- Witnessing does not just mean speaking about God and His Word; it means doing what His Word commands, in order to tell others what is the Truth.
  What About The World – Lim Yang Zhi

- That married people divorce freely, and divorced people remarry freely is an outstanding example of the lawlessness that Christ taught which will be a sign of the last things.
  Eschatology Notes (2) – Prof. David Engelsma

- When we are called to defend the truth, it is a defence of the God we love whose name and reputation are at stake.
  The Battle Of the Ages – Prof. Herman Hanko

salt shakers

joel 3:16 matthew 5:16

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Be SALT & LIGHT

Matthew 5:13

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WELCOME TO THE 41ST ISSUE OF SALT SHAKERS!

Dear Readers,

This year we begin the new theme "Dare to Stand", as we also mark the 500th anniversary of the 1517 Reformation. It is with sober reflection that we recognise God preserving His church through the Reformation, and His grace in continuing its true, biblical teachings these last five centuries. Though we see the truths of God denied, attacked and besieged on all sides, we take comfort that the cause is God's alone, and it will never fail!

It has never been easy for God's people to stand for the truth, and 2017 will be no different – it will in fact grow ever harder. The word of God in Isaiah describes this for us very vividly – the church in this world is "left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city" (Isa. 1:8). Increasingly, those who dare to stand for the truth will be alone in the world as a small hut in the midst of a large and overgrown garden of cucumbers.

Why are they alone? They are alone because their walk is offensive to others. No, they do not go out of their way to offend others or stir controversy, but their very way of life is a witness to the truth, and a witness to the ungodly who hate the truth and love the lie. They do not go along with the world in their sinful deeds and relentless pursuit of pleasure. They do not swim along with the current; working on Sundays, use the same foul language, watching the same TV programmes and movies and engaging in the same gossip and backbiting. They are interested not in the fading things of this world, but in spiritual things. They stick out from the crowd! They are unpopular – even hated. They are alone, because the hatred of the world is too much for many to bear. Increasingly, the world squeezes true Christians, putting pressure on them to conform, such that there is less and less space for them to exist. This persecution causes many – family and friends – to depart. It is hard work to be in the hut, constantly working to repair its walls. It is much easier to be a cucumber!

Often, it is so puzzling to the world of why the Christian eschews the smooth life of a cucumber for the lonely, seemingly hopeless hut. Why not be a cucumber, which is after all, the easy, pleasant, and popular thing to do? The Christian's reply is one of hope and certainty. There is an everlasting reward to those who persevere; to those who are saved by the blood of Christ and who live out of thankfulness to him. Christ our King commands, and causes us to stand! Life in the besieged hut is the way of salvation. The broad way of the cucumber, on the other hand, leads to everlasting destruction.

Throughout this year, we will be replacing our usual "Word of the Issue" feature with quotes from and descriptions of notable reformers whom God used in His great work of preserving the Church. Look out for them! As we read these statements and the reformers who made them, let us be encouraged. Though it may seem that we are few in the world, a persecuted remnant – we know we are not alone. We stand in the line of countless true Christians of the Church, who have gone before us, who are in this world, and who will come after us. We dare to stand, not by our own strength, but because God is with us, and will be forever more.
Remember to pass the salt!

Pro Rege,
Lee Yang

LEST WE FORGET

>>Aaron Lim



Aaron Lim is a member of CERC and is the editor of Salt Shakers.

2017 – a special year for Reformed churches the world over. Lest we forget, this year we commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. If anything stands out from the Reformation, it is the reformers' fierce struggle for the truth. They counted God's truth above all. They would readily lose their lives for the sake of the truth. In the words of Guido de Bres, chief author of the Belgic Confession, the persecuted believers would "offer their backs to stripes, their tongues to knives, their mouths to gags, and their whole bodies to fire, rather than deny the truth of God's Word"[1]. We are humbled and grateful to be the children of the Reformation, and to call its glorious heritage our own.

2017 is particularly significant for CERC, because she will celebrate her 30th anniversary. Thirty years ago in 1987, she was organised and instituted as a church. CERC's history mirrors the history of the Reformation, a history marked by painful and bitter struggle for the truth. When she was first organised, CERC was made up of first-generation Christians. They were new believers who had just come to know the Lord. Most of them had come from pagan backgrounds, formerly worshipping idols, ancestors, and were deeply entrenched in superstition. Many suffered persecution on account of their faith. But forsaking their unbelief by the sovereign grace of God, they remained steadfast in the faith, and were organised into an instituted church.

Graciously, the Lord has preserved CERC through numerous trials. Today, CERC is growing spiritually with a group of second-generation believers. Many of them were raised in the church and have married, cleaving to those who love and confess the same truths as they do. Besides, God has added many others who were not born in covenant homes to CERC. There is doctrinal strength, and true, spiritual unity that is based upon the truth.

There is good hope for the future in CERC. The third generation arises. Plenty of covenant seed are being added to the church. God is demonstrating His gracious promise to be a God unto His people and to their seed after them. He has not cut us off in our generations. Sovereignly He maintains His covenant of grace with us and our children. He sees to it that His truth is believed, confessed, developed, and maintained in our midst. He uses false doctrines in other churches, in Singapore and elsewhere, to sharpen our understanding of His truth. Always God uses apostasy to increase a love for the truth in His people. He uses the lie in order that His truth is defended, developed, and cherished by faithful believers.

Only ten years ago, lest we forget, CERC still belonged to a denomination of Reformed churches, the Evangelical Reformed Churches in Singapore (ERCS). Ten years ago, the ERCS denomination was dissolved, and the only two member churches – First Evangelical Reformed Church (FERC) and Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church (CERC) – went their separate ways. Several years after the split, CERC reunited and became sisters with the Protestant Reformed Churches in America (PRCA) and their sister church, the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland (CPRC). FERC recently became a sister to the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA), whose distinctive doctrine is that of a conditional covenant[2].

These developments in Singapore are not only ecclesiastical in nature. They

[1] The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches. Grandville: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005, 22.

[2] Acts of the 2015 Synod of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, Baldivis, 2015, 36-7. Taken from http://synod.frca.org.au/2015/acts/Acts_Of_FRCA_2015_Synod.pdf. See also The Covenant of God and the Children of Believers by David Engelsma. Jenison: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2005.

are doctrinal. Although the split ten years ago concerned the doctrine of marriage, differences then have led to differences today over the doctrine of God's covenant, common grace, and the well-meant offer of the gospel. Ten short years was all it took to expose these differences. Through her ecclesiastical contacts, FERC has introduced the doctrines of common grace, the well-meant offer of the gospel, and the conditional covenant into the Reformed churches in Singapore.[3] These are important doctrinal developments that deserve our analysis.

Through the controversy over divorce and remarriage that raged in the ERCS, CERC was led by God to see the glorious and beautiful truth of marriage. Her members now confess the lifelong permanency of marriage, which Scripture incontrovertibly teaches in 1 Cor. 7:39 and Rom. 7:2-3. With humble boldness we reject, repudiate, and condemn the false doctrine of divorce and remarriage, which doctrine permits the "innocent party" of a lawful divorce to remarry. This doctrine not only violates the clear teaching of Scripture, but also makes marriage a conditional relationship, a relationship dependent on the faithfulness of a spouse. If a spouse remains faithful in the marriage, then the marriage bond remains intact. But if a spouse becomes unfaithful and commits adultery, then the "innocent party" may divorce and remarry. This weak view of marriage destroys what God has joined together, and disobeys what He has commanded not to be put asunder (Matt. 19:6). This conditional view of marriage ultimately denies the power and efficacy of God's grace to maintain what He has established.

CERC will not permit divorce and remarriage. God will not allow it.

Unashamedly we confess that marriage is an unconditional relationship of love and friendship. Husband and wife love each other unconditionally in marriage. They cleave to each other for life because God has made them one flesh in marriage (Gen. 2:24). At no time is their marriage conditioned on the faithfulness of either spouse. Where there is sin against each other, even the grievous sin of adultery, there is forgiveness in the cross. In the comforting words of the Reformed Form for the Confirmation of Marriage which repudiates divorce and remarriage, married couples have the "certain assurance" of the grace of God in all their afflictions.[4] They do not, and may not, take it upon themselves to break up their marriage. God's grace gives them the "certain assurance" that He will uphold them in all their trials and afflictions. This is the comfort of the gospel of grace. Believing this comforting gospel, faithful believers are assured that God's grace enables them to assist each other faithfully in "all things that belong to this life and a better". Believing this faithful promise of God, married believers vow "never to forsake" the other, and to live holily in marriage as long as they both shall live.

Behind the marvellous truth of marriage's lifelong permanency stands God's everlasting covenant of grace. God's covenant is His bond of marriage-friendship with His elect people in Jesus Christ. That covenant is described in Scripture in terms of a marriage (Jer. 3, Ezek. 16, Eph. 5:22-33). Jehovah is married to His beloved Bride, the Church. Faithfully, He maintains His marriage to her, even though His wife sins against Him so grievously, and ever so often. He remains married to her, for theirs is an unconditional relationship of love and friendship.

CERC believes, confesses, and preaches the unconditional character of God's covenant. That God's covenant is unconditional means that it is not dependent on man's will for its origin, establishment, or maintenance. God is absolutely sovereign in establishing and maintaining His covenant. By His sovereign decree of election He chose a people for Himself, bringing them into His covenant in time and in history by the preaching of the gospel. He maintains His covenant with them sovereignly, and perfects it in the new heavens and earth, where His people will dwell with Him in perfect bliss. Never is God dependent on the will of sinful man for the establishment or maintenance of His covenant. The covenant is His.

Today, after ten short years, the evil root behind the false doctrine of divorce and remarriage is exposed. What the last ten years proved beyond any doubt is this: the doctrine of marriage is inseparable from the doctrine of God's covenant. Touch the doctrine of marriage, and the doctrine of the covenant will necessarily be affected. So close, so intimate is the relationship between the earthly and the heavenly marriage, that to spoil or to exalt the one would impact the other. If marriage is conditional, so is God's covenant. If marriage depends

[3] See the speech "What is the Grace of God" by Maurice Roberts (http://ferc.org.sg/OtherRecordings.aspx). For Wes Brendenhof's conditional covenant theology, see "I Will Be Your God" – An Easy Introduction to the Covenant of Grace" by Wes Brendenhof (Inter League Publication Board, 2015).

[4] The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches, 306-10.

on the faithfulness of a spouse, so does the covenant depend on the faithfulness of man. Conversely, if marriage is unconditional, so is God's covenant. If marriage does not depend on the faithfulness of a spouse, neither does God's covenant depend on the faithfulness of His people.

Today, those who stood for the truth in the controversy are vindicated. History has vindicated them. History is making it clear that the split ten years ago was a divide between the truth and the lie. History is making it clear that God's blessings abide with those who are faithful to His truth, and that those who reject His truth further apostatize from the faith through false doctrines and heresies.

Ten years have passed, and many of the younger generation in CERC do not know the bitter struggle for the truth only ten years ago. Lest we forget our history, it is imperative that the church continues to instruct the younger generation what happened ten years ago. Lest our children forget their parents' and grandparents' bitter struggle for the truth, we must teach our covenant seed to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to their forefathers. To those who find themselves in churches where false doctrines have made inroads, search the scriptures! Return to the old paths; remember your first love! The Lord will confess those who overcome, and clothe them in white garments (Rev. 3:5).

The church of Jesus Christ is always a militant church, so long as she is in the midst of this world. Like the reformers of old who counted all things but loss for the sake of the truth, it is our high calling to teach our children to battle for the truth in these last days. The words of Rev. Herman Hoeksema, who warned those who would shy away from controversy in the battle for the truth, is fitting: "Let those who are shy of controversy remember that in this world it is impossible to maintain the truth unless one is ready to defend it against the gainsayers".[5]

[5] Hoeksema, Herman. God's Goodness Always Particular. 2nd Ed. Jenison: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2015. EPub Edition.

SCRIPTURE'S COVENANT YOUTH (IV)
JOSPEH: A FAITHFUL YOUNG MAN IN A FOREIGN LAND

>>Prof. Herman Hanko



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Joseph was the oldest son of Rachel, Jacob's favourite wife. Rachel was not Jacob's first wife, for God had given Jacob Leah. God used a trick of Laban to give him Leah, for Leah loved the Lord, while Rachel did not; Leah was the covenant mother; Rachel brought idols into Jacob's family (Gen. 31:27-35). Rachel was the symbol of Jacob's carnal love; Leah was in the line of Christ as a mother in Israel.

Because Joseph was Rachel's firstborn, Jacob loved Joseph more than any of his other sons: he spoiled Joseph by giving Joseph a coat of many colors. Nor did Joseph have to work with his brothers in tending the flocks: Jacob kept him home (Gen. 37:3-4).

Joseph even curried his father's love, for he reported to his father all the wicked deeds his brothers did (Gen. 37:2). Further, God gave Joseph two dreams; in one of which Joseph saw all the sheaves of the wheat field bowing down to his sheaf, and in another, all the sun, moon and 11 stars bow down to him. We can easily imagine that it was foolish of Joseph to tell his brothers, and even Jacob was angry with him for telling him these dreams (Gen. 37:10). The trouble was that the dreams were prophecies of an event in their lives when Joseph's whole family did bow down to him.

In their fury, the brothers sold Joseph as a slave to a passing band of Ishmaelites

when Joseph came to learn their welfare, and they lied to their father by soaking his coat in the blood of a lamb that they killed; they told Jacob that a wild beast had devoured him.

It was in Egypt where Joseph was sold that his life showed the depths of his love for God and his desire to be faithful to God. The intensity and strength of his determination to be faithful to God is underscored by the fact that to be sold as a slave in an unknown land would make most, if not all, of us despair and simply go along with the customs of a heathen land where God was not known.

The first incident Scripture records for our profit was Joseph's repeated refusal to commit fornication with his boss' wife, even though she did everything in her power to entice him. If we were torn from our family, sold as a slave in a foreign land, tempted by a beautiful woman to commit adultery, would we, could we, resist? And, do not forget: Joseph was only 17 years old, a youth near the peak of his powers. A youth without any hope of seeing his family again. A youth whom, it seemed, God had cut off from covenant lines.

The second temptation to abandon his faith came when, at the lie of her who had tempted him, he was put in prison.

"It was in Egypt where Joseph was sold that his life showed the depths of his love for God and his desire to be faithful to God."

I do not know how Joseph kept from thinking God had abandoned him: it is, of course, only the grace of God that can prevail in one's life in such circumstances.

But Joseph remained faithful to his God. In spite of daily temptations in Potiphar's house, he worked for the benefit of his master with diligence so that God blessed Potiphar's house for Joseph's sake. And in prison, rather than crawling into the corner of his cell and shutting out any memories of his home and of God's promises to Jacob and his family, he was so hard working and so pleasant that he finally became an assistant to the jailer. Joseph was determined to serve God through obedience to his masters no matter what the circumstances of his life were. He served God while wondering how God could do these things – piling grief upon grief on his head.

The only explanation I can think of is that he believed in all his trials and sufferings what he later said to his brothers: "Ye thought evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Gen. 50:16-21). And God, by his grace, preserved him through all these trials when life seemed hopeless.

That, covenant youth, is an example of godliness and faithful service of Jehovah which shines before our eyes as a biblical illustration of our calling and of what we must and can do by the power of grace.

And so, we must conclude with what Scripture wants us to learn from all this is:

-Our calling is, like the calling that Joseph obeyed, to serve God faithfully no matter what the circumstances of life may be, even when all seems to be

"...only the grace of God that can prevail in one's life in such circumstances."

wrong and we do not understand the ways of our God.

--God's grace is so powerful in our lives that we can serve Him in life's darkest hours and under the most difficult circumstances.

--No matter how difficult our life may be and no matter what calamities befall us, God is working His purpose and seeking our good and our everlasting salvation.
--When it seems impossible that God works for our good, we must trust explicitly in Him and wait on Him for His favour to be restored. (Read Psalm 27 and especially the last verse. Read it slowly, word by word, and think of each word as you do so.)

There are those who want to make Joseph a type of Christ. They point to his being sold for thirty pieces of money; they find Christ's humiliation in Joseph's years in prison. They find Christ's exaltation when He was raised to be second in the kingdom under Pharaoh.

However, I do not think this is true. Scripture nowhere makes Joseph a type of Christ, and I am hesitant to do what Scripture refrains from doing. But Joseph is an example of the power of grace in our live to preserve us in God's ways.

SINGING THE CANONICAL PSALMS (II)

>>Rev. Angus Stewart



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

In the last article, we considered the uniqueness of the Psalms, as the only canonical book that God has given to His beloved church for her singing, before looking at many passages that describe their use in the Old Testament. In this instalment, we shall build on this foundation by looking at Christ's use of the Psalms, the Psalms in the Greek Septuagint and the three key nouns in a couple of important New Testament texts (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16).

Their Use by Christ in His Earthly Ministry

It is practically universally acknowledged that the Jews of Christ's day sang the Psalms. The canonical Psalms were sung at the temple, on the way up to Jerusalem for the pilgrim feasts, in the home and elsewhere.

Moreover, just about everybody agrees that the Jews sang the Hallel (Hallelujah or "Praise the Lord") Psalms at the Passover (Ps. 113-118). After His last Passover and the first Lord's Supper, we read of Jesus and the eleven disciples singing these inspired songs: "And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives" (Matt. 26:30; Mark 14:26).

The Holy Spirit is here telling us something very significant at this critical juncture in Christ's life. He is soon to be betrayed and crucified for all the sins of all God's elect. He has just instituted the Lord's Supper, a New Testament sacrament, in place of the Old Testament Passover. This was the scene at which He uttered these great words: "For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matt. 26:28; Mk. 14:24; Lk. 22:20). Then, Christ, the Head of the church, and the eleven disciples, the leaders of the New Testament church, sang the Hallel Psalms.

Thus the Passover passes away as merely an Old Testament observance (cf. 1 Cor. 5:7) but Psalm singing passes over into the new dispensation. Canonical Psalm singing is here united with the Lord's Supper, which is to continue until Jesus Christ comes again in great glory on the clouds of heaven with His holy angels (1 Cor. 11:26).

The Septuagint

Some time after the completion of the book of Psalms and the inspiration of all the other books of the Old Testament canon, the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek. Why was that? The answer is that many Jews were scattered outside their ancient homeland, especially throughout the eastern Mediterranean. At that time, many people in the Roman Empire spoke Greek, including the Jews. Over the years, the Jews or, at least, many of them had lost the facility of reading and listening to Hebrew. So a Greek translation of the Old Testament, as we now call it, was produced about 200 BC. This version, the Septuagint, was used in the synagogues of the Jews. Most Jews and proselytes who possessed copies of the Bible had this Greek translation. It was used for memorization and teaching. In short, the Greek Septuagint was the Bible of the church of that day.

So what about the Septuagint translation of the the Psalms? The *Sepher Tehillim* (book of praises) in Hebrew became the *Psalmoi* in Greek, which is known in English as the Psalms or the Psalter. The Greek Psalm titles themselves contain three words—and only three words—to refer to these

"Thus the Passover passes away as merely an Old Testament observance (cf. 1 Cor. 5:7) but Psalm singing passes over into the new dispensation."

"The canonical Psalms were sung at the temple, on the way up to Jerusalem for the pilgrim feasts, in the home and elsewhere."

Psalms as material to be sung: *psalmos* (psalm), *hymnous* (hymn) and *oodee* (song).

What happened when the gospel spread from Jerusalem to Judah, Samaria and beyond? The apostles, as we read in the book of Acts, went first to the synagogue. God called His elect people from their midst. These believing Jews and proselytes became the nucleus of the New Testament church, with others joining them. The Bible of these fledgling churches was the Septuagint.

The Three Key Nouns in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16

Let us now look at two key texts in this debate: Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16.

Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord (Eph. 5:19).

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord (Col. 3:16).

The question is, What is meant by the three nouns: "psalms," "hymns" and "songs"? Even more basic is this query, How are we going to determine what is meant by "psalms," "hymns" and "songs"? Do we come with our own preconceived view of what these words mean in the twenty-first century evangelical scene or do we let the historical and scriptural context determine what the apostle Paul meant, and what the Ephesians and the Colossians would have understood these terms to mean?

First, let us look at the word *psalmos* or psalm. Almost everybody, including singers of uninspired hymns, admits that the biblical Psalms are meant. *Psalmoi* or Psalms is the title of the longest canonical book in the Greek Septuagint and our English Bibles. *Psalmos* is also found in 67 of the Psalm titles and 11 times in the Psalms themselves in the Septuagint, as well as appearing frequently in the book of Psalms in our English Bibles. This is clear and simple.

Second, to what do the *hymnoi* or "hymns" refer in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16? In the last article, we looked at the Hallel Psalms which Christ and his eleven disciples sang after the Lord's Supper, and we saw that the inspired Psalms 113-118 were called "hymns" (Matt. 26:30; Mark 14:26). In Hebrews 2:12, Jesus Christ says, "I will declare thy [i.e., God's] name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee" or "will I *hymn* unto thee," with the verb in this last clause being a form of *hymnos*. Moreover, this "hymn" is a quotation from Psalm 22:22.

"...What is meant by the three nouns: "psalms," "hymns" and "songs"?"

In the Septuagint translation, the word *hymnos* (hymn) is found in 6 Psalm titles and 7 times in the Psalms themselves. In 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Chronicles and Nehemiah in this Greek version, there are some 16 places in which a Psalm is called *hymnos* (hymn) or *oodee* (song) and its singing is a "hymning" (from hymnos). A Jew called Philo (d.c. AD 40-50) in Egypt frequently designates a psalm as *hymnos*. It is, in fact, his usual word to refer to the canonical Psalms. You and I in our age and culture would call them Psalms, but Philo in his world and in his day typically called them hymns. Likewise, Josephus, a Jew who lived in the last two-thirds of the first century AD repeatedly called a psalm a *hymnos* or hymn.

Third, we conclude with *oodee* or song used, for example, in the title of Psalm 45: "A Song of loves." The word *oodee* or song is found in 36 of the Psalm titles in the Septuagint and 9 times in the Psalms themselves.

More remains to be said about Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19, including their application, but this must await our next article.

DARE TO STAND: SALT AND LIGHT

>>Noelene Wong



Noelene Wong is a confessing young adult in CERC.

Matthew 5:13-16

"Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.

Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

The text in Matthew 5:13-16 is a common one. We have all heard and know that we are the salt of the earth and light of the world. We are so because we are Christians. Christians are spiritually distinct from the rest of world, like salt is to blandness, and light in darkness. This distinction is glaringly clear and evident: no one can miss it upon sight. But what does it actually mean to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world? Let us meditate upon these for a moment humbly and prayerfully.

Whom Jesus is addressing

In the text, the possessive pronouns, "ye" and "your" are used. The word usage indicates an address to those mentioned in verse 3 to 9 of the chapter. "Ye" and "you" refer to those who are "poor in spirit", "mourn" over their sins in godly sorrow, "meek", "hunger and thirst after righteousness", "merciful", "pure in heart", "peacemakers". These characteristics describe a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. These characterise God's disciples, you and me. God is telling us in this text, "ye are the salt of the earth" and "ye are the light of the world". This is our identity in this world. God does not tell us to go become something which we were not, but that we are salt and light. Our identity is already fixed. So what does it mean to be the salt of the earth and light of the world?

Identity as salt of the earth

Firstly, we are illustrated as "salt of the earth". The reference to salt here is not salt in its preserving function. It does not mean that we as salt ought to preserve the earth and hinder the world's corruption, making it a better place. We know that the kingdom of God is a heavenly kingdom and we do not seek to revive or redeem the corrupt world that Jesus will destroy when He comes again. That is not our calling from God and what the text here means. The reference to the function of salt in this verse is salt that is used for seasoning, salt that is savoury and intensifies the flavours of a dish which bring delight to the palette. We are this delight in the earth. To whom? To God. God takes delight in the earth because of us. The Lord takes pleasure in the activities of the earth such as economics, conflicts and globalisation because God's people are in the earth. God's people are what makes the earth delightful to the Lord. That is because through God's people, all the activities of the earth have meaning and value, for they serve God's glory. He delights when the vegetables grow for they are used to feed His people, giving energy and health to them to serve Him. He is glad when there is development in technology and the internet such that He may gather His people from various walks of life. The opposite is true too that when the end times come to pass and all His children have been gathered, the earth will be destroyed for there is no use for it anymore and He will bring all of His people to live with Him in heaven. He will not keep a sinful creation in vain like the world in Noah's days or the city of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Identity as light of the world

The second picture used to describe our identity is "light of the world". Jesus uses the picture in verse 14 to illustrate what that means. "A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid." As we imagine a night scene, looking down from the airplane as it is nearing a city, all the city lights will be lit and seen, juxtaposed by the darkness of the night. This is a similar picture Jesus uses. The city lights will be seen and not be missed in the night.

The description of the city upon the hill further depicts that the city will be identified. And this is us. We will be seen to be glaringly different in the sinful world. We will be recognised as different. Thus we are the light and we shine.

In verse 15, Jesus uses the illustration of the use of a candle to light up a room. The candle is to be put on a candlestick so that the flame will light up a room and not be left to be hidden under a basket. That is not how a candle is to be used. Similarly, God made us as light in the world to shine.

The meaning of the word "light" here refers to the spiritual life and light over against the wicked and sinful world. It is the comparison of light and darkness as in Ephesians 5:8 – "For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light". Darkness is referred to as the world in its corruption, sin, and vileness. It literally means life without God. Life that displeases God and life that God hates. Whereas light is referred to the exact opposite which is spiritual perfection, virtue and goodness. It means life with and of God. We are characterised as light of the world, the ones with spiritual life and goodness among the world which is sinful and corrupt. Thus, we light up in this wicked world and shine as spiritually distinct, alive and not dead.

How we may be distinctly salt and light

But how may we be savoury as salt and shine as light? What do we have to do? Earlier we looked at Jesus' address to the citizens of the kingdom of heaven as salt and light. Salt and light are our identity. But it is not because of what we are in ourselves, but in Jesus Christ alone. God made us to be salt and light in this world in Jesus Christ. Through Him we are savoury, through Him we are shining. Apart from Him we are bland and dark like the world, distasteful and insignificant to the Lord. Jesus makes us savoury and shining as He has made us a new creation. He changed our heart and now we seek to obey Him. The world is like unsavoury salt to the Lord, displeasing and thrown away by the Lord. The world is darkness, sinful and vile. But in Jesus Christ and in His covering, we are pleasing before the Lord and we use all that we are and own to serve Him. We confess Him and do good works. In Jesus we are salt and retain our savour, and shine. Therefore, we can say that we are distinctly salt and light in Jesus Christ.

But is there then nothing we have to do? No, we have a calling to remain savoury and shine brightly. In our identity as salt and light it means that we are different from the world. The world is not pleasing to God and does everything against God's law. However, as salt and light, we are not like the world.

As salt of the earth, we are called to remain savoury, not to lose the savour. This means to be a continual delight to God on this earth. We use and devote all that we are and possess to the glory of our God. We obey His commandment to love Him and our neighbours. We confess His truths and ways and submit ourselves to Him. The negative is also true that we flee from sin that can spoil our saltiness, making us distasteful to the Lord. The text warns us that if the savoury component of salt is lost it is useless and unprofitable. It will be thrown away for it is worthless. Thus we are called to live as salt, being pleasant in the sight of our God.

As light of the world, we are called to shine. We are to shine wherever we are stationed in this world. In our home, in church, in school, in the workplace, wherever our neighbours are and wherever God leads us to. The calling to shine does not only confine us in the sphere of the spiritual only, in the church and our family, but the whole world, wherever God places us in. We light up in this wicked world and shine as spiritually distinct, lively people.

We shine in the world by a good confession and a godly walk. We confess Christ with our mouths – His power, His grace, His salvation, His truth! Whenever we make a good confession of our Lord, our light shines brightly. We shine also by our life. We show that we are children of light by our lifestyle and actions. We are filled with good works. We are meek, peacemakers, merciful, and more by our actions. When we do so, our light shines brightly for all to see. But one thing to note is that our confession and actions go hand in hand. When we make a good confession that we love God and seek to walk in His ways but our manner of life is as the ungodly, seeking to please our flesh, our light does not shine. Our life has destroyed the good confession. Most of the time we fail in this aspect. It is easy to confess to love God and our neighbours. But when someone sins against us, we immediately bear a grudge against him and do not seek to forgive him in our pride. Or as parents or grandparents when we instruct our children, it is natural to confess that God's path is the way to go but in our living we walk contrary to that. Let us not overlook the fact that our light shines by the way we live too. Let us walk in integrity and sincerity, that our light may shine ever so brightly in this world.

Fruit

In our identity and walking as salt and light, we will be distinguishably different from the world. We do not think, act, or speak the way the world does and others can see that too. Is that a good thing though? Should we try to fit in as much as possible?

No, it is good and necessary that we remain savoury and shine. We dare to stand as different in the world, and to stand out. Not because we are motivated to be different from others to serve our pride. But that others may glorify God in heaven too. This is sobering. Through our conversation of life, so God will be glorified. God is pleased to use us to bring His people to Himself and glorify Himself! In our natural state of sin, men do not glorify God. Instead, men blaspheme and ridicule God. However, here we see that men's cursing of God can be turned to blessing when others see our good works. In our devotion to God, in the words we speak and the manner of life we live, God is glorified and God can use us to gather His people. That is a privilege, and that is a calling too. God's glory is at stake here, so we must be savoury as salt and shine as light. God forgive us when we fail, and may God help us in this high calling. To Him be all honour, praise and glory.

WHAT ABOUT THE WORLD?

>>Lim Yang Zhi



Lim Yang Zhi is a confessing young adult in CERC.

We return once again to friends. Last time, we considered where to look for our friends and settled that the church, the congregation, is the place to find true friends.

Now, however, we must backtrack to the first article. In that first article, when we said that believers are our true friends, we said also that unbelievers can never be our true friends.

If that is true, this question comes: how should we interact with unbelievers?

If they are not our friends, do we treat them in a friendly manner? May we talk to them casually? Eat with them? Play sports with them? Go out with them? How do we answer all these questions?

Scripture gives us the answer. And that answer is a command.

The command of Scripture for our lives with unbelievers is to be a living witness to our unbelieving neighbours.

What does a witness do?

A witness, having known and seen that something is true, tells others what is true.

As witnesses, we know what is true from the Bible, and, so, tell others what the Bible says. We tell others who God is. We tell others what God requires of us: love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength; and to love our neighbour as ourselves. We tell others how we are able to follow God's requirement: Jesus Christ covering our sins from God's sight and cleansing us from our corrupt natures so that we have a new beginning of obedience.

Christ Himself calls us to be witnesses in Matthew 5:14-16. In that passage, Christ calls us witnesses the light of the world. Christ calls us the light; but He does not mean that we have any light in ourselves. Rather, the light we have comes from God's Word, because that Word is a lamp unto our feet—yes, a light unto our path (Ps. 119:105). Therefore, when we tell others what God's Word says, we are being the light of the world.

As witnesses, we know and are sure what God writes in the Scripture is true. Therefore, we tell others what the Scripture says.

What we have said so far, however, does not fully answer our question of how we are to live with unbelievers. We are to be witnesses to them; but how do we

go about telling others what is true, as the Bible says?

You may think, "Telling means speaking; so I can be a witness by speaking to others about the Word of God". You are right; but you do not have to speak to witness. There is more than one way to tell others what our God says in His Word.

We can tell others what our God says by our personal lives. Take something as simple as praying before your meals among your unbelieving classmates/colleagues. When you pray, you are telling them that God has given you the food on the table. Because He has given you that food, you pray to thank Him for it.

Other actions such as going to church on Sundays, putting in effort in your studies, not swearing or cursing, not listening to ungodly music, and not spending hours upon hours playing video games tell them what God says is important (worship of Him), what is wrong in His opinion (swearing/cursing, ungodly entertainment), and what He says can become an idol (video games).

There is also the action of coming and preparing for youth group activities on Saturdays. When we make sure that our afternoons are spent among our fellow saints, we are telling our unbelieving neighbours that our greatest delight is in studying God's Word with the church.

There is, for us boys, in the heat of a game of soccer, the action of forgiving an opponent that has committed a foul against us instead of bearing a grudge. When we forgive, we are telling everyone in the game that forgiving others, not holding a grudge, is what God calls us to do wherever we are.

For you girls, when outward appearances are becoming more important to you; but, at the same time, if your unbelieving female peers think that looking beautiful means showing more flesh through skimpy skirts/dresses and bare-back tops, you make sure you buy dresses and skirts of decent length and tops that cover what ought to be covered. When you do so, you are telling your peers that beauty is not showing off what is on the outside, but a meek and quiet spirit that God thinks highly of (cf. 1 Pet. 3:4).

The point is very simple: We witness by what we do in our lives.

But also, this too: we can tell others what our God says by our response to their lives.

Much of what our unbelieving neighbours do are forbidden by the Word of God. To go back to our examples above, holding grudges and dressing immodestly are rather common in the callings God has placed us in. And I am sure you can think of more things that are a "no-go" in God's eyes.

Our only response to those things must be a firm "NO." But how do we tell our unbelieving neighbours this firm "No"?

There is always a verbal response—"This is wrong. I cannot accept this". But we can also respond in other ways. A frown of frustration when you hear cursing and swearing; leaving the group when gossip starts; remaining silent when others laugh at dirty jokes and scandals—these are some ways to respond to ungodly behaviour.

We are lights in this world, witnesses to our unbelieving classmates and colleagues. Witnessing does not just mean speaking about God and His Word; it means doing what His Word commands, in order to tell others what is the Truth. The question about your witness is: "Do my actions tell my unbelieving classmates (or colleagues) what God's Word says?"

To witness by our lives and by our response to ungodliness is not easy. It takes wisdom to know the right way to witness at the moment, especially when it comes to responding to ungodliness. Oftentimes, either we end up giving a neutral response to the sin before us; or we get so used to seeing that sin that we do not even respond the right way. We do not need a lot of effort to remember the last time we have failed to be witnesses.

But this is where we go back to friends—our true friends in the church.

Think: if you struggle to be a witness of your faith, your friends that share that same faith with you would have their fair share of struggles. They would know your struggles, and they would know what encouragement God's Word has for us. They would point you to that Word and strengthen you to be the witness God calls us to be.

Yes, to spend our time and strength in the church is, in itself, a witness to unbelievers. But also, you will only find strength to be a witness when you forge your ties with the church. In the church, among believers, you will find encouragement and exhortation to be a witness in this world.

That shows how important and valuable true friendships are. But, more on that next time, DV.

ANOTHER YEAR

>>Marcus Wee



Marcus Wee is a confessing young adult in CERC.

Introduction

"Why weren't you at CK/CKS (CERC's youth group meeting) yesterday?" Does this question sound familiar? Have you asked this question before? Been on the receiving end of it? Or, has asking (or being asked) this question become a thing of the past, especially when it has become a norm for a fellow youth (or for yourself) not to attend CK/CKS, such that a surprised 'What brings you to CK/CKS today?' becomes the more appropriate question to ask?

Asking and receiving such a question is important, for it expresses a care for each other's spiritual well-being, and provides us with a measure of accountability to each other. It is part of the admonition to "look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Phi. 2:4). We are concerned that our fellow youth is unable to make time to attend CK/CKS, which we recognise is of tremendous spiritual benefit for us, and genuinely want to find out why he or she is unable to do so. We hope to provide a listening ear if necessary, and cannot wait to share what we learnt the day before about the exciting truths of God's Word.

If you are a CK/CKS youth, I especially ask that you read through this article to the end, so that we may briefly recap the activities of the past year, be reminded of the purpose of CK/CKS, and do a little reflection together.

A Recap

For the benefit of all, Covenant Keepers / Covenant Keepers Senior (CK/CKS) is the youth group of CERC, with youths aged 13-16 for CK, and aged 17 and above for CKS. We meet an average of three times on various Saturdays in a month, typically for a workshop, Bible Study, and outing.

Workshops: In the past year, for workshops, we finished up the series on the seven churches of Revelation, and are currently continuing our series on church history. We covered the history of the PRCA and CERC. It was extremely exciting to learn this recent church history, and the speakers did a fantastic job making it come to life, allowing us to relive past days which happened before we were born, or went by as we lived in oblivion. We were given a glimpse into the struggles of the church in her defence of the truth. Above all, it was a timely reminder of the providence of God in preserving His church through the many controversies which threatened to wreck and swallow her up. It was amazing to learn of how, at many crucial junctures, God used the power of a single vote to preserve His truth in His church.

Bible Study: We also continued our Bible study in the book of Genesis. We learnt about the wickedness of man in the pre-diluvian period and the tiny remnant of the seed of the woman. We learnt about the prophetic significance of Methuselah's name given to him by his father Enoch. We learnt about the swift and violent judgment of the flood, and how eight souls were saved by water. We learnt about God's covenant made with Noah and the creation, and His promise of salvation. Once again, we were richly blessed to be able to delve into the riches of God's Word in Genesis, which sets the stage for the great drama of sin and salvation through the seed of the woman.

Outings: We also had many fun outings, including cycling, a tree top walk, a session of kickball, and an excursion to Trampoline Park! Above all, it was the opportunity to spend much time in fellowship with one another which proved the main highlight, at least for me.

"If you are a CK/CKS youth, I especially ask that you read through this article to the end..."

Why did we come for these activities? Or, perhaps a better question: why should we, as CK/CKS youths, come for our youth group activities (whether we have been coming or not)? Let us explore that next.

A Reminder

Origin and Purpose of CK/CKS: CK/CKS is part of the organic life of the church, as all societies are. It is not something commanded by God for the church to have, but is something voluntarily created and maintained by all the youth of the church – and not merely by a single committee. It is created and maintained as a response to the preaching, as we grow in our knowledge and love for God's Word, and also in our love for our fellow saints. As the chief means of grace, the preaching works in our hearts an ever greater zeal for God's Word, such that we cannot rest content hearing it only twice on Sunday – we simply must study it personally during the week, and also look forward to meeting up with our fellow saints to study God's Word together. The preaching also works in our hearts an abounding love for our fellow saints – we want to spend more time in their company than those brief hours on Sunday would allow us. We want to discuss God's Word together not merely for self-benefit, but also for the benefit of our brothers and sisters in Christ, that we may provoke one another unto love and good works.

"It (CK) is created and maintained as a response to the preaching, as we grow in our knowledge and love for God's Word."

Thus, CK/CKS is formed and maintained, as it allows us to do just that. Bible Studies, workshops, and even exhortations during outings are opportunities to hear God's Word taught by a speaker, and also to ask and answer each other's questions. Sharing with each other the time spent with one another discussing God's Word, and playing sports allows us to know each other personally, form and develop lasting friendships. As we grow in our love for the truth, we cannot help but grow in our unity which is founded upon the truth we love.

Importance of CK/CKS: Studying God's Word together and enjoying blessed fellowship amongst fellow saints – these make CK/CKS so important and dear to us. But perhaps a factor that underscores its importance, and highlights the urgency for us as youth to be active members of CK/CKS, is that we have precious little time outside of Sunday to study God's Word together and to fellowship. Many of us do not get to see each other much at all – during the weekdays, we are busy with school, homework, and CCAs. Many (though not all) of our classmates in school are unbelieving, or 'Christians' who put Christ's name to shame. We receive so much ungodly influence and teaching from the public school throughout the week. CK/CKS then becomes something of a relief, something to look forward to when the weekend comes. It is a spiritual oasis in the desert of the world and we come to find rest in God's Word and sweet communion amongst fellow saints. It is a huge blessing for a church to have such a youth group. Do you view your youth group with such importance?

"... we have precious little time outside of Sunday to study God's Word together and to fellowship."

A Reflection

Now is the time for a little reflection. Where have we found ourselves over most of the Saturdays in the past year? Were we at CK/CKS meetings, whenever they were held, or were we elsewhere? Can you identify with the activities listed out in the 'Recap' section, because you attended most of them? At the beginning of a new year's worth of CK/CKS activities, it is a good time for us to pause and reflect. We shall revert to the singular person as each of us undertakes this reflection. Looking Back: Do I place CK/CKS as a priority to attend? If I do, is this reflected in my regular CK/CKS attendance? If I claim that CK/CKS is a priority for me, yet I do not find myself attending activities often, am I not acting according to my priorities?

Perhaps it could be worthwhile to examine some activities which take away my CK/CKS attendance: (i) Busy with school work/CCAs. (ii) Work during my school holidays. (iii) Fill in your own reason. When I am actually free from all these, do I then find myself attending CK/CKS regularly? If I still find myself not attending CK/CKS regularly, are any of the listed reasons really the root reason for me not attending CK/CKS, or are they just excuses that I use to justify myself

"... Do I place CK/CKS as a priority to attend? If I do, is this reflected in my regular CK/CKS attendance?"

to others? (Note: this exercise is for us to reflect, nor to justify our non-attendance to others.) If they are just excuses, what then is the root reason?

Even if I do not attend only due to those listed reasons, are they really reasons for which I ought not to attend CK/CKS? Am I prioritising spiritual things if I choose to focus on those at the expense of CK/CKS attendance?

Perhaps I do not place CK/CKS as a priority to attend anymore. If so, why do I not? Perhaps I recognize that CK/CKS is spiritually beneficial, yet other factors have made me not want to prioritise CK/CKS attendance: (1) I have no friends in the church. (2) My friends do not attend CK/CKS. (3) The activities are boring.

Regarding (1): Am I simply resigned to having no friends, or do I view continued CK/CKS attendance as a means of making friends? Do I have an entitled mentality that others have to always approach me? Or, do I also seek to reach out to others, to put in effort and build friendships? Am I willing to try again to make friends even if I have not succeeded in the past?

Regarding (2): Do I view CK/CKS as important enough for me to encourage my friends to attend it when they may not feel like doing so? Should my CK/CKS attendance really be dependent on whether my friend attends, especially if my friend may not seem very spiritually interested? By my actions, am I positively influencing my friends to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, or am I being influenced away from that?

Regarding (3): Do I make the effort to inform the committee of this, as a youth who is interested in and feels responsible for my youth group, or do I not really care anyway? Do I make the effort to prepare for activities and participate in discussions or do I merely sit back and let others make things work?

Looking Ahead: How can I work on being more spiritually minded in the year ahead? I recognise that I must be always growing spiritually, continually sinking my roots into Christ and being built up in Him (Col. 2:7). I also recognize that CK/CKS is a tremendous blessing and a means to help me grow spiritually. It provides me with an opportunity to learn God's Word and to fellowship with my brothers and sisters in Christ, which I have precious little time to do throughout the week. I want to make CK/CKS a priority for myself to attend! I am not going to wait and see whether I happen to be free on that Saturday before deciding whether to attend – I am going to make it a point to attend as many CK/CKS activities as I can, and even be willing to cancel other appointments which clash with them.

"Looking Ahead: How can I work on being more spiritually minded in the year ahead?"

I recognize that it is by God's grace alone that I am able to seek things that are spiritual, while my sinful flesh always craves the opposite and comes up with excuses to justify itself. Despite my new resolve to grow spiritually, and to seek CK/CKS attendance as a means to this end, I also recognize that I can easily fail and quickly lose my resolve. I must then constantly look to God for grace, for He alone can sustain me and grant me the required strength.

Conclusion

"Why weren't you at CK/CKS yesterday?" Our motivation for coming to our youth group must not be merely to avoid being asked this question. What then is our motivation? A love for God's Word, a desire to grow in it, and a love for our fellow saints. Oh, how we long to see one another, and to gather together to study God's Word! The next CK/CKS activity cannot come soon enough.

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THE BATTLE OF THE AGES: TRUTH VS LIE

>>Prof. Herman Hanko



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The battle of the ages is another way to describe the antithesis. The antithesis, as I explained in a series of articles (now in pamphlet form) means the opposite ways that regenerated and saved Christians, who are children of God's covenant, live holy lives in the wicked world in which God has placed them. It is the great battle that began in Paradise and will not be finished till Christ comes again.

The battle of the ages is a battle because the wicked world is under General Satan and has billions of demons on its side as well as all wicked men. Their purpose is to make God's earthly creation their own country and push God out of it. God's covenant people, however, have Christ as the Captain of their salvation. They are called to fight the enemy by representing God's cause in the world. They invade enemy territory and make soldiers warriors in the armies of Christ of those who are born and enlisted in the devil's army. While the enemy uses everything in God's world to sin, Christ's soldiers use everything to fight the enemy: computers, refrigerators, medicine, hand phones, automobiles – everything.

Yet all these battles are skirmishes: the main battle is the battle over truth versus the lie. This phase of the battle is the subject of this article. I shall say a number of things about that battle.

God Himself told Adam that his wife and all God's chosen soldiers who would be born would have to fight a battle: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman and thy seed and her seed"… (Gen. 3:15). In that battle the forces of Christ would often be wounded, but wonder of wonders, the head of Satan and his forces are smashed: their head is crushed (Col. 2:15).

The soldiers of Christ fight a battle that is already won for them by their Captain. It is like two armies in the world who fight a decisive battle (as was Gettysburg in our own Civil War), and win that war so that the enemy are defeated, although the battle goes on a while longer. All we Christians have to do is "mop up" small pockets of resistance and secure the territory of this creation. John says that faith is the victory that overcomes the world: faith in Christ (1 Jn. 5:4). Paul writes that we are, even while in the world, "more than conquerors through Christ" (Rom. 8:37).

Think of that, young people! We are conquerors; that is certain. Faith is our victory. But we are "more than conquerors!" How can that be? It is a wonder so great that it catches our breath. The Captain of our Salvation, our Christ, is so highly exalted that He sits in the headquarters of the enemy and directs them all – not to help the enemy but to help His people win! This great battle of the ages is not a battle that can be won or lost. Christ, the Captain of our salvation went into the very headquarters of the commander-in-chief of the world and fought him and crushed his head.

They do not know it; they are quick to deny it. But the joke is on them. Read Psalm 2. They rage against God and foam at their mouths in their fury. They are determined to break the yoke of God and Christ. But He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh. I can hear that laugh of God in the rolling thunder of a severe storm. Why does God laugh? Because God has set His Son on the holy hill of Zion, where He reigns supreme. Everything the enemy does helps Christ and helps His church.

The battle is not with planes and guns, battleships and tanks, bombs and bullets. You must stop at this point and read something Paul writes in Ephesians 6:10-17. Our warfare is spiritual and our armour and weapons are spiritual. If you read carefully the description of these pieces of armour and the sword we wield, you will notice that every one of the items Paul mentions refers to a particular use of the Word of God.

We must be sure of this, for many Christians deny this. In our own country many advocate defeating the enemies of liberalism, for example, by creating a Christian political party and voting for a Christian candidate. A noted theologian even advised Christians, if the liberals win control of the country, to retreat to the Rocky Mountains and fight a guerrilla war with guns and bombs.

The decisive battle is the battle between the truth and the lie. The battle is decisive because the enemy attacks the truth constantly. And if Christ's soldiers would lose the truth, the whole battle would be lost, for Christ's soldiers are put in the world to represent God's cause and God's cause is the truth concerning God Himself.

The devil does this in many ways. Usually he works within the church itself by finding those who are not Christ's soldiers, but are spies who do not serve Christ, but serve themselves. They begin their heresy in subtle ways. They sometimes attack the Bible itself, because it is the only source of the truth. They claim that in whole or in part the Bible is not really the word of God, but it is also, at least partly, the word of man.

Sometimes they create a spirit of indifference to the truth and say that doctrinal differences are not important: the one important virtue is sincerity in confessing that one believes in Jesus as his personal Saviour. (But who can judge sincerity in another?) Sometimes people claim that they are only trying to express the truth in different and more effective and modern ways. And in this way they introduce heresy into the church. Sometimes people claim that doctrine is not important; we must have more emphasis on how we are to live. (But to live in godliness is to know and understand the truth.) They say that God is love; that, therefore, He loves all men; and therefore Christ died for all men.

When Christ's soldiers defend the faith, they are often accused of being narrow-minded, bigoted, proud, falsely claiming that they think they are the only ones who are going to heaven and that they are the only ones who understand the Bible. These accusations hurt and sometimes frighten us to the extent that we are very quiet about our faith and, as Jesus put it, hide our light of the truth under a bushel. But then we are not fighting, but letting the enemy have his way.

The battle for the truth is not an intellectual battle only. It is profoundly spiritual. God has taken those who are soldiers of the cross into His own covenant fellowship in Christ Jesus. A bond of love exists between God and His people. When we are called to defend the truth, it is a defence of the God we love whose name and reputation are at stake. We are, so to speak, defending our spiritual family and particularly our Father.

If we would overhear a trio of people mocking and speaking evil about our earthly father, we would not let that rest, but would tell those slanderers to stop; we would even fight if they continued. Wouldn't we do much more for our heavenly Father, who loves us and has saved us from hell? Any heresy is a slander of our God, for the Bible is a record of our Father's revelation in Jesus Christ.

I knew an aged man once who was in a large hospital ward on the Lord's Day had to endure a TV program in which there was swearing and laughing over things spiritual. He told the other patients, "Will you please turn off the TV? That is the God whom I love who is being mocked. They only laughed at him. The result was that laboriously and with pain he crawled out of bed, crawled on his hands and knees to the TV, turned it off and returned to his bed, barely able to crawl back in. None of them dared to turn it back on.

I have seen denominations become apostate churches. It happens this way very often. Some heretic begins to teach heresy of some sort. He is challenged by some in the church. But he and those in agreement with him beg the church to let them have their opinion and tolerate it because they are only exploring implications of the truth. The church tolerates these heresies, fails to put them out of the church, allows them to continue to teach wrong doctrine and soon loses the battle altogether.

I have seen true churches join with churches that do not hold to the truth in various endeavours, such as the war against abortion. Joining others is to allow soldiers of the enemy into the camp. The reason for the battle may be ever so good, but association with others who hold not the truth brings the errors of others into the church.

When Jehoshaphat joined Ahab against the Syrians to save Israel from foreign domination, Jehoshaphat may have justified his alliance with Ahab on the grounds that Syria was also an enemy of Judah; that there were believers yet in the Northern Kingdom, and that by cooperating in this venture the result could be a union of the ten tribes with the Southern Kingdom.

But the prophet Jehu told Jehoshaphat: "Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? therefore is wrath upon thee before the Lord" (2 Chron. 19:2). I can mention in passing that Jehu is saying that the northern kingdom hates the Lord – even though there were still people of God in the nation.

The words of God to Israel through Moses before the Israelites conquered Canaan are true for us: "Israel shall dwell in safety alone" (Deut. 33:28).

The heathen nations that attacked Israel almost constantly were attacks against the Old Testament church to destroy the one nation that belonged to God and carried Christ in her. When they joined with enemies and idol worshippers they were overcome by the enemy – as in the days of the judges and kings. They were safe as long as they worshipped God in the way that He commanded.

God's truth that has to be defended is the glorious truth of the absolute sovereignty of God in all things – in history, in the world including the wicked, in providence, in the whole creation of heaven and earth, and in the salvation of the church. He is sovereign because God does all things for the glory and praise of His own name. Read Romans 11:33-36.

To defend the truth is a grand and glorious calling. It is the highest calling one can have. It is, after all, the salvation of the church. Who, a part of the church, would not want to fight for that?

It is a long and bitter struggle. The devil never gives up. It is a life and death battle. It often seems as if the enemy has won, for the church is small: a hut in a garden of cucumbers, a besieged city, a very small remnant, small groups of huddled sheep surrounded by ravening wolves. But it is victorious in the end when its cause is publicly justified by Christ Himself.

There are many blessings that come to those who defend the truth in this warfare.

The church that proclaims the truth is the church God uses to gather other members of the church: the children of believers born in the church (who swear a vow at baptism that they will bring up their children in the true doctrines of Scripture), the remnant among those who have forsaken the truth, and the elect among the heathen nations. What a glorious task that is!

Under the pressures of false doctrine the church is forced to defend herself; and to do so the church develops the truth and grows richer in the knowledge of God.

The truths of the trinity and the divinity of our Lord were developed under the pressures of the heresies of Arianism and Semi-Arianism. That truth is found in our Nicene Creed. The truth of God's sovereign grace in salvation, along with such truths as the particular redemption of Christ's cross, election and reprobation, total depravity, were all developed in the 4th and 5th centuries by the great church father Augustine when he defended the truth against Pelagius and the Roman Catholic Church. The truths of God's glory in all His works as the sovereign God who alone saves His people were developed by the Reformers and their successors against the bitter attack of the Arminians who almost destroyed the church. The crucial truth of an unconditional covenant (that has meant so much to the PRC, the CERC, the CPRC, the Berean PRC and its sister congregations in the Philippines) was developed over against those who taught a conditional covenant in which man had the decisive vote in being a member of that covenant. A sturdy and unwavering determination to defend the truth of God's creation against the horrible error of evolutionism has given the saints a richer understanding of God's mighty works in creation and history.

But the battle is fierce and deadly. Many are the soldiers of Christ who waver in the battle, retreat before the threats and assaults of the enemy, and even fall dead on the corpse-strewn battlefield of history. Many faithful soldiers are captured and tortured in vain efforts to persuade them to join the enemy, and history runs red with the blood of faithful soldiers of the cross.

But to return to the figure Paul uses in Ephesians 6: the faithful warrior, armed with the armour of God remains standing. He may be weary beyond description; his arm may ache so badly that he can barely lift his sword; his helmet may be knocked askew, his shield pierced with many arrows, his body streaming with the blood of a thousand wounds, but when all the enemy are destroyed and the battlefield swept clean of all the forces of the enemy, he is still standing. When the Captain of his salvation comes to carry him off to his eternal rest, he hears his Captain say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant; enter though into the joys of thy Lord". I cannot imagine anything more wonderful than to hear those blessed words of the Saviour.

PROF. DAVID ENGELSMA'S ESCHATOLOGY NOTES (II)

>>Aaron Lim



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

The Salt Shakers is pleased to present the second installment of Prof. Engelsma's notes on eschatology. In this installment, the esteemed professor explains his (and the class') interest in the book of Revelation, and the increasing lawlessness that abounds in the world and in the church.

The Nature of the Specific Study

Many years ago, when I came back to Grand Rapids to teach in the Seminary, this Reformed Doctrine class began with the truth of eschatology. At that time, I framed the study and my instruction along the lines of a systematic order of things. I taught the class the same way a professor would teach it to his seminarians, following a logical order. I am not going to repeat that method in this class. I am going to do something different. This time I want to work as much as possible with the book of Revelation, the outstanding book in the Bible of the truth of the last things. In light of the teaching of the book of Revelation, I want to take note with you the certain events that are happening in present history that are fulfilling biblical prophecy, and affirming that the end truly is near.

Although I restrain myself from making any predictions on dates (which is utter folly), I make bold to venture that the end is nearer than we sometimes suppose as we go about our day to day business. When we look at the book of Revelation and take a hard look at developments in our culture, we will be impressed with the truth that the end is very near indeed. I will do some explaining of Jesus' teaching in Matthew 24 and Luke 21, but my main interest in this class will be the book of Revelation.

Helping our study at this time (AD 2015) is that certain events that belong to the end that are foretold in Revelation are taking place today. It has long been recognized by Reformed preachers and teachers that of all the main doctrines of the Christian faith, eschatology is the truth that is the least known and developed. Of the six major doctrines, this is the least developed. This is evident in our Reformed creeds, although they are quite extensive, sharp, and detailed. They are quite brief and noticeably general about the truth of the last things. They do not have much to say about the truth of eschatology.

That eschatology is the least developed is also evident in Reformed writings about the last things. You may know that neither Luther nor Calvin wrote a commentary on the book of Revelation. They wrote on almost all the other books except Revelation. Calvin admitted that he did not do so because he did not understand the book – it was too dark and deep. That is why there are also very few Reformed commentaries on the book.

Someone has said that the church will not be able to grasp the truth of the last things as she ought to until those truths of the last things are actually taking place and happening. I am suggesting that we are living in the time when the truths of the last things are beginning to take place in their final development, so that we are able to understand the biblical teaching of the last things that the previous generations who have gone before us could not. I intend to prove that a number of prominent and extremely important events that

"I intend to prove that a number of prominent and extremely important events that are a part of the last things that are figuratively described in Revelation are happening today before our eyes."

are a part of the last things that are figuratively described in Revelation are happening today before our eyes. This implies that the very end, with the dramatic events that immediately precede the very end (the antichrist) is very near, nearer than we commonly suppose.

I am very well aware that Christian teachers like to prophesy on the exact date of Christ's coming. Church history warns against that. I am not going to fall into that mistake because Jesus forbids us. When He was on earth, Jesus did not know that either (Matt. 24:36). Jesus also gives us signs of the end with the purpose that they will alert us concerning the time of his coming. It is a danger when we ignore those signs and put them off into the distant future. We get used to those signs, we take them for granted. Admittedly, those are sinful things, and we fail to relate them to the last days and the end.

An example of the sheer, abounding lawlessness in the last days is the sin in Western society with regard to marriage (Matt. 24:12). Iniquity in the Greek is literally lawlessness. Lawlessness shall increase. Lawlessness is different from just failing to keep the law. Failure to keep the law is bad enough. But lawlessness is deliberate trampling upon the law of God with the purpose to disobey and to flaunt that disobedience as an indignity against the Lawgiver. A child who does not go to bed on time is disobedient to the law, but a child who shakes his fist at his parents and tells them that he will do everything contrary to what his parents teach him is lawless.

"An example of the sheer, abounding lawlessness in the last days is the sin in Western society with regard to marriage"

We can take this lawlessness for granted. Young people can simply have sex before marriage, but they flaunt their fornication. That married people divorce freely, and divorced people remarry freely is an outstanding example of the lawlessness that Christ taught will be a sign of the last things. We easily do not react to such things because they are so prevalent.

Besides, we also live in a time when this lawlessness takes place in the churches. When this is approved by the churches, it is lawlessness. That points to the second aspect of the sign of lawlessness. Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many toward God and Jesus Christ and the truth shall wax cold. That is Jesus' way of describing apostasy among nominal Christians and in churches that have the name of being Christian churches. If love for God cools, that must take place in the churches. That is the only place where love for God and the truth ever took place. Love there used to be warm and ardent. Now it cools. The cooling of that love is due to the abounding of lawlessness. Because lawlessness abounds, the love of many becomes cold. So prevalent is lawlessness in marriage and sexual morality that church members become used to it. They take it for granted. The result is that love for holiness and sexual chastity cools – holiness such as fidelity to one's spouse, and hatred for divorce and remarriage.

"We can take this lawlessness for granted... We easily do not react to such things because they are so prevalent."

My dear friends, this is what you are seeing today in so-called conservative Reformed and Presbyterian churches. The abounding of lawlessness with regards to marriage, don't take that for granted. That is the way it is; don't get used to it. You must realize it as the sign that lawlessness shall abound, and the love of many will cool. So cool is love for God and Christ in the matter of marriage that good church members today never get angry about divorce and remarriage. Let a preacher preach the truth once about divorce and remarriage, and these same people will become plenty angry with the preacher. The explanation is that the love of many will cool. Don't take for granted that among us in the PRC, lawlessness does not abound. Lawlessness with regard to the holiness of marriage does not abound in our churches, but let us not take that for granted. We must not assume that it is always going to be the way. Rather, see the sign of lawlessness in the church and world around us that the end is near. Therefore, let us resolve to maintain the law and the love of the law in holiness of life, specifically with regard to marriage.

BRF REVIEW

>>Jessica Lanning



Jessica Lanning is a youth in CERC.

The British Reformed Fellowship (BRF) Conference is a Reformed conference that is held in the United Kingdom biannually, for a week. This year, it was held from Saturday, 16 July to Saturday, 23 July, at Castlewellan Castle in Northern Ireland.

The theme of the conference was "Behold, I Come Quickly: The Reformed, Biblical Truth of the End". There were six speeches on that topic, given by Prof. David Engelsma and Rev. Andy Lanning. In addition, there were three special speeches by Rev. McGeown ("Disorderliness and the Second Coming of Christ" [2 Thess. 3]), Mr. Pete Adams ("The Renaissance and the Reformation, Highlighting the Eschatological Implications"), and Rev. Stewart ("Dispensationalism, J.N. Darby, and Powerscourt").

The first speech by Prof. Engelsma taught us about the signs of Jesus' second coming and that He returns quickly. Rev. Lanning's first speech dealt with the subject of premillennial dispensationalism, especially the views of premillennial dispensationalists about the rapture and antichrist. Against those views, he stated the Reformed belief about being "caught up together…in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air" (1Thess. 4:17). Prof. Engelsma's next speech was entitled "The Coming World-Conquest of the Beast from the Sea", taken from Revelation 13. In the fourth conference speech, "Jesus' Coming as a Thief in View of Abounding Lawlessness and Great Apostasy", Rev. Lanning explained what it means that Jesus comes as a thief and how that is connected to the signs of apostasy and lawlessness (Matt. 24:11-12). The last two conference speeches were given the day before the conference ended. Prof. Engelsma gave a speech on "The Two Witnesses of Revelation" (Rev. 11) in the morning. Later that day, Rev. Lanning gave the last conference speech, "Called to Live in the Expectation of a Final Judgment and in the Hope of Life Eternal".

On the Sunday of the conference we had the church services at the castle. The morning sermon was preached by Prof. Engelsma on "The Hope of Creation for Christ's Coming", his text being Romans 8:19-22. The evening worship service was led by Rev. Lanning, who preached about Methusaleh, with Genesis 5:25-27 as his text.

During the conference there were two day trips. One of them was on Monday, 18 July. That trip was to Hillsborough Castle, where the queen and other British royalty stay when they come to Northern Ireland. We got a guided tour of the castle and then got to spend some time outside in the queen's garden. The other day trip was on Thursday the 21st to Boyne Valley, a 1690 battle site, and Trim Castle. In the town of Trim we also had time to walk around the town next to the castle and fellowship with each other.

At the BRF Conference there were people from many different countries: Australia, Canada, England, Hungary, Northern Ireland, the Philippines, Ireland, Singapore, the United States, and Wales. Psalm 22:27-28 talks about this: "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee. For the kingdom is the LORD'S: and he is the governor among the nations".

Every morning and every night there was devotions, led by different people attending the conference. Devotions included singing from the Scottish Psalter, which the church in Northern Ireland also uses for its worship services. We used this Psalter before and after each speech as well.

There was also free time every day, when we could talk, walk around a lake by the castle, cycle, kayak, go to one of the world's largest hedge mazes, sing with people at the conference, and many other activities.

We are thankful for the time we could spend with God's people at the conference.

"I love Thy saints, who fear Thy name And walk as in Thy sight; They are the excellent of earth, In them is my delight" (Psalter 27, stanza 2).

HONOURING GOD IN OUR VOCATIONAL CHOICES

>>Julia Koh



Julia Koh is a member of CERC.

Have you been to a career fair before? If you have, you would be familiar with the many booths and attractive selling points that companies boast of, like a large pay package, opportunities for overseas travel and working in new environment. A vocation is one's main occupation and in a rapidly progressive society like Singapore, there is pressure on students to decide what their interests are. The most concrete choice would possibly be whether they would prefer to be in a "science stream" or "arts stream". There are also options of pursuing education in less conventional routes like homeschooling, Lasalle College of the Arts, and the Singapore Sports School which provide differing career paths.

"The issue we discuss today is this: as Christians, what are we to do with our lives?"

The issue we discuss today is this: as Christians, what are we to do with our lives? How will we know if we are meant for one job or another?

In Japan, there is a concept of *Ikigai* which states that the purpose of one's living is an intersection between what you love, what you are good at, what you can be paid for and what the world needs. Others would say that you can simply "follow your heart" when it comes to these decisions. While these models seem to break down large concepts simply, they do not mention God.

We must never forget that the sovereign God is the Giver of our abilities and the Sustainer of our lives. He creates us fearfully and wonderfully (Ps. 139:14) and forms our brain, heart, limbs and sets in motion our bodily functions so that our intellect, our motor function are all determined by Him. Has not the Potter power over the clay? This is to God's glory and to His child's comfort, that "he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory" (Rom. 9:21-23). Since He has prepared His people for glory and eternal life, He will surely provide for us in this life which is but a short sojourn!

The Bible says the following about work:

"We must never forget that the sovereign God is the Giver of our abilities and the Sustainer of our lives."

1. We should work hard.

"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, *nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest*" (Ecc. 9:10).

In this life, the ability and opportunity to work are God-given and we should be thankful for them. God works by giving us personalities and interests, flaws and strengths that make us able or unable to work at each time in our lives. While we hem and haw about having to go to work while other matters of life trouble us, we must always give thanks for the ability to use our lives and gifts to serve others and treasure the opportunity to do so for it can be swiftly taken away from us.

2. We should seek first the kingdom of God.

"*But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you*" (Matt. 6:33).

"As a child of God, we trust that God will provide for our daily necessities, and acknowledge that the other pursuits of life are not essential."

What are "these things" that will be added? They are food, drink and clothing, the daily necessities of life. Proverbs 30:8-9 records a special prayer, a request to "give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain." As a child of God, we trust that God will provide for our daily necessities, and acknowledge that the other pursuits of life are not essential. These other pursuits including wealth and status are instead 'vanity' as Ecclesiastes 5:10 reads: "He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity." Help us realise that God's provision and anointing is sufficient for our cup to run over.

As a lady myself I feel compelled to add that Titus 2 gives instruction that older women should teach younger women to be sober, to love their husbands and children, to be discreet, chaste, and **keepers at home**, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed. Although women in the workplace do not fall within the scope of this article, these words are clear regarding the occupation of married child-bearing women. From my mother's example, serving at home as a full-time mother definitely keeps one very occupied!

What can we do to prepare now?

Other than much prayer for God to lead and make one's path clear, let me offer a few simple ways for preparation:

1. Find out about the vocation.

"*Every purpose is established by counsel: and with good advice make war*" (Pro. 20:18).

Speak to older Christians who have been in the vocation previously, who can identify the struggles that Christians may have in the field and also continue to mentor you should you embark on the similar path. Proverbs 20:18 says that every purpose is established by counsel, and the wise Old Testament kings did likewise before heading to war. Try out the job if you can too! It may seem like a completely different experience compared to what you see from a third person's point of view.

2. Understand that every job has its difficulties.

Just as we have difficulties in our family life, our physical health and even our spiritual life, each vocation will have days of utter weariness. As difficult as it may be, and perhaps after a period of rest, we must continue to be thankful for our jobs, for God has given them to us. A clear situation to watch out for would be a job that clearly conflicts with the life of a Christian, one which contradicts the teachings of the Bible. Then, it may be wise to seek counsel and leave the job.

"Speak to older Christians... who can identify the struggles that Christians may have in the field..."

3. Get prepared for changes in your life.

Prepare thy work without,and make it fit for thyself in the field; and afterwards build thine house (Pro. 24:27).

Unlike school, work will not end just after lunch and there is usually more hierarchy in the workplace. Organise your time with room for church activities, exercise and your own interests. When you start the job, give yourself time to adjust to a different environment (e.g. standing all day long, a new route to get to work) and people with different belief systems and working styles.

What is the blessedness of honouring God in our lives?

Honouring God through our lives will allow us to savour all the promises in His word. He will add "all these things" unto us and we will be pleased to live out His will as "vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory."

DESIRING A GOOD WORK (IV)

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

Having previously examined the nature of the office of elder and what Paul describes as the "good work" of his office, in the last issue we began to consider the blessings that an elder receives. In this final instalment, we will look further at the blessings that God gives a faithful elder. We will conclude with a consideration of ways in which men can prepare, indeed, ought to prepare themselves for the office.

We have noted that God's blessing on elders arises out of the faithful labours that they perform in their office. Faithful elders are constantly busy in God's Word – studying, searching, and teaching that Word. The blessing that results is growing in their knowledge and understanding of the Bible. In addition, since they are continually applying that Word to situations in the church, the elders grow in wisdom in applying the Word to their own lives and families.

A second notable personal blessing is a growth in sanctification. This blessing also arises first out of the elder's work with the Bible. In His beautiful high priestly prayer recorded in John 17, Jesus made this request for His disciples: "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (vs. 17). The elder who is busy studying the Bible for his work also recognises the need for the Word for his own personal benefit. God will bless that study. The Word more and more governs his thinking and his life. The Spirit gives the desire to walk in holiness. Add that to the elder's experience of how sin ravages the lives of God's people, and the deception of sin, and the result is that the elder more and more hates that sin and knows he must stay as far as he can from sin himself. He knows his own wicked nature, and he knows that Satan would like nothing better than to cause an officebearer to fall into gross sin. By God's grace, all these things lead an elder to fight sin in himself and to strive for holiness. Faithful work in the office will produce growth in sanctification.

Third, the faithful officebearer grows in his love for the church, for the people of God. This is not an automatic blessing. On the one hand, God's people are sinners. They are not always

"A second notable personal blessing is a growth in sanctification. This blessing also arises first out of the elder's work with the Bible."

so loveable. They can be harsh, critical, attacking, slandering people. And they demonstrate that not only to other members, but not infrequently, toward the elders. Certainly what Solomon observed in his life is true of the officebearer – with knowledge comes sorrow (Ecc. 1:18). An officebearer weeps over the sins of fellow believers. And he feels the sting and bears the scars of attacks from fellow members of the congregation. Not once, but twice, Proverbs grieves: "The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of

"Third, the faithful officebearer grows in his love for the church, for the people of God."

" If a man properly desires to serve his Lord and Saviour in any of the three church offices, it is obvious that he ought to prepare himself as much as he can."

the belly" (Pro. 18:8, 26:22). These are wounds that do not heal easily. Many an officebearer has finished his term of office heartsick because of the sins of God's people, astounded at the vicious natures that manifest themselves in the church.

And yet, the officebearer loves God's people. And the more he helps them, the more he loves them. He sees their struggles and can empathize with them. He sees them taking hold of the word of instruction and admonition. He sees them striving to be obedient – fighting sin and living in sanctification. And seeing the work of God in them, he loves them. The bond of love forms, develops, and lasts. All believers are called to love one another, to care for the weak, and to seek the good of the church. The officebearer has many opportunities to carry out these admonitions. And his love for the church grows and is manifested.

These are some of the outstanding blessings that Christ bestows on faithful officebearers.

Preparation

The main point of the articles has been that the office of elder is a good work, a work that men ought to desire. If a man properly desires to serve his Lord and Saviour in any of the three church offices, it is obvious that he ought to prepare himself as much as he can. The man who believes he is called to the office of minister of the Word and sacraments pursues many years of preparation. One who desires to serve Christ as an elder (or deacon) should likewise seek to be prepared for the office.

That leads to the question, how can a man prepare for the work?

Let us not miss the obvious preparation that is needed, as the passage in 1 Timothy 3 directs us. The inspired apostle Paul wrote of desiring of the office of bishop (elder), and then immediately followed that with the qualifications for the elder. The point is clear. A man who desires this office must cultivate these spiritual qualifications. Without them, he may not be nominated for the office. These qualifications ought to be obvious in his life and conduct. Paul wrote:

> *A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil (vs. 2-7).*

A necessary place to begin then, is with a prayerful study of these qualifications.

Second, one prepares for service in the church of Christ by growing in the knowledge of the Word of Christ. The Bible is the heart of each office. The Word of Christ is the power of the office. This is the source of the instruction, the admonitions, the good counsel, and the wisdom needed in the work. The man who will serve ought to be daily reading and meditating on the Word of God.

Closely related, a man who desires to serve should be familiar with the Reformed confessions. All officebearers sign the Formula of Subscription when they are first ordained/installed. In so doing, they express that they "heartily believe and are persuaded that all the articles and points of doctrine contained in the Confession and Catechism of the Reformed Churches together with the [Canons], do fully agree with the Word of God". Then they will promise "diligently to teach and faithfully to defend the aforesaid doctrine…." It should be obvious that to make such promises meaningfully they must know these Reformed confessions. Anyone who will serve effectively as an officebearer in a Reformed congregation must know and love the Reformed faith, and that is the content of the confessions. Preparation includes then gaining a thorough knowledge of the confessions.

In addition, the officebearers must know the Reformed Church Order. The Church Order gives the rules for the proper Reformed government of the church as drawn from Scripture itself. It sets forth the time-tested church polity which has as its basic principle that

"... the officebearers must know the Reformed Church Order."

"An officebearer should know the truth. He should know the errors that the church battled in the past."

Christ Jesus is the King of His church. King Jesus demands that all things be done decently and in order. Good, effective Reformed officebearers will not only know what the Church Order says, but understand the principles behind the articles, and be able to apply them to the government of the church. A man can prepare himself to serve by reading good commentaries on the Church Order. The importance of such preparation cannot be overstated.

Further preparation can be gained by reading. An officebearer should know the truth. He should know the errors that the church battled in the past. Knowledge of the history of the church generally, and of his own church in particular, are important. We learn from the struggles and the mistakes of the church in the past. Good books are available on the office of elder and its duties.

And then one more thing. A man who desires the office of elder desires to serve the church of Jesus Christ. Such a man should be seeking ways to serve the church before he is nominated for any office. He is involved in the life of the church. He serves the other members in small, unnoticed ways simply because he loves God's people.

These preparations, it should be evident, are efforts from which all believers can profit. They will give rich spiritual benefits to any Christian. And the man who desires the office rests then in the will of Christ. He will prepare himself, in the event that Christ calls him to the office of elder. If Christ does not, then the man still is spiritually stronger, and he uses the many other opportunities to serve outside the office.

The office of elder is a tremendous blessing which Christ gives to His church. And the elders who labours faithfully can be assured of Christ's promised blessing: "And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (1 Pet. 5:4). Pray for your elders. And pray that God will continue to give His church faithful officebearers, well prepared, filled with the good and proper desire to be used by Christ for the good of His church.

"He serves the other members in small, unnoticed ways simply because he loves God's people."

Martin Luther quote:

"Unless I am refuted and convicted by testimonies of the Scriptures or by clear arguments (since I believe neither the Pope nor the councils alone; it being evident that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am conquered by the Holy Scriptures quoted by me, and my conscience is bound in the word of God: I can not and will not recant any thing, since it is unsafe and dangerous to do anything against the conscience. Here I stand. I can not do otherwise. God help me! Amen."

Source: http://www.prca.org/books/portraits/luther.htm



Singapore

On 1 January 2017, CERC gathered together for the first time in the new year to celebrate and give thanks to God for the many blessings He has given the church. CERC's Session presented CERC's theme for 2017, which is "Be Ye Holy".

On Saturday, 7 January, Cornelius and Jemima Joy were united in the covenant bond of marriage. We pray that God will bless their marriage, as they reflect the union of Christ and His Church.

Matthew 19:6 : "Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

On Sunday, 8 January, Rev. Emmanuel Singh was installed as CERC's missionary to Kolkata.

We rejoice with our fellow saints in Kolkata and give thanks that the Lord has given them a good and faithful young servant to lead them in His Word. Let us continue to keep Rev. Emmanuel Singh and his wife in our prayers.

Philippines

We thank God that after several months of preparation for mission work, Rev. Daniel Holstege and his family (wife Leah and four children: Gabriel, Kirsten, Kiley, and Charity) have arrived safely in the Philippines on Thursday, 12 January to take up their life and work there.

Lord willing, a delegation from Doon PRC and the Foreign Mission Committee (FMC) is scheduled to visit the Philippines mission field from 3 February through 14 February. The delegation will consist of Rev. C. Griess and Elder Alan De Boer.

On Saturday, 25 February, the Classis of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines is scheduled to meet.



Vacation Bible School 2016: Games in church



Vacation Bible School 2016: Outing to the Science Centre



New additions to the church through Public Confession of Faith



Baptism of Meryl Lim



Baptism service of Celina, Millie, Jia Chin and Zhi Leng



Table talk with Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

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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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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