderly manner, is critical for a church who seeks to obey the injunction 'Let all things be done decently and in order.' (1 Cor. 14:40).

A **second** reason why the Church Order is necessary and important for a church is because it serves to promote unity and peace in the church. This second reason flows from the first. When there is order in the church, peace and unity prevails. No church is without her own fair share of troubles or conflicts, including the church that has adopted a Church Order. But when troubles and conflicts arise, the church with the Church Order has a ready, reliable reference and guide to deal with them properly, biblically and in an orderly manner. It is not left to the preference of individuals, or the wit of a few intelligent men, or the high-handedness of a forceful leader to resolve the matter or determine the outcome.

The Church Order not only promotes unity within a church, but also in a federation of churches when all the churches adopt the Church Order together as one of their minor confessions. The church institute is called to manifest the spiritual unity of the one holy catholic church of Jesus Christ by establishing ecclesiastical relationships with other churches of like precious faith. These relationships require a certain structure and order to

regulate the proper interaction between churches in the federation. The Church Order provides that organizational structure and order that allows the churches in the federation to express and experience their spiritual unity.

A **third reason** why the Church Order is necessary and important for a church is because it *guards the church against false doctrine*. It does this by regulating those who teach doctrine in the church, namely the ministers of the gospel. Ministers must be examined by the church as to the orthodoxy of their beliefs. They must be ordained by the church, and bind themselves to teach the confessions of the church. They must be subject to the supervision and rule of the Elders, may be investigated, suspended or deposed from their office by the church should they become wayward. The Church order also guards the church against false teaching by providing an avenue of protest and appeal to those who object to the teaching of the church. When the leaders of the church err and allow false doctrine to be taught, church members can (and must) bear witness to the truth through the proper avenue of protest and appeal.

How necessary and important is the Church Order for a church? Can a church *survive* without a Church Order? Probably yes (though I'm not sure for how long). But can it *thrive*? In my judgment, no.

Uses of the Church Order

The Church Order has great practical value for the local church. I will name but a few here.

First, it guides office-bearers in their rule of the church. The fundamental principle that underlies the entire

Church Order is that Jesus Christ is the Head and King of the Church, and He rules her by His Word and Spirit. The office-bearers are NOT the supreme authority in the church. Jesus Christ is. The authority of the office-bearers is a delegated authority, and insofar as they rule according to the principles and commands of Scripture, they wield the authority of Christ Himself. The Church Order is founded upon direct and indirect principles of the Word of God, and hence when office-bearers rule according to it, they may be sure that they are exercising their authority in a lawful manner. The Church Order regulates the keys aspects of church government relating to the marks of the true church, i.e. in the areas of preaching/doctrine, the sacraments and Christian discipline. It is therefore very helpful in keeping the office-bearers focused on their proper calling and not be distracted by many other non-essential and perhaps even illegitimate demands.

Second, the Church Order serves as *a rule for members of the church regarding their daily conduct* in relation to the office-bearers, as well as to fellow believers. Because it is founded upon the principles of the Word of God, the Church Order is authoritative (albeit derived authority) for the faith and life of the church member whose church has adopted the Church Order. I quote Rev. Vanden Berg: *“The believer promises before God and His church that he will submit himself to the rule of the church. He binds himself to these rules of church government. He promises that by the grace of God he will regulate all his life according to these rules. That must not be regarded lightly for it is a very serious matter. It means certainly that our Church Order is the rule for our daily conduct and by it we are to be governed not only in relation to the office-bearers*

in the church but also in relation to our brothers and sisters of the household of faith. Our Church Order then is certainly no abstraction but, on the contrary, is a matter of greatest practical concern to every member of the church” (Vanden Berg, 1953, pg. 261)

Last but not least, the Church Order is of great practical value for the local church in her mission work. The main goal of every mission work is to establish an instituted church in the field that is self-governing, self-propagating, and self-supporting. In relation to the first aspect, instruction in the Church Order is essential for the group of believers in the mission field who desire to be instituted as a church someday, especially for those among them who are potential office-bearers. They must have a good grasp and understanding of the principles of Reformed church government, of the proper calling and work of the special offices, of the significance of baptism and the Lord's Supper, the importance of church membership and the necessity of Christian discipline. In CERC's own experience, we have seen how this instruction in the Church Order has helped correct what is a common erroneous practice in India – independent preachers without the oversight of a church. The Church Order has also helped us and the fellowship in India to better understand the validity of administering baptism in the mission field, and guided the Session in coming to a decision to call Bro. Emmanuel Singh as CERC's missionary to Kolkata, India.

Conclusion

How necessary and important the Church Order is for the church of Jesus Christ in guarding her against false doctrines and promoting her peace and

unity! What blessings it brings when there is good order in the church! Young people, know your Church Order. Appreciate it. Then you will know how you ought to behave yourself in the house of God, the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15), and in that way seek the good and peace of Zion.

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CONSCIENCE

>>Cornelius Boon



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What is the Conscience?

When we think about our conscience, the first thought that comes to mind is that “inner voice” which tell us what is right or wrong. The world knows of this concept and if you refer to any dictionary, you will find a definition similar to it: “a person’s moral sense of right and wrong, viewed as acting as a guide to one’s behaviour.” Although this definition is partly correct, it does not do justice to what this word really means. To truly understand this word, we must turn to the only dictionary that we trust – the Bible.

Before we look at some passages, it is helpful to know that the English word “conscience” comes from the Latin word “conscientia”, which means “to know with”. With whom do we have this knowledge? The answer to this question can only be God. The fact that we have a conscience means that we know something with God. So for this article, we will refer to this knowledge with God as man’s conscience.

Why was man created with a conscience? There are many reasons, but the most important reason is for the glory of

God. First, we must understand that God is truth, and His definition of what is right or wrong is the standard for everyone. When He made man with a conscience, He gave us a testimony of what is right and wrong. Our depraved nature rebels against His definition of what is right or wrong. We do not want to acknowledge God’s sovereignty and we want to decide for ourselves what is right or wrong. But God will have His glory, He alone will be worshipped and praised, He did not create man for the purpose that they glory in themselves. So no matter how much man tries to hide or run away from the truth, it is ultimately futile - our conscience tell us so.

A Reprobate’s Conscience

One question we might have is whether reprobates are able to tell what is right or wrong in the sight of God? The Bible’s answer is that God did give them a conscience as evidenced in:

Rom. 2:14-15 – “For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;)”

In the above passage, the Gentiles never had the law; they never had the chance to read the scriptures. But God wrote His law in their hearts, giving them a conscience that tells them what is right and what is wrong.

God also revealed His law to them through the creation:

Rom. 1:20 – “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:”

Thus we see that no matter whether one is elect or reprobate, God gave us all a conscience. The difference is that the conscience God gives to the reprobate is never for their own good, it is not a common grace which God gives them. It is given to them so that they are left without excuse in the Day of Judgement.

Conscience Weakened

As we look around us, we might also wonder why some people are able to sin without remorse. They lie with impunity and cheat without a second thought. Scripture has this to say:

1 Tim. 4:1-2 – “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron”.

The conscience of the reprobate is described as having been seared with a hot iron. It is possible for a man to still the voice of his conscience so that he is no longer able to hear his conscience speaking to him. Ultimately, we should still note that it is impossible to remove a man’s conscience completely. But by

constantly committing the same sin over and over again, he no longer hears God's condemning voice as he commits that particular sin. It reaches a point where he is so hardened in sin that it no longer bothers him and he no longer senses the sin that he is embroiled in.

Before we breathe a sigh of relief exclaiming that such condemnation only happens to the reprobate, we must humbly realise that this can very much happen to the elect as well. Those who persist in such sins thread on dangerous ground and there is no forgiveness for those who remain unrepentant.

Heb. 10:26-27 – “For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.”

The problem is that in our pride, we refuse to confess our sins, and stubbornly desire the pleasures of this world. Thus we justify our sins in order to ease our conscience. But the danger is that the more we commit the sin, the less our conscience pricks us. Every time we commit the sin, it sears our conscience so that it no longer functions as it ought. Sin hinders our walk with God and there is no way to escape from the searing of our conscience then by confessing our sins before God and man. This is God's work through the Spirit of Christ in the heart of the sinner and the result is a good conscience before God.

1 Tim. 1:19 – “Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck”.

Conscience Strengthened

How then can we prevent our

conscience from being dulled? First, as noted earlier, we need to confess all our sins and guilt at the cross and by faith appropriate the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Additionally, we must pay faithful attention to the preaching of the Word of God, keeping our conscience sharp and alive. The Word of God is our only guide and that same Word serves to convict us of our sins through our conscience.

Conscience's Disapproval

The conscience of a child of God plays an important role. It serves to convict us of our sin, and the Holy Spirit works in our hearts and in our conscience to convince us of the severity of our sin. An example in the Bible would be that of David when he committed the sin of numbering the people.

2 Sam. 24:10 – “And David's heart smote him after that he had numbered the people. And David said unto the LORD, I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech thee, O LORD, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly.”

And also in Psalms when David committed the sin of adultery with Bathsheba, his conscience gave him no rest.

Ps. 32:3-4 – “When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah.”

Only by confessing our sins can we find peace as David wrote in the following verse:

Ps. 32:5 – “I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions

unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.”

Conscience's Approval

On the other hand, when our conscience is right before God, we must be properly guided by it and not act in contrary to it. Martin Luther, when faced with severe persecution to recant his teachings, gave this beautiful testimony: “Since your majesty and your lordships desire a simple reply, I will answer without horns and without teeth. Unless I am convicted by scripture and plain reason - I do not accept the authority of popes and councils for they have contradicted each other - **my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe.** Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise, God help me. Amen.”

Whether in prosperity, poverty, sickness or health, a good conscience before God is the only assurance we need to have peace and joy in this life. A good conscience allows us to come boldly before God's throne of grace, declaring before God that we are righteous. We see that when Hezekiah made this prayer to God, beseeching God not to end his life:

2 Kg. 20:3 – “I beseech thee, O LORD, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore.”

It was an amazing prayer and testimony that Hezekiah gave, to be able to say that his walk of life before God was one of truth and in a perfect heart. We might even hesitate to give that same confession today. Hezekiah knew he was a sinner and that he was not

perfect, and it is impossible for anyone except Jesus Christ to be perfect. But the other amazing thing was that God accepted Hezekiah's prayer:

2 Kg. 20:5 – "Turn again, and tell

Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the LORD."

We must arrive at that point in our lives when we can make the same prayer that Hezekiah made. If we cannot then something is very wrong in our life. Will our conscience allow us to? Only through the cross of Jesus Christ.

PROF. DAVID ENGELSMA'S ESCHATOLOGY NOTES (I)

>>Aaron Lim



Prof. David J. Engelsma has been an ordained minister in the Protestant Reformed Churches in America for nearly 50 years, having been ordained into office in 1963. From 1988 to 2008 he was Professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament Studies at the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

The following is the beginning article in a series of notes on eschatology by Prof. David Engelsma. These notes were taken by Aaron Lim while he was attending Prof. Engelsma's Reformed Doctrine class at Faith Protestant Reformed Church between the fall of 2015 and the winter of 2016. The notes are presented in the first person, that is, from the viewpoint of Prof. Engelsma speaking. We hope that they will be of spiritual profit to our readers.

Introduction to Eschatology

Not antichrist, not persecution, but Jesus Christ is the most important in eschatology. He is the truth about the end. The prevalence of errors on the millennium are not the most important thing. This truth concerning the end is taught in Rev. 20. Two main errors regarding the millennium – premillennialism and post-millennialism – must be pointed out because thousands of Protestants have fallen to this error.

We will also discuss the signs of the end and its nearness. Lawlessness, apostasy, and the second coming of Jesus Christ. The awesome events that accompany his coming – the resurrection of all the dead, the inheritance of the new world by elect believers, and the recompense of all the wicked. These are importance topics concerning the last things. We believers must beware of these things. There is eternal punishment. We will end this season by looking at the practical implications of the truth of eschatology for our Christian life before the end comes.

Scripture passages in connection with the class: Matt. 24, 25, Mk. 13, Luk. 21, 1 Thess. 4:13-18, 5, 2 Thess. 2,

2 Tim. 3,4, 2 Pet. 3, 1 Jn. 2:18-29, Revelation. Creeds: HC Q52,57,58, 123, BC Art. 37.

The subject is eschatology. This is the Reformed doctrine of eschatology. The word itself derives from the Greek word "last" (eschatos). Therefore the Reformed churches have called this doctrine eschatology – the study/word about the last things.

1 Jn. 2:18. There the apostle is warning the church that antichrist is coming. It is the last time. The word translated "last" is eschatos. In Jn 6:39, we are told that Christ will raise us from the dead "at the last". So at the last when history comes finally to its conclusion, when the present creation has run its course, there will take place a resurrection of the people of God by Jesus Christ. That will happen only at the last day.

Eschatology is the doctrine of the last days, the last time, the last of the present creation, the last of human history, the last of human life, and the last of the history of the present creation.

Our study is also going to concern what the Bible speaks of as the end. This is also how the Bible refers to these last things – the end. Jesus waited until the

very end of his ministry to teach us the truth concerning the last days, or the end. Everything Jesus teaches in Matt. 24 concerns the end of the world. Matt. 24:13-14. The main sign of the nearness of the coming of Christ is the preaching of the gospel in all the world. Europe, Asia, China, and everywhere. When that happens, then the end will come. What is elsewhere referred to as the last is here called by Jesus “the end”.

1 Cor. 15:24. There are a certain number of people who belong to Christ in all the world, not just in Judea. When all of them have been born and brought to a living faith in Jesus Christ, then comes the end. The end is controlled by the salvation of the church. It cannot come until the whole church of Jesus Christ has been gathered and saved.

1 Pet. 4:7. Everything is not going to continue as it has for thousands of years before. Peter said already in his time that the end is at hand; it is near. The truth of the end must affect us spiritually, not just satisfy our curiosity about these puzzling things. It makes a difference in our life from Monday morning to Saturday night and the Lord’s Day. Everything has an end. We are going to answer the question: how could Peter answer 2000 years ago that the end of all things is at hand already in his time? If it was true already then, how much more is that the case with us? Here the last things are referred

to as the end. That is a different word from “last”.

This word “end” has an important meaning. History is not just going to stop. It is not just going to be the case that this world is not going to be here anymore. But this word teaches us that all things on this day will finally reach their goal – the goal that God has appointed for all things, the goal that He has decided for history and creation, and the goal that He has appointed for your life, and my life.

We must emphasize that the end of history and this present creation is also the end of each one of us personally. This is the goal that is finally attained. When you say that this world will come to an end to your children, be aware that you are not merely saying that it is going to stop, but you are saying much more than that. This world is going to reach its goal, its purpose that God had for the entire creation when He created it in the beginning.

The Importance of the Subject

The subject of the last things is important. It is recognized by Reformed churches and Reformed theology. Reformed theology observes that there are 6 major doctrines/truths taught by the Bible. The doctrine of God, man, Christ, salvation, the church, and the last things. In the PR Seminary, when the professors teach Reformed Doctrine, they teach 6 courses in 6 semesters.

The importance of this subject is simply obvious to everybody from the nature of the topic or subject itself. Is it not important how history and the world will end? And what the signs preceding the end of the world and history are? Certainly the beginning of the world is important. But the ending

of the world is important as well. Is it not important that we know and live in the consciousness of the goal of God with everything – the universe, history, and the life of each of us in history? If anyone is still inclined to doubt the importance of the truth of all things, let him or her consider that to eschatology also belongs the truth of an everlasting heaven and an everlasting hell. Every human being will either enjoy an everlasting heaven, or suffer the torments of an everlasting hell. That should make this topic of great interest to everyone who calls himself a Christian, and makes this study important.

Such is the importance of this topic for every believer that it shapes and controls all his earthly life. I am talking to myself first of all before I talk to you. If the truth of eschatology does not have this importance in my life that it shapes and controls all of our earthly life, something serious is lacking. We must allow the truth of the end to dominate and control our life and the important decisions we make – whom my friends are, whom I will date, how I will conduct myself with my husband or wife, how I will raise up my children, how I conduct myself with my brethren in the church. That is the importance of eschatology. It shapes and frames and controls our entire life.

2 Pet. 3:11-14. The whole earthly creation will be dissolved. Since we know the truth that there is coming an end – the second coming of Jesus Christ for our salvation and the renewal of the creation – because you know this, what difference does it make to you when we go home tonight, when we wake up tomorrow, all our recreation and planning? There is something dreadfully wrong about my life if this truth does not affect me. This is what

“Such is the importance of this topic for every believer that it shapes and controls all his earthly life”

we have to be concerned with, and to be busy with.

Before I was appointed to teach at the PR Seminary, one of the major issues in both congregations that I served was marital problems. Warfare between husband and wife, even though both claim to be Christians. More than once, especially when I did not think I was getting any where, I would quote this text. Don't you think that Jesus is coming? Don't you think that the end is near? For everyone of us who is married, the end is at the most 50 or

60 years away before our life comes to an end. Leave your own misery out of view. When your end comes, do you want to be found fighting and hating your own spouse? Hating and rebelling against your own parents? The truth of eschatology is important because it controls and shapes our whole life.

Eschatology is not only a truth that we study a couple of times a month, or think about once in awhile. But it is a truth that shapes our life to be holy and godly, in dating and marriage, what we read and watch, our friendships and

more. We live in the light of the truth of the end of all things. The human being is a fool if he does not live in the light of the truth of all things. That is the way most human beings live, as though there is never going to be an end, as though they are going to live on forever, as though there is never going to be a return of Jesus Christ and a final judgment, resulting in eternal life or death, as though there is not going to be a reward for the obedience of God and a recompense for disobedience. It is to live foolish, apart from the truth of the end of all things.

PREPARING FOR PERSECUTION

>>Cheryl Lim



Cheryl Lim is a confessing young adult in CERC.

Certainly, the youths of Singapore (or elsewhere, for that matter) are no strangers to the idea of preparation. They may often be found busy preparing for major examinations such as the PSLE¹, GCE 'O', or 'A' levels. And many are also regularly involved in preparing for school-level artistic or athletic competitions. But in this article, we face the question: what are we doing to prepare for *persecution*?

What are we doing to prepare ourselves for the times when the world exerts

its might and attempts to squeeze and press the church out of existence, and to silence her witness? Are we preparing *earnestly*? Are we preparing *early*? And indeed, how are we preparing?

Persecution, A Reality

The assigned title of this article assumes that there is, or will be persecution. However, I think it would do us well to briefly consider how this is not a mere assumption, but the reality revealed in Scripture.

The Christian church is an institution that has suffered, is suffering, and will continue to suffer persecution. From righteous Abel to the saints in the 21st century, persecution has been the lot of believers on this earth. Christ Jesus Himself states it as a requirement of being His disciple: "...If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, *and take up his cross*, and follow me." (Matt. 16:24, italics mine). This is

not the cross of the general, common sufferings of mankind, but the cross that is borne because we bear the image of Christ and are hated of the world. For, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you... The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you..." (Jn. 15:19, 20).

Believers are persecuted because we live differently from the world. We walk as children of light, testifying of *the* Light in this world of darkness. And the ungodly world will not put up with this! The apostles Paul and Peter respectively warned: "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12) and, "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin" (1 Pet.

¹PSLE: Primary School Leaving Examination, usually taken at 12 years old.

4:1). It is when we distinguish ourselves from the world by fighting against sin, witnessing by word and deed, that we suffer persecution for Christ's sake.

Such persecution may take various forms. The apostle Paul gives an account of his own sufferings in 2 Cor. 11:24-27 which included being scourged, beaten with rods and stoned. Heb. 11 contains a vivid record of what the saints of old endured: "...others were tortured... And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented... they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth" (v. 35-38).

Yet it is not always that persecution comes as a direct threat of physical violence. Oftentimes, it also takes on more subtle forms. In a Standard Bearer article, Rev K. Koole describes this as "peer pressure"; a certain pressure to conform to the standards set by a dominant group such that our thinking and behaviour are affected (Koole, 1982, pg. 471-2). Our lives are regulated by what others think of us, and we grow more conscious of their judgements rather than of God's. If we choose to reject conforming to their standards, we risk being outcast, scorned, reproached and ridiculed. Will we then give thanks before our meals in public? Will we reject invitations to pursue worldly entertainment? Will we seek first the kingdom of God, even at the expense of academic and material success or social status? This is what many of us have to grapple with, but how *prepared* are we to swim against the current of worldly influences and live according to the principles of Scripture?

And that is not all. Not only do we face such day-to-day persecution by virtue of being Christ's followers, we also expect, sometime in the future, the great tribulation of which Christ spoke in Matt. 24. Over and against those who believe in the rapture of the church before such tribulation, or a "Golden Age" in which the world will be Christianised², the Reformed (biblical) position asserts that the church *will* endure terrible persecution at the hands of the anti-Christian kingdom. Furthermore, this is not, ultimately, the persecution which occurred in AD 70 when the Romans besieged and destroyed the city of Jerusalem. This was merely a foreshadowing of the final, incomparable persecution that will occur just before the coming of Christ.

The great tribulation will be one so great such as was not seen since the beginning of the world to this time, nor ever shall be. A persecution fronted by the man of sin (2 Thess. 2:3), that beast from the sea (Rev. 13:1-8), when he is revealed and rises to accomplish world domination. A persecution so fierce that its days will be shortened for the elect's sake. A persecution during which those faithful to our Lord will not be able to buy or sell, and indeed, are killed (Rev. 13). All these will finally culminate in the destruction of the church institute, described in Rev. 11 as the killing of the two witnesses.

Preparing for Persecution

Having discussed the reality of persecution, we come now to (1) the need, and (2) the means of preparing for persecution.

Why is it needful for us to prepare for persecution? As mentioned in the beginning, most of us are well associated with the notion

of preparation — preparation for examinations, competitions, interviews, presentations, board meetings, celebrations and hundreds of other important events. If we are willing to spend much time and effort preparing for that which concerns our *earthly* lives, what more that which concerns our *souls*? Are we content to be as those who receive the seed of the Word in stony places, who for a time express joy in it, but eventually fall in the face of tribulation or persecution (Matt. 13:20, 21)? Let us not belittle the persecution which is and which is to come. It will be fierce and it will be trying. It is a battle "not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places (Eph. 6:12).

And so we prepare early. We prepare hard. We prepare so that we "may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand" (Eph. 6:13b).

But what does this preparation consist of? From the same passage, we read: "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Eph. 6:11). Put on the armour of God! What better defence have we than the armour given and chosen by God Himself? Let us put it on!

Have we the girdle of truth? Let us search the Scriptures that we may have before us an accurate account of reality, a worldview shaped by the lenses of God's revelation. And do not be content with mere superficial understanding, but dive deep into the unsearchable riches of Christ.

²For a more thorough explanation of these views, the interested reader may refer to Prof. David Engelsma's series on Pre-millennialism and Post-millennialism in the Standard Bearer magazine.

Have we the breastplate of righteousness? Do we wholly trust in the imputed righteousness of Christ, or have we adorned ourselves with the filthy rags of Pelagianism, Arminianism or conditional theology? Only the breastplate of Christ's righteousness will shield our hearts from Satan's arrows of doubt.

Have we the sandals of the preparation of the gospel of peace? Has the message of the gospel so gripped our souls and established itself as our sure foundation that we may stand fast in the midst of fierce persecution? This is the gospel that will dispel all fears and fuel our courage. Know it, believe it, and cling to it.

Have we the shield of faith? Do we believe the promises of Scripture and cleave to Christ as our Saviour? Actively attend to the means which help kindle

our faith and cause us to rely on the Word of God. With such a shield, we can extinguish every dart hurled at us by wicked foes.

Have we the helmet of salvation? Is the hope of salvation (1 Thess. 5:8) within us so that when the devil unleashes his attacks, we may confidently declare "...there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day..." (1 Tim. 4:8)?

And have we the sword of the Spirit, the word of God? Know this word. Be rooted in and convicted of it. So that when we are challenged, "Yea, hath God said?" our response may begin as Christ's "It is written..."

In putting on the armour of God, let us also not forget to pray (Eph. 6:18). Bowing the knee to God, we bring

all our petitions to Him, asking for boldness, for peace, for strength. We pray always. In prosperity or in distress. And we pray for our fellow soldiers, that they too may stand. We pray, for it is God that protects us. He alone is our strength and shield.

Conclusion

Persecution is a reality. It is a reality now, and will continue to be, culminating in the great tribulation. Are we prepared? Will we stand in the evil day? Then let us take unto ourselves the whole armour of God.

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NEWS FROM THE COVENANT CHRISTIAN EDUCATION SOCIETY

>>Daniel Tang



Daniel Tang is a confessing young adult in CERC.

On the night of October 10, 2014, men of the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church gathered together in response to the call of Deuteronomy 6:7 - "*And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy*

children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up". These men recognised the pressing need for our children, and our children's children, to be given a Christian education: an education that was founded not only on academic excellence, but especially on the Word of God. That night, thirty-one men signed the roster forming our first society for Christian education, and elected six to its Board.

The Board was immediately given a number of tasks. The Board was to propose a name and constitution for

the newly formed society. But more importantly, the Board had to begin investigating into the conditions necessary for forming our own Christian school in Singapore.

As the investigation progressed, it quickly became clear to the Board and Society that a fully functional Christian school – think having a school building with classrooms, labs, a gym and so on – would not be ours for several years yet. In the first place, the small number of children of school-going age in CERC today meant that it would be nearly impossible to set up such a school. There would not be enough

students, nor sufficient funding to pay for the school. In addition, education in Singapore is heavily regulated by the government, thereby presenting us with a number of hurdles to cross before our school can be set up (more on this later).

With these considerations in mind, the Society at its January 2016 meeting adopted the name **Covenant Christian Education Society**, along with a Constitution for the Society. The adoption of the Constitution was significant because in it was embodied the basis for the Society: its belief in Scripture as the foundation for all things, the covenantal relationship between God and His people, and the need to raise covenant children for the service of God. In addition, the adopted name and Constitution reflected the unique position we had in Singapore. The Society expanded its initial goal from establishing a Christian school to one that also included providing a means for us to give our covenant children a Christian education while a school could not yet be formed.

In the course of its investigation, the Board uncovered a number of issues that would stand in the way of our having a Christian school. The largest hurdle to the formation of our Christian school today would probably be the enactment of the Compulsory Education Act. Established in 2003, the Act requires all Singaporean children to undergo Compulsory Education (CE) in a national primary school. Exemptions are only permitted for special needs children, Muslim children wishing to attend the madrasahs¹, and those who wish to home-school. Parents who wish to home-school their children may apply to the Ministry of Education (MOE) for an exemption from CE, but home-schooled children must still, like

all other students, sit for and complete the national Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) when they are between 11 and 15 years of age². There are currently no laws requiring children to further their education after completing the PSLE.

Because of the apparent difficulty of giving our children of primary school-going age a Christian education, the Board has decided to focus its investigation first on the possible alternatives for Christian education for parents with young children.

Undoubtedly, the most ideal scenario would be to have our school recognized by the MOE as an official alternative to the public primary schools. However, at this point this appears difficult to do. Establishing our school as a national school would mean having to comply with standard MOE policies, which would almost certainly prevent us from teaching the Bible or from a biblical perspective. And while a Christian private school currently exists as an officially recognized alternative to public school education, it was formed before the current legislation took effect, and today the authorities appear to have little desire to grant approval for more of such schools. It is also not possible for us to establish our school as an international school, as Singaporean students would not be granted exemptions from CE to attend an international school.

The investigation appears to have yielded nothing but difficulty after difficulty, and obstacle after obstacle. Perhaps as you read this you are beginning to ask— will we ever have a Christian school?

The Board does not have an answer to that, but we trust that God will provide

in His time. However, let us not despair as though the cause of Christian education is lost. While we do not yet have a Christian school, there are still possibilities for our children to be given a Christian education instead of attending a public school.

The opportunity to apply for a CE exemption to home-school our children remains open. While home-schooling cannot replace the learning experience which a child can enjoy in a Christian school, it provides us with the ability to educate our children from a Reformed perspective instead of leaving our children in the hands of the public schools. Because this option appears the most feasible as a near-term solution for Christian education, the Board is exploring the possibility of developing a Christian education experience for home-schooled children. While there are no concrete plans yet, possibilities include providing a suggested home-school curriculum for parents, and gathering the children for lessons, outings or other activities.

Despite the difficulties, let us remember that the Christian education of our children is an urgent calling for us. The third generation of children are already arriving one by one, and in God's providence we will be blessed with more children in future as our young people marry. We – yes, all of us - have to be ready to raise these children in the ways of the Lord. How can we be ready?

Young people, make the covenant education of your children a priority.

¹Madrasah: An Islamic religious school

² Ministry of Education, Singapore. (2016). Compulsory Education: Exemptions. Retrieved from <https://www.moe.gov.sg/education/education-system/compulsory-education/exemptions>

You may not be married, or even dating at this point, but you can already begin to make preparations to enable you to give your children a covenant education in future. Start by taking an interest in the work of the Society, because providing our children with a Christian education is not only the Board's work. It is also your calling too! Familiarize yourself with the possibilities and constraints of Christian education in Singapore. In addition, recognize that you may one day need to apply for a CE exemption to home-school in order to give your child a Christian education. There are certain requirements to be fulfilled for that exemption to be granted, and you can begin exploring how you can be ready to meet the requirements, should

the time come that you need to apply for that exemption.

Adult members, your own children may be past the school-going age, or perhaps the Lord has not given you children of your own. Nevertheless, the calling in Deuteronomy 6 comes to you as well. As the entire nation of Israel was commanded to teach their children the ways of God, so also are you to teach the children of our church, though they may not be your own. If you are able, consider giving financially to help the cause of Christian education, for Christian education is costly, especially for young parents raising a family on one income. You can also volunteer your time to support the activities related to Christian education, perhaps

by teaching a class or two, or being a chaperone at an outing for the children, should such activities be organized. In any case, Christian education is no easy task, and there will be many different ways for you to contribute.

Finally, pray for the work of the Society and the Board, for the work ahead is too great for our own strength to bear. It is only through Christ, relying on His strength and resting on His promises, that we may one day see our children, and children's children for generations to come, educated in a solidly Reformed school.

DESIRING A GOOD WORK (III)

>>Prof. Russell Dykstra



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

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

In the previous two instalments we have examined the office of elder and the "good work" of his office. Now we consider the blessings that an elder receives, and therefore the incentive for men properly to prepare themselves for the office because they desire this good work.

What makes the office of elder desirable? Let us strip away any false ideas about this, lest anyone desire the office for wrong reasons. A man might desire the office because he is drawn to the power and authority of the office. That the office of elder is powerful is without question. The elder has the

oversight of the congregation. And, to the elders of the church, God has given the power to open and close heaven. Is there a greater, more significant power than that in all the earth?

But we must notice, first, that the elder's power is a spiritual, not an earthly power. It is very different from any other conception of power that we might have from life in this world. It is not the power to make people do what one commands. It is not the power to make decisions that are for one's own benefit or enjoyment. It is rather a spiritual power that is concerned with the salvation of people. And notice secondly, that this power is not personal. The office of elder does not give a man some position of power that he may now speak and everyone must

“...the elder’s power is... a spiritual power that is concerned with the salvation of people”

listen and obey. If a man is looking for power, if he wants to have a “say” in how the church should be run, then his motives are totally wrong, and he is not fit for office. Peter warns the elders against this – “Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock” (1 Pet. 5:3). What are the elders? They are servants, that is, ministers of God called to serve God’s flock.

This is such an important point, that it needs to be driven home. That the desire for personal power is a problem and danger in the church is evident from the disciples of Jesus arguing about being the greatest in Jesus’ kingdom. Jesus instructed them, and every officebearer in His church.

But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister [that is, *one who serves*, RJD]; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant [literally, *slave*, RJD].

And if that does not humble a man, then he must hear the next word from Jesus. After that instruction to the

disciples, Jesus, THE office bearer of God, added: “Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:25-28). There is the example to be followed – not to be served, but to serve, a man comes into office.

Paul and the other apostles referred to themselves that way – the slaves of Jesus (Act. 4:29, Rom. 1:1, etc., where servant is literally *slave*). Paul even called himself and his fellow laborers in the gospel slaves of the congregation – “ourselves your servants [*slaves*] for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor. 4:5).

That last paragraph brings out a second wrong reason, that is, what may never be the motivation for seeking the office, namely, that a man seek the office for his own honour. Some might imagine that they will gain respect and earn prestige in the office. They might feel as though they are lacking respect if they are not nominated, or not elected to the office. This is a false notion as well. While the congregation is called to honour the officebearers, it is not the man who is honoured. Honour them for their work’s sake, we must. Honour them in their office because they represent Christ. But if a man rules well and labours in the word and therefore is counted worthy of double honour (1 Tim. 5:17), to whom is the honour? It is to the God who made him, and equipped him, and sustains him by His sovereign grace. Any officebearer who does not seek and desire that ALL glory go to God is not worthy of the office. Desire for honour among men is not a proper motive. It is rather the pride of Satan and is destructive to the man and to the church.

Because it is a wrong motive, anyone who seeks the office for that reason

will fail. He will try to *gain* respect and *maintain* his position among men. And how does one do that? By pleasing men. Making decisions and speaking words that will please them. But, writes Paul, “if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant [slave] of Christ” (Gal. 1:10). And dreadful is Jesus’ warning: “Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets” (Lk. 6:26). The man will fail, because God will not share His glory with another. God will remove the man from office.

A third sinful motive for desiring the office is financial gain. Peter warns elders against this explicitly – “not for filthy lucre” (1 Pet. 5:2). In reality, being an elder more likely will result in a decline in his financial situation. The office bearer often pays for various expenses out of his own pocket, such as a coffee or lunch with a member or a visitor. Sometimes he is forced to leave work early in order to do elder’s work. No, an elder will not become better off financially in the office.

So, why is the office of elder to be desired, if the office provides no earthly advantages or benefits?

The desirability of the office is that it is the work of serving Christ by serving His body the church. The man who properly desires the office does so out of a love for Jesus Christ. The office requires a man who is deeply aware

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that he is a sinner, and that Jesus saved him with His precious blood. The depth of his sin and deservedness of eternal punishment, on the one hand, and the experiential knowledge of the astounding glory of salvation, on the other hand, these move a man to love and thankfulness. “How can I serve my Lord and Saviour?” he asks. The answer is, in whatever way and to whatever work the Lord calls him. He will serve the Lord as husband, father, church member, worker, and, if the Lord calls him, as an officebearer in the church. It is that simple. If God calls a man, that believer responds with thankful obedience. And even then, it is not that the man is lifted up above the rest of the church members. Rather it is that the Lord has set him in a place where he has more opportunities to serve the body. He now has five or ten talents given him (opportunities to serve, see Matt. 5, the parable of the talents). He will serve God by serving His people.

Clearly this demands that an elder love the saints, that he love the body purchased by Christ. As John expresses it, “Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another” (1 Jn. 4:11). And again, “every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that

is begotten of him.” (1 Jn. 5:1). The elder loves the members, not in theory, but in truth. He loves the individual members. They are unique – different personalities, struggles, and yes, sins. But he loves them all. And thus he truly desires to serve them. Christ is pleased to serve the needs of His church using men called to the offices in the church. The officebearer then seeks to do the work Christ wants to be done. He will gladly wash the feet of the saints. He will serve them in humility and love. This is a good work.

And there are tremendous blessings in this work – spiritual blessings. The blessing, first and foremost, is growth in the Word of God. This arises out of the work an elder does. The elder who faithfully carries out his duties is constantly in the Bible. He brings the Word of God to the widows, to the sick, to those walking in sin, and to those not living in wisdom. To be able to bring the right word, he searches the Scriptures and seeks to know and understand it better. He searches the Scriptures also to give good advice to those who come to him. He seeks the proper biblical way when dealing with an issue in the church that must be faced and resolved. The elder also grows in the truth of the Bible when he teaches catechism or leads a class or Bible study.

The elder is in the Word in his work of assisting the pastor. He pays special attention to the preaching of the Word. The elder must also evaluate the word preached. Is it 1) confessional (in harmony with the Reformed creeds), 2) exegetical (truly drawn from this text), and 3) antithetical (setting forth the truth over against the lie)? It is not enough that the elder be fed by that word preached; he is evaluating it – is it feeding the sheep? Is it being applied

to them in their lives, their sorrows, and their dangers? And, as the elders give help and guidance to the minister in regard to the preaching, the elders are themselves growing in the Word. Spiritual growth is the blessing a faithful elder receives.

Such an elder also grows in wisdom. Wisdom is the ability to take knowledge, add understanding of life, and then be able to apply it in the best way to various situations of life. Sanctified wisdom enables a man to direct his life in paths where he glorifies God the best way that he can. An elder needs wisdom to apply Scripture’s instruction to himself, to the congregation, to the minister, and to the fellow office bearers. Elders seek wisdom, pray for it unceasingly, and thus grow in wisdom by God’s gracious provision. We all can think of certain men and women, usually older members who are wise. They have lived many years and experienced much. They have learned what is foolish, and what is wise. They are able to give good, wise advice. This is God’s blessing on a faithful office bearer – he grows in spiritual wisdom.

More can be said about the spiritual blessings of serving in the office of elder, but this must wait for next time. We will also consider the question – if a man has the good and proper desire for the office of elder, how should he prepare himself?

“Elders seek wisdom, pray for it unceasingly, and thus grow in wisdom by God’s gracious provision.”



News from the Churches

Singapore

On 29 October 2016, CERC examined Emmanuel Singh according to Article 9 of the Church Order, which states that

“Preachers without fixed charge, or others who have left some sect, shall not be admitted to the ministry of the church until they have been declared eligible, after careful examination by the classis, with the approval of synod.”

Emmanuel Singh gave a sermon on Acts 13:48. CERC’s Session approved the sermon, with delegates from PRCA concurring as well.

Following this, the ministers took turns to examine Emmanuel Singh on the six loci of Dogmatics: Theology, Anthropology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology and Eschatology.

- Theology : Rev. Andy Lanning
- Anthropology : Rev. Daniel Kleyn
- Christology : Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma
- Soteriology : Rev. Andy Lanning
- Ecclesiology : Rev. Daniel Kleyn
- Eschatology : Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

After lunch, the examination continued, with the ministers taking turns to examine Emmanuel Singh on the following aspects:

- Knowledge of Scripture : Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma
- Knowledge of the Confessions : Rev. Daniel Kleyn
- CERC Distinctives : Rev. Andy Lanning
- Controversy : Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma
- Knowledge of the Church Order : Rev. Daniel Kleyn
- Practica : Rev. Andy Lanning

Session then unanimously approved the examination of Emmanuel Singh, together with the concurrence of Delegates from the PRCA.

Philippines

A delegation of the PRCA’s Contact Committee plans to visit the PRC in the Philippines in December. The purpose of the visit is to continue to work towards a sister church relationship. Lord willing, Professor Dykstra and Rev. Eriks will be on the delegation.



Playing basketball at the CERC Olympics



CERC's 29th Anniversary:
yet another year of God's faithfulness and grace



The children ages 12 and under sang Psalter 403
and Amazing Grace for an anniversary song item



Rev. Lanning administering the sacrament of baptism
to Herman Lim, infant son of Aaron and Iva



Revs. Wilbur Bruinsma and Daniel Kleyn conducting
the examination of Emmanuel Singh



Presentation of classical diploma to Emmanuel

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.

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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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