Our hope as Christians is not that we become healthy and wealthy, but that we have spiritual riches and an eternal inheritance.

– Eric Lanning | Money

To be Reformed then means heartily to believe and to be persuaded that all the articles and points of doctrine in the creeds fully agree with the word of God. *– Rev. Nathan Langerak | The Necessity of Being Reformed*

The effects of media and social media addiction can be very detrimental to the church.

– Paul Ong | Media Addiction

salt shakers

joel 3:16 matthew 5:16

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Our Continuing Heritage

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WELCOME TO THE 44TH ISSUE OF SALT SHAKERS!

Dear Readers,

Welcome to another issue of the Salt Shakers!

Since I completed the editorial series ***Lest We Forget*** in the last three issues, Lee Yang, the chairman of the Salt Shakers committee, will begin a new editorial series. He will be writing for the following three issues of the Salt Shakers, running till the end of the year.

In this issue, Rev. Nathan Langerak from Crete Protestant Reformed Church reminds our readers of the necessity of being Reformed – in doctrine, life, and polity. Using Scripture and the Reformed creeds, he carefully defines the meaning and beauty of the Reformed faith.

Reminiscing CERC's 30-year history is Elder Chan Chee Seng. In the article ***Grateful Reminiscence***, he recounts the young and difficult beginnings of CERC in 1986, and how he and his family are one of the very few charter members left in CERC today, by God's grace. CERC faced many struggles since her inception, but God preserved and developed her into a faithful Reformed church. Today she is doctrinally stable and mature. Her members and young people are well-instructed in the distinctive truths of the Reformed faith.

Such is the loveliness of the church, as Elder Lee Kong Wee also highlights in his article ***Isn't She Lovely***. The church on earth, although comprising of sinful saints, is pure and lovely on account of her Saviour, Jesus Christ, who has cleansed His beloved bride thoroughly from the defilement of sin.

CERC is planning a Reformation Day conference in November to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the sixteenth century Reformation. We welcome one and all to hear the speeches that are being planned. More details on the conference will follow in the coming months.

As we commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, it is crucial to understand that one of the greatest legacies that the reformers gave to us is the duty to read. A Reformed believer must be a reader. He must be a faithful reader of the Scriptures and Reformed literature, growing in grace and knowledge. Salt Shakers serves to preserve that legacy. So read, and pass the Salt!

Blessings,
Aaron

BOOK REVIEW: A SPIRITUAL HOUSE PRESERVED

>>Chua Lee Yang

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

A Century in the River's Bend

For its 100th anniversary last year, Hope PRC (Walker, MI) published *A Spiritual House Preserved* (Kalsbeek, 2016) to commemorate the occasion. The cover carries the following introduction:

"This is the story of a church of our Lord Jesus Christ with very humble beginnings on the extreme western edge of Kent Country… On one occasion the church's membership of mostly poor farmers recorded in their minutes, "The question was asked if we were going to continue as a congregation, and the answer was yes."

With that "yes" recorded in the tenth year of their existence they plodded on as a fledging congregation with little hope for the future. But God is at times a God of little things. Little did they know, or could they have imagined at the time, that God had many years in store for them…

…this one-hundredth anniversary book of Hope Protestant Reformed Church is more than a record of Hope's history. More importantly it reveals the secrets of why she continues as a faithful church of our Lord Jesus Christ today: secrets which if heeded gives Hope and like-minded churches hope for tomorrow."

For a church to exist as a distinct entity for 100 years is remarkable in itself – but for a church to remain true and faithful to her Lord for 100 years is nothing short of a miracle of grace. That alone should make us want to read this book. While the world notes the course of what is trending, famous people, inventions, sports championships, wars and rumours of wars, the centenary of a comparatively small, solidly Reformed church passes by quietly and largely unnoticed.

Not entirely unnoticed, however, and certainly not by us here in Singapore. *A Spiritual House Preserved* should be essential reading for all of us in CERC, for our own spiritual heritage can also be traced through all the way to the small, isolated group of poor farmers by the river's bend, which once held worship services "under the big tree in Richard Newhouse's yard". Indeed, the book itself contains detailed historical perspectives of Hope's official labours in Singapore between 1979 to 2005 by Rev. den Hartog as well as Rev. Jason and Jean Kortering. These perspectives are extremely interesting and profitable reading for both old and new members of CERC.

In her 100 years of history, Hope has been the mother of three daughter congregations whose names and ministers are not at all unfamiliar – Faith PRC (Rev. Lanning's previous congregation before accepting the call to CERC), Grandville PRC (Rev. Kenneth Koole) and Grace PRC (Rev. Ronald Van Overloop). As CERC has, over the decades, been a clear beneficiary of the direct labours of Hope and her daughter congregations, it would be correct to identify CERC at the very least, as an adoptive daughter or granddaughter of Hope. Hope PRC's rich chronicles are deeply relevant to us here in Singapore, inasmuch as they are a part of our own heritage.

This book of Hope PRC's story is a gem. A brief glance through its contents impresses upon the reader the comprehensiveness of its scope – in how many books can one find a serious doctrinal discussion right alongside one young man's desperate flight from a tornado?

"The tornado was huge, monstrously huge. It was not the slender, curved, even graceful cloud of the painting. It was hardly a funnel. Rather, it was an enormous, squat column, nearly as wide at its bottom as at the top… it was a deep and fearsome black – the black of the third horse of the Apocalypse.

"… for a church to remain true and faithful to her Lord for 100 years is nothing short of a miracle of grace."

"Each section is succinct and easily digested by even the young reader..."

….The response of the young man was not so much fear, although he was afraid, as awe – awe as before Jehovah God of Israel come to judge the wicked world in the wrath of his holiness."

– Prof. David J. Engelsma in *Memories of the Tornado of 1956 .p.347*

Each section is succinct and easily digested by even the young reader, especially as much of the book reads as one story to another. Topics range from the serious to the everyday and humorous (*"Rumour has it that Rev. Slopsema was asked while in Singapore, "Are you the tallest man in the world?"*), with numerous accounts by or of those, whose names are familiar to us in Singapore, especially those of former ministers of Hope or sons of Hope in the gospel ministry (Rev. (now Prof.) Herman Hanko, Rev. Jason Kortering, Rev. Ronald Van Overloop, Rev Slopsema, Rev. (now Prof.) Russell Dykstra, Prof. David J. Engelsma, Rev. Kenneth Koole…).

Besides the doctrinal issues surrounding the controversies on God's grace in 1924 (common vs. particular) and on the covenant in 1953 (conditional vs. unconditional), the reader is offered an intimate view of the struggles of living through those times, as well as through the war years and the Great Depression.

On losing the church property to the minority group who stayed with the CRC denomination in 1925:

"…Although it is important to a congregation to have a church building as a meeting place in a community, the congregation had to go forward in the knowledge that even without a building a church continues to exist.

At what must have been one of the lowest points in the life of the small congregation, a congregational meeting was held on April 27, 1927, in the home of Deacon Moelker. The meeting was opened with singing verse 3 of Psalm 119 and prayer by the president, Rev. Ophoff. The minutes of that meeting are as follows:

Article 1. Rev Ophoff gave a short talk in which he explained the object of the meeting which was that our finance was nearly exhausted and to see if some means could be provided by which we could continue as a congregation."

– David Moelker in *Hope's Buildings: Dedicated to the Service of God .p.86*

And again in 1953:

"Although in the years between 1925 and 1953 the congregation of Hope had grown to about forty families, it shrunk again in size. About fifteen families left; the congregation was brought down to about twenty-five families, although a few other families also joined the church shortly after the split. But as was always true and remains true today, it is better to be small and faithful to the truth than large and apostate. No price is too great to pay for the sake of God's truth."

– Prof Herman Hanko in *Hope's Involvement in the Controversies of 1925-1925 and 1953 .p.129*

On the economics of the Depression years:

"Several hours later, and with daylight arriving, the disgusted farmers began to pack up and leave. I became desperate and sold the whole load to the lone buyer at 25c a crate. I was sick to my stomach as we made the transaction, for that price would hardly pay the cost for the sixteen containers… upon arriving home I told my father the circumstances of the deal. He estimated that the eight of us had worked that whole day for the sum total of $1.50. Well, that was the last of the berry picking for the season. The younger children were glad and didn't hide the fact either. We older ones were a bit more sensitive to the heartache and despair of our father and mother as they watched that bountiful red-ripe field shrivel and go to waste.

Incidents such as that were multiplied during the long, lean years and have made a lasting impression on me. Because the last forty years have been years of prosperity and influence, the majority of this generation's teenagers find it next to impossible to visualize, let alone

"Countless other vivid and fascinating epithets like those above can be found in *A Spiritual House Preserved*."

> **"Some other interesting sections include the accounts of young men of Hope who faced being drafted in various wars..."**

sympathize, with the lifestyle of the Depression years and its lack of what is currently deemed a necessity."

– Dewey Engelsma (father of Prof. Engelsma) in A Teenager during the Depression Years p.257

Countless other vivid and fascinating epithets like those above can be found in *A Spiritual House Preserved*. Rather than cite them all, which would be impossible, for there are so many hidden jewels, I strongly encourage you to read it for yourself! Besides the many oral accounts by members and ministers, the book also includes accounts of Hope's participation in missions, of which Hope was the calling church for ministers-on-loan to Singapore for 15 years, and perspectives on Christian education (Hope was the first PR church in Michigan to start a school). Hope's development as a "reading" church is also included, which is of course a matter of profound interest to the Salt Shakers. Some of us who may have had the pleasure of visiting Hope PRC can recall how strikingly deep the culture of reading and being well-read goes in Hope. Besides the distribution of various books to members at particular occasions (*Bound to Join* on the occasion of graduation from high school, *Marriage: The Mystery of Christ and the Church* on the occasion of marriage, and *Believers and Their Seed* and *Reformed Education* on the occasion of the baptism of a first child), a unique practice of Hope is how families will gather in the sanctuary on the Lord's day half an hour before the service, and prepare for worship by silently reading Reformed literature. It is a matter worth thinking about for us in CERC too – are we a "reading" church? Do we want to be one?

Some other interesting sections include the accounts of young men of Hope who faced being drafted (called up to serve) in various wars, descriptions of all the societies and ministries in Hope, the work of the consistory, including a how-to guide for officebearers, and even some perhaps rosy perspectives on Singaporeans:

"I think that having been in Singapore gives me a more critical look at our churches. If the young people in Singapore have shown us one thing, it's this: they are living much closer to God than our general population in the Protestant Reformed Churches. That's at least what we consider to be true; we can't read the heart. They are spiritual; they seem to be able to cast the world out…. I said to one fellow, "Do you keep up with the sports in Singapore?" He said, "No, God delivered us from all that.""

– Dewey Engelsma (Interviewed in 1985) in *Oral History Accounts of Hope.p.254*

Reading *A Spiritual House Preserved*, it is easy to see many parallels between what CERC and Hope have faced over the decades. We also gain insight into how CERC became what she is today, why she does certain things the way she does (such as, why do we open our worship with singing the opening Doxology "Praise God from whom all blessings flow..? What do we consider an appropriate way to worship and why?).

However, we also see God's hand in preserving Hope over the years, and just how we too stand in the line of faithful churches in the midst of this dark time. For us in Singapore, to read of the struggles and victories of our fellow sister (mother, or grandmother, perhaps?) church, is deeply encouraging. For though Hope PRC is far away in a foreign land, nothing can be clearer that we do share strongly the same hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

A Spiritual House Preserved can be obtained through purchase from the RFPA website: https://rfpa.org/products/a-spiritual-house-preserved. You may also borrow my copy, if available.

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SCRIPTURE'S COVENANT YOUTH (VII): SAMUEL

>>Prof. Herman Hanko

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

Among all the many faithful people in Israel of whom Scripture speaks, and even among all the covenant youth that are mentioned in Scripture, Samuel is unique. He was unique in several respects, but the most important characteristic of this great man of God was that he alone came closest to holding all three offices in Israel: prophet, priest and king, something no man ever did in Israel, in fact, might not do. He was prophet to whom the Lord spoke and who brought the word of the Lord to the nation. He was priest and often sacrificed for the people – as he did, for example, when he went to Bethlehem at God's command to anoint David king in Saul's place. But he was not king. Yet he was numbered among the judges who fought for the nation and judged them while Israel did not yet have a king. Samuel even served in that transition period when God gave Israel a king to take the place of judges. Saul was deposed from office by God himself for the sin of disobedience. Saul was the choice of the people; David was God's choice.

You probably know the story of his birth. His mother Hannah was the wife of a man named Elkanah. But Elkanah had two wives, and was, we may conclude, a rather prosperous man. But, as was always the case in families where a man had more than one wife, in this home too, there was trouble between the two wives. God tolerated families with multiple wives during these Old Testament times, because godly marriages are a picture of Christ and his church, and because the picture was dim, blurred and unclear in the time when Christ had not yet done His great work of making His bride a pure and holy bride. God no longer will tolerate such marriages for Christ has come and He has one wife and one only, the church. He loves her and none other (1 Tim. 3:2, 12). Nor can He love any other for He died only for His bride.

The spiritual condition in Elkanah's home was not the best. It is true that Elkanah did take his family to the tabernacle once a year to make their sacrifices to God as the law required. And it is also true that Elkanah loved Hannah in preference to Peninah (1 Sam 1:4-5). Hannah was the God-fearing wife of Elkanah. I doubt whether Peninah even loved the Lord, for she provoked Hannah "sore" because God had not given Hannah children (1 Sam 1:6), while Peninah had sons and daughters (1 Sam. 1:4). She mocked Hannah's longing to have children.

Hannah was very sad that the Lord had not given her children, but Elkanah, it seemed, did not understand what was the reason for Hannah's sadness. He thought that extra gifts to Hannah would cure her of her sadness. But, it seems, he was too lacking in any real spirituality in his inability to understand that Hannah's sorrow was not so much the mere fact that she could not have children, but that she could not share in the blessing that most godly mothers possessed: to be a part of the nation of Israel and so to have a part in bringing forth the Christ, the Seed of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent and bring deliverance from the tyranny of sin (1 Sam. 1:8).

How do we know that her inability to have children was her great sorrow?

The answer is the fervency of her prayer for a child along with her promise that if God would give her a child, she would dedicate the child to the Lord (1 Sam 1:16-18). And even more powerfully, the song that Hannah sang when the Lord gave her a son (1 Sam 2:1-10) has many similarities to the song that Mary

sang when she knew she was pregnant with Christ (Luke 1:46-55). It seems to me that Mary had Hannah's song in her mind when she sang the song recorded for us in Luke. It was as if Mary, in her astonishment that the Lord had done what he said he would do, spoke in her song of and to all those godly women in the old dispensation who eagerly longed for the coming of Christ, and found their joy in bringing forth children of the covenant who would bring into this world of sin the Christ himself. Mary collected all these songs and prayers of covenant mothers and said, as it were: God is faithful. I am to bring forth the hope of Israel's mothers.

And so it is yet today even though Christ has brought salvation.

Throughout the entire new dispensation, the church of Christ has been blessed with such mothers as Hannah. These mothers live and die with two great truths in their hearts that lead them to understand Hannah's sorrow in not having children.

The first is this: They are given the blessedness of bringing into the world God's elect, for God's promise is that he will save his church from believers **and their seed**. These covenant mothers bring forth the church of Christ itself.

Second, they know that Christ will come only when the last elect child is born and brought to faith in Christ. They have a part in bringing about that glorious day when Christ, the hope of the church, will come to take His people to glory. It is as if every covenant mother has her eye on and her heart aching for her Saviour who shall presently come to take her and her children to be where Christ is. They understand Hannah's prayer. They will say when they stand before Christ: "Here am I, Lord, and the children thou has given me (Isa. 8:18, Heb, 2:13)[1].

I know I have not yet written about Samuel, but I will – in the next article, God willing; but all these things are necessary background. Samuel was, in the words of Hannah, lent to the Lord as the living expression of Israel's hope. This so permeated Samuel' life that all his work was to bring Israel to a stronger hope for the coming of their Saviour.

[1] We must not conclude that Christ must wait to come again until godly mothers have had their children as they planned to have them. The date of Christ's coming is eternally fixed. But because the text from Isaiah that I quoted above is applied to Christ himself in Hebrews 2:13, the glorious idea is that Christ assigns to each covenant mother what children of God's covenant they must bring forth, and to them He gives this great privilege. Christ determines His "children."

ARE UNBELIEVERS IN GOD'S IMAGE? (II)

>>Rev. Angus Stewart

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

Last time, in the light of both the nature and the number of the *imago dei*, we considered significant problems with the view that unbelievers are in the image of God. In this article, we shall critique this theory further. We will begin with arguments from the idea of the image of God, and then we will point out some of the amazing incongruities and massive equivocations which follow from the erroneous position that absolutely everybody bears the *imago dei.*

The Idea of the Image of God

There are two types of image. First, there is an image with little or no similarity to that which it images. Think of the image of Audi: four interlocking, horizontal circles. This image does not look like an Audi car but you have learned to link it to Audi. Such an image is a symbol, for it represents something else purely by means of association or convention.

Second, there is an image with a significant degree of similarity to that which it images. Think of the image of yourself in the mirror; it sure looks like you!

The image of God is an instance of the latter sort of image. This is evident even from a brief consideration of the four parties that all sides agree are in the

image of God. First, the eternal Son of God possesses all the divine attributes and is the perfect image of the Father. Second, Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son, is the "express image" of God (Heb. 1:3) so that those who have seen Him have seen the Father (Jn. 14:9). Third, Adam and Eve before the fall were in the *imago dei* as those who spiritually looked like their Creator (Gen. 1:26-27; 5:1; 9:6). Fourth, all those who are elect and regenerate are in the image of God as those who know Him savingly, and are righteous and holy by the transforming work of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10).

Moreover, those who are in the image of God are also in the likeness of God. The very first reference to the *imago dei* in the Bible joins these two ideas: "And God said [on day 6], Let us make man in our *image*, after our *likeness*" (Gen. 1:26). If a party is in the image of God, it is also in the likeness of God (Gen. 1:27; cf. 5:1).

So the question, "Are unbelievers in the *image* of God?" is equivalent to the question, "Are unbelievers in the *likeness* of God?" Are those willing to answer yes to the former question also willing to embrace the latter?

Let us go further. Someone who is in the image of another *is* the image of another; someone who is in the likeness of another is the likeness of another (cf. 1 Cor. 11:7; 2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15). Do we really want to say this regarding the wicked: the ungodly *are* the image of God and those who hate Him *are* the likeness of God?

Scripture not only joins together the image of God and the likeness of God, but it also joins these concepts with the glory of God. Of course! Since God is glorious, those who are His image and likeness are glorious too! Thus Scripture refers to "the image *and glory* of God" (1 Cor. 11:7).

Adolf Hitler, the image and glory of God? Osama bin Laden, the image and glory of God! Richard Dawkins, the image, likeness and glory of God? Joseph Stalin, the image, likeness and glory of God!

"Ah," someone might object, "these are emotive figures, particularly wicked men who hated the holy Triune God with an especially great vehemence". Yes, but the position we are opposing is that *all* unbelievers absolutely *are* God's image and, therefore, *are* His likeness and *are* His glory. Clearly, identifying the ungodly as the image of God goes too far! This important biblical concept carries a *lot* of theological freight.

Amazing Incongruities and Massive Equivocations

Identifying unbelievers as the image of God also involves further amazing incongruities and massive equivocations.

How does this notion square with the truth of God Himself? Is ungodly man really in the image of God when he does not even worship the God he is supposed to be like? If the wicked were the glory of God, surely they would glorify the God of glory!

The Lord Jesus is "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15). But unbelievers, who are supposedly in the image of God, do not recognize the Lord Jesus as the image of God! The wicked, who are allegedly God's image-bearers, are "blinded" by Satan with regard to the "light" of Jesus Christ, "the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4). Moreover, 2,000 years ago, those who were, allegedly, the image, likeness and glory of God actually crucified the Messiah, who is the perfect image, likeness and glory of God!

On the plain of Dura outside Babylon in Daniel 3, unbelievers in the image of God, according to the theory which we are opposing, bowed down to and worshipped Nebuchadnezzar's golden image. Those who were the image and glory of God adored and glorified an image of gold!

In Isaiah 46:7, those who are God's image-bearers bear images of Bel and Nebo, Babylonian gods!

In Romans 1:23, those in the image and likeness of God make and worship images in the likeness of men, birds, beasts and creeping things. Those who are the image and glory of God change the glory of the incorruptible God into images of corruptible creatures!

In Revelation 13:17, those who are the image of God, according to the theory we are opposing, worship the image of the beast. Those who supposedly bear the likeness and mark of God actually bear the mark of the beast! Can all this theory really be true?

Do you remember Christ's response to the Pharisees and Herodians who asked if it was lawful to pay taxes to the Romans (Matt. 22:15-22)? The truth is that these Jewish leaders were more interested in coins with the "image and subscription" of Caesar than the God they were supposed to image or in His great image-bearer, the Lord Jesus. Unbelievers in all ages, though allegedly in the image and glory of

God, are gripped by the imaginary glory of money rather than the glory of God (cf. Luke 16:13).

What about Satan? If the image of God (in its alleged "broader sense") consists of rationality and personality, the possession of intellect and will, and creaturely freedom and language, then it follows necessarily that the devil is in the image of God! Yea, Satan *is* the image of God, the likeness of God and the glory of God! In fact, having such a good memory, powerful intellect and resolute will, the devil has a much, much greater image of God (in the "broader sense") than any of us!

So it is not just all of fallen humanity that is in the image of God but also be Beelzebub and all his host! Advocates of the theory that we are opposing may object at this, yet it necessarily follows from their own principles.

INTERVIEW WITH ELDER CHAN: GRATEFUL REMINISCENCE

>>Elder Chan

Chan Chee Seng is an elder in CERC.

Q: How did you come to CERC?

A seminary student and potential minister for the church was finishing his seminary training and was returning to Singapore soon. The Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore (ERCS) got busy, and asked for volunteers to form another congregation. A small group came out to become the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church. My wife and I, together with baby Isaac in a pram, were privileged by God's grace to be counted amongst its first members. Sadly, those of the original group who remained in this church today can be counted with the fingers on my hands. Grace alone kept us in CERC until today.

Q: What were the most significant challenges you feel that CERC faced in the past?

The years ahead for the young church were difficult. Considering our heathen and Arminian background, and having been introduced to the Reformed faith only not too long ago, CERC was, on hindsight, a non-creedal Reformed church. A Reformed church that claims the faith of the Reformed fathers has to be creedal. It is no wonder that CERC was a church struggling to be Reformed in doctrine and practice.

Most of us would probably think that the divorce and remarriage controversy (D&R) was the most significant challenge CERC faced in the past. Prior to writing this article, I believed that too. It is true that that event was significant. In fact, so many left CERC in the aftermath of that controversy that I wondered if CERC could continue. It is not an exaggeration to say that those few families who left FERC to join CERC became the majority of the members in CERC. But the D&R controversy was only the symptom of what really plagued the church. The real problem was a lack of knowledge. "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge..." (Hos. 4:6). The Three Forms of Unity were only a "guide", in the words of an office bearer then. It had no authority in CERC. Those were the days. The years of lack of creedal authority in the CERC of the past was akin to the church doing what seemed good in her own eyes, ignoring God's leading hand in the church of the ages.

There were a few instances when CERC faced struggles in the church. Men were nominated to office, based on a perception of them being active in church, not on their soundness of doctrine. I remember that after an election, a man who was elected into office told me that he nominated himself because no one nominated him. I remember being very ignorant of Reformed doctrine when I was first elected to be a deacon. I was thrown into the tsunami of the D&R controversy which hit not long after I was elected into office. I was thrown into the water to learn to swim, reading doctrinal books to make sense of the controversy. Thanks to the invention of emails, I was able to consult Prof.

Hanko who became my Reformed doctrine encyclopedia. That personal struggle taught me much about the need for all members of the church to be taught doctrine.

Congregation meetings used to last hours where members would raise new issues and proposals on the floor to be voted on. Such practice gave the congregation the final authority instead of the God-appointed office bearers who were elected to office. I recall that in one such meeting, my heart almost missed a few beats when a member suggested giving all the balance of every year's collections, after all expenditure, to the pastor. It is a hilarious proposal as I think about it today but it illustrates the abundant opportunities for unbiblical practices.

We also struggled in doctrine. I recall an occasion, during an adult Sunday school class, a member suggested that the 3 Forms of Unity do not have anything to say in support of our unconditional covenant theology, to which no one in the room could properly repudiate.

All these, I mention, to my own shame of my lack of knowledge as an office bearer at that time, in order to illustrate the precarious position CERC was in not so long ago. If it was not for God who hid us in the palm of His hand, CERC would have been an easy prey for the roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, God preserved the church while He was in the process of developing her into one purer in doctrine and more confessional in practice.

Q: In what ways, to you, has CERC changed or remained the same at the present time?

In the last few years, God led CERC to affirm more concretely the 3 Forms of Unity, adopt the Church Order, and establish mutually beneficial sister relationships with the Protestant Reformed Churches of America and Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Ballymena, Northern Ireland. These, to me, are one of the most significant and important developments in CERC. It put knowledge which God taught the church of the ages into the hands of CERC and committed her to those doctrines and proper church government and practices. Today, our Confessions and Church Order are not wallflowers but are our constant companions at our Session meetings and are taught systematically in this church. It makes me glad to see that while our children are being catechised, the adults are taught the Canons of Dordrecht. The instruction on the Belgic Confession are about to be finished and instruction in our Church Order is next in line. In a way, not only are the children catechised, but there are also opportunities for the adults who never had the opportunity to be catechised to learn the doctrines of the church systematically. My only regret is the relatively low attendance during such adult instruction classes. According to the requirement of the Church Order, the Heidelberg Catechism is explained in the preaching almost every Lord's day. With knowledge, almost all those unorthodox practices in the past are no more or are diminishing.

Q: What were your thoughts and hopes for the future?

Is there a future for CERC? To answer that question, we need to understand where CERC stands in this world. CERC is a besieged city (Isa. 1:8). In this besieged city, as it is today, I look back with fear and joy. The overwhelming words of David in Psalm 124 say it so accurately: "If it had not been the LORD who was on our side, now may Israel say...". If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, we would have been swallowed up in those precarious years and not be around today to say that the Lord was on our side. The true church of Jesus Christ in this world since Adam's fall has been and will continue to be a besieged city until Christ comes again to give her the victory He won for her. For now, God will gather His church into His besieged city and He alone can and will preserve her for the day of His coming.

But knowledge alone cannot make the church any safer. Knowledge of the Word of God is the means that God uses to imparts faith, without which we cannot please God. Having creeds brings order into the church but it is no guarantee against heresies and the enemy, Satan. He is like a roaring lion seeking to devour CERC if we endeavour to teach the true gospel.

With this danger in mind, my hope for CERC is that she will persevere in her calling faithfully and unashamedly to teach the truth summarised in our confessions, marking well the bulwark of the church, which is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets.

We look back with thanks and praise to God alone for the true gospel He has given to this church and for preserving her so that our children also may know the gospel. God alone is our confidence for the future of CERC. The history of CERC is another demonstration of God's absolute sovereignty, grace, almighty power, and faithfulness.

CONFLICTS IN FRIENDSHIP

>>Lim Yang Zhi

Lim Yang Zhi is a confessing young adult in CERC.

This string of articles on friendships is about to reach its end—but not without one final word. One young reader, keeping up with the previous articles, suggested the title that you see above this paragraph. So, we will say a few things under this title.

All of us have had conflicts in our friendships. They do not all start the same way—a harsh criticism of your error, or an indifferent response to your sorrow. Neither have they all lasted the same time—some, less than twenty-four hours; others, for days; still others, left unresolved.

However they start, however long they are, conflicts are always ugly. Knowing how ugly they are, we want to resolve them—or do we?

Whether we want resolution or not, God calls us to end all conflicts with our friends in the church we belong to. The church, God through Paul says, must "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:1). Conflict is opposite of unity and peace. Letting conflicts with our friends continue breaks the unity and disturbs the church's peace. Letting a conflict go on, fester, and deepen, then, is disobedience to God.

Briefly consider, then, the matter of conflicts in friendships: their Triggers, Purpose, and Resolutions.

Triggers

In a sense, there are many things that can trigger conflicts between friends. All of us can easily remember words spoken or actions done by our friends that have ticked us off. Perhaps it was a time, when you casually shared a thought with your friend, but that friend, without letting you finish, jumped in with what he thought—well, he sure wanted to listen to what you had to say! Perhaps it was a time when you confided in your friend about a certain problem, but your friend…first laughed. She probably did not laugh to mock you—oh, but it sure felt that way! Or perhaps, you and your friend have grown up, but now he has a girlfriend, or she has a boyfriend; and you see him lesser during the week, or you find that she spends less time with you. The friendship grows cold; both of you talk less to each other; and soon the blame goes to…

In our experience, many things can be an occasion for conflicts.

Yet, the Bible does not first of all pay attention to these "many things". The Bible pays attention, firstly, to the heart—no, the evil of our hearts. And so, when we want to know from Scripture what starts a conflict between friends, we will find that it is sin.
Turn nowhere else but to Proverbs, first. Hatred stirreth up strifes: (10:12a). When your friend steps on your toe, and you bear a grudge against him for that one action, you have stirred up strife. He that is of a proud heart stirreth up strife (28:25). When a friend comes to us with problems, but we brush them aside because we think they are weird and the problems are small, we are stirring up strife. When God calls us to love our neighbour as ourselves, but there is hatred and pride, there will be conflict.

Then turn to the conflicts Scripture records. The very first conflict between two humans was Adam and Eve. When God confronted Adam with disobedience, Adam said proudly, "It was not my fault; my wife at the fruit first! It's her fault!" Adam was too aloof to admit he was at fault; and there, he set a conflict with his wife. There was Abram and Lot, too. Lot, jealous of Abram's riches, brought his conflict between his herdsmen and his uncle's. Eventually, Lot chose a greener pasture and separated himself from Abram. His jealousy started a conflict between Abram and Lot.

The *one* trigger to all conflicts between friends is sin.

Worse still, sin not only triggers conflicts, but it also prolongs them. Hebrews 12:15 speaks of bitterness—hatred that is kept in our hearts. When I am angry with my friend, and I do not get rid of that anger; that anger, like roots gripping the soil of the ground, grips my heart, so that I will not stop thinking of that anger when I look at my friend. Or look back to the times when we had conflicts with others: Were we the first one to say, "Let's talk about this"? Or were we too proud,

thinking that he should have made the first move? Or when the words "I'm sorry" had been spoken to us: Did we still bear that anger in our hearts? How pride—how sin—triggers and prolongs conflicts!

Purpose

Horrific as it may be, conflicts have a purpose, as God is in control of the conflicts in our friendships.

Briefly, God ordains conflicts to sanctify us and our friends. Think back to the conflict between Euodias and Syntyche: The Lord ordained that quarrel, so that he may teach the church of Philippi—including Euodias and Syntyche—to "be of the same mind in the Lord" (Phil. 4:2). Likewise, as sin sows discord in our friendships, the Lord uses it to teach us how we ought to live together as friends in the church. How the Lord does so is by showing us from His Word how to resolve those conflicts.

Resolutions

How does God want us to resolve conflicts?

There is our attitude, firstly. Do we want to resolve the conflict? However, realise with me that we are wrong to start with that question. When are we to think *first* of what we want; is not what *God* wants more important? Does *God* want you to resolve the conflict? God declares the ceasing of strife to be honourable (Pro. 20:3). Let us, then, desire resolution.

There are also certain actions that can help us when there are conflicts. Let us list a few here (in no particular order):

1) **Listen**. Be ready to hear what your friend has to say about the conflict. Maybe there are some things you did not know you have done that hurt your friend. Often, you will not know these things until you stop talking and let your friend share his part. After all, doesn't God listen to us when we speak to Him in prayer?

2) **Examine yourself**. Ask yourself: "Have I done anything wrong that has started or continued this conflict?" We already know how depraved we are; therefore, we must not leave ourselves out when it comes down to "Who started the conflict?"

3) **Have a face-to-face conversation**. Not by the phone, or by Whatsapp. With your fullest attention, talk to your friend. Such conversations tell your friend that you are not afraid to settle the conflict, even if it means admitting your own sins to your friend. Also, using indirect means of communication (Whatsapp, phone calls) may lead to more misunderstanding. Writing out your thoughts may be helpful, but it may not convey all your thoughts to your friend. Meeting directly with your friend gives you the time and space to speak your mind out and clarify things. After all, doesn't God want us, His friend-servants, to be in His presence?

4) **Forgive**. When sins have been confessed to each other and regret has been acknowledged, you must be ready to tell your friend, "I forgive you". Read Q&A 126 of the Heidelberg Catechism.

5) **Bear with it!** Do I tell my friend that I forgive him, when he does not think he is in the wrong when he clearly is? If our friends do not acknowledge their faults in the conflict, then we must be ready to bear with those faults for some time. To bear with faults can be expressed this way: "He doesn't know where he is wrong: But that is fine. Maybe he needs more time to realise his fault; why he needs more time, I do not know. I will just give him that time he needs. Meanwhile, I will pray for him, that the Lord shows him his error. All I want for him to know is that I love him and am ready to forgive". Does the Lord patiently bear with our sins that we are not conscious of? Have we seen Him lash out at us in eternal fury? Never. In time, He gradually makes us discover a new depth to our depravity and brings us to confess the sins we have grown conscious of. Even as God has shown us patience, so we must be patient with our brethren, and bear with their weaknesses.

6) **Doing the same thing in the home**. If we do not practise forgiving our parents and siblings in the home, we must not expect ourselves to be able to forgive and resolve our conflicts with our friends.

Conclusion

More can be said on conflicts between friends in the church and on dealing with these conflicts. Yet, one point must never be left out: How we deal with our friends is how God deals with us. Has God ignored us when we sinned? Has God ever said, "I forgive you", but make us sense that he is still angry with us? Has God looked at us, only to bear thoughts of anger and hatred? Never, from eternity to eternity!

That is our pattern, my dear friends.

PROF. DAVID ENGELSMA'S ESCHATOLOGY NOTES (IV)

>>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.

Notice what is in the churches that God commends in Rev. 2:10. He praises Smyrna for faithfulness – willingness to suffer for his sake. Look at the other church at Philadelphia in Rev. 3:8. She kept the name of Jesus Christ and did not deny his name. Sound doctrine, preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, a witness to the truth set forth in Holy Scripture.

Contemporary events in the churches make plain what Rev. 2-3 are teaching about the end. We see the corruption of worship in the modern worship practices that are being introduced into those churches. The Heidelberg Catechism requires that we worship God only in the way that He has prescribed in His Word. That is the traditional form of worship, the heart of which is the pure preaching of the gospel. What we see in many churches that had been sound churches in the past is departure from that sound worship of God.

The same tolerance of immoral conduct is seen today. This is what I intend that we will see in this course in eschatology. We will see what Revelation prophesies about the last times in a vivid way. We will see what is happening in the churches today so that we will understand the book of Revelation better.

One more aspect of the course of study that I want to bring to your attention is that all the way through this study, I want to expose and condemn two prominent errors concerning the last things. Those are the errors of postmillennialism and premillennialism. Rev. 20 speaks of the 1000 years ("millennium" in Latin). I want to make that a part of the main subject of my teaching because those two doctrines are serious contemporary errors. They are not only serious errors about the millennium, but of the entire truth of the last things. Those two doctrines affect everything that has to do with the truth concerning the last things. Those errors are a real threat to the PRC and all Reformed and Presbyterian church members. The reason is that influential religious teachers are promoting these errors, and many people are being deceived (especially postmillennialism).

Almost no warnings are given on these false doctrines today. I regard it as one of the main callings of sound Reformed churches and theologians today to witness both positively and negatively to the truth of amillennialism (not a literal 1000 years). As the church at the time of the Reformation was called to witness to the truth of justification by faith alone, Reformed churches today are called to witness against those false doctrines. The teachings of premillennialism and postmillennialism dominate in Reformed churches today with hardly any opposition. I am going to defend the truth of amillennialism vigorously.

Dispensational premillennialism is the teaching that prior to the millennium, Jesus is coming back to establish a kingdom for 1000 years in Jerusalem. Jesus will restore the Jews, and the OT Israel as His kingdom. The Jews will rule this kingdom for 1000 years. 7 years before Jesus' visible coming, He will come secretly to take the church of believers off into heaven in what is called the rapture. According to this doctrine, the kingdom of God and the church of Jesus Christ are two different peoples of God. The church is not the spiritual reality of Israel. The church is not the true Israel of God. The hope of the church, incredibly, is the earthly power and glory of Israel as a nation of Jews in the earth. There will never be any persecution of the church by antichrist because the church will have been raptured before the antichrist appears. The church will be in the clouds with Jesus before He comes to establish the kingdom of Israel. When He does that, antichrist will persecute the Jews, not the church. That will be the means by which God will turn the Jews back to Him.

I want to oppose that doctrine because millions of evangelical Christians

believe this doctrine, and influential teachers are promoting it at every opportunity. The Moody Bible Institute teaches this. They are dispensational premillennialists. John MacArthur is one of them. Darby started this, and the Scofield Bible spread this.

With regard to postmillennialism, it is an error that concerns the 1000 years of Rev. 20. That is the doctrine that Jesus Christ is right now busy making the majority of human beings Christian in all the world, so that for 1000 years this present creation and history will be Christianized. There will be a kind of heaven on earth. When the majority of the world is Christianized, Jesus will then come and Christianity prevails. Christ comes after the millennium. During this millennium, the church will rule the world. Christians will be senators, congressmen, and other political leaders. The whole world will be under the domination of Christianity. So it is also called dominion theology. The origin of this teaching was the Puritans in the 1700s. This doctrine is taught today by a larger number of theologians who are influenced by the Puritans, such as Martyn Lloyd Jones. It is also promoted by Christian reconstructionists such as Gary North.

Premillennialism and postmillennialism do not look ardently for the coming of Jesus Christ, but an earthly kingdom. One of the Jews, and one that Christians will dominate. I submit to you that this is a fundamental error. We must have an ardent expectation of the coming of Jesus Christ, not an earthly kingdom. That is a practical theme of the whole book of Revelation.

Besides, both of these teachings deny that there will be an earthly persecution of the church. Instead, they teach a victory of the Jews and of Christians before Christ returns. They give Christians the impression that there will be no persecution.

Creedal Reformed Christianity is amillennial. We teach that there is no doctrine of an earthly millennium, of an earthly victory of Jesus Christ before the end.

Jesus forewarned us in John 16:33 that in the world we will have tribulation. The comfort is that He has overcome the world. This is the reason for our being of good cheer.

MEDIA ADDICTION

>>Paul Ong

Paul Ong is a confessing young adult in CERC.

History of Media

Media (noun) - A way to communicate information from person to person.

Media is a tool to communicate information from person to person. It can come in many different forms in our day and age. In this article, we shall limit media to the press, audio, and video.

Media with storage and transmission began many years ago: from the carving of God's ten commandments on stone tablets to the invention of the Gutenberg Press in 1450, which God was pleased to use to aid the Protestant reformers in the spread of God's truth when Luther's ninety-five theses were copied and circulated in Europe. The arrival of the Gutenberg Press introduced the era of printed mass media communication that we have today. Unlike the press, television and radios did not begin their development until the 1800s. Radios and televisions enabled audio and video information to be transferred far and wide. The early use of the radio was mainly to maintain contact between ships out at sea in Morse code transmission. However, in 1920, the first public radio broadcast took place. And just two months after the first public broadcast, KDKA aired the first religious service in the history of radio. They also continued with regular Sunday evening service broadcasts through 1962.

The Danger of Media

Media is a tool. And when tools fall into the wrong hands, there can be devastating results. Media is engaging and appealing to our human senses. To top it all off, it has pleasures that please our old man of sin. Satan knows of this great tool, a perfect weapon that can be used against Christians. He has been using this tool to attack and tempt Christians. He holds this

weapon in his hand, prowling around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5:8b). An example would be the release of the novel and film *Fifty Shades of Grey* in recent years. This novel/film is notable for its explicit erotic scenes. Despite the nature of the novel and film, the books have been sold in family-oriented bookstores. The movie posters were widely distributed and could be seen from the many bus stops and malls in Singapore. This is but one of the many attacks of Satan.

Media Addiction

Addiction (noun) - The state of being enslaved to a habit or practice or to something that is psychologically or physically habit-forming to such an extent that its cessation causes severe trauma.

Satan does not just stop at empowering the media with attractive sins that appeal to the lust of the flesh. He also lures unsuspecting victims into media addiction so that the user will forsake his Lord and be a slave to sin.

To be addicted to the media means to be enslaved by it. The addicted person spends a large amount of time with the media at the expense of other callings in life. The user takes pleasure in it, and he cannot do without the media despite the disruptiveness of what excessive media can do.

Media addiction is a serious problem, because usually the users are addicted to media that are sinful in nature, ranging from dramas that are filled with violence and sexual scenes to secular music that promotes immorality.

Those who are addicted spend their days on earth indulging in these media, and they find it hard to stop. They are not able to redeem the time that God has given to them because they are bound by the shackles of the media. Their worldview is shaped by the ungodly media and not by the word of God. They will not be good friends, as they care only for their own pleasure. They cannot fulfil their callings as fathers and mothers because they care more about their TV shows than spending time with their children. And their children will care for the things of the world rather than things that are in heaven.

Social Media Addiction

In recent years, a new form of media addiction has surfaced due to the prevalence of mobile devices and the ability to connect to the internet wherever we are. That is social media addiction. Social media has become increasingly popular among children, youth, and even adults. Many are caught spending their free time browsing through the different social media platforms that are offered on the web instead of doing something else productive. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat are some of the popular social media networks in Singapore.

I vividly remember a scene when I was out for dinner with some of my colleagues after a long day of work. After making our way to the eatery, we settled down into our seats around the table, and almost immediately all of my colleagues started to whip out their mobile phones. They were all engaged on social media; they were either tweeting, Facebooking or VLOG-ing on Instagram. Unfortunately, no conversations were made around a table of eight people, and we had dinner quietly for the rest of the night with everyone's eyes glued to their phones.

The Cure to Addiction and how to Prevent it

The effects of media and social media addiction can be very detrimental to the church. Addiction is like a poison that enslaves us, and only our Lord Jesus Christ, the Great Physician, has the cure. In order to free ourselves from addiction, we have to forsake our pleasures and acknowledge that Christ is our only Lord and we will serve only Him. We were in bondage under the elements of the world, and God has redeemed us (Gal. 4:3). "Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ" (Gal. 4:7). In addition, 1 Peter 5:8 reminds us to be sober and to be vigilant. To be sober means that we have to be conscious of the different media that are exposed to our lives. With a clear and sober mind, we discern the good and the ungodly media with the word of God. When we come across ungodly media, we have to say in our hearts and minds that it is wrong. Not only do we have to say that it is wrong, we have to stay away from it too. This is what it means to be a vigilant Christian – always keeping a careful watch for possible dangers. Fellowshipping together with your church friends can help in dealing with media addiction as well, for they can watch over you. There is strength in a multitude of godly counsel. "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise" (Prov. 13:20a).

Dear friends, let us pray for God's grace to help us to manage media in our lives. Remember, every day requires prayer! (ERP!)

THE NECESSITY OF BEING DISTINCTIVELY REFORMED

>>Rev. Nathan Langerak

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

The editors of *Salt Shakers* asked me to write on the necessity of being Reformed. To treat this subject, it is necessary to define the terms.

Reformed

The first term is *Reformed*, which describes the confession of the truth of scripture as it is summarised in the three forms of unity—the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dordt—which were officially adopted by the Synod of Dordrecht in 1618–19. Included as minor creeds in the Reformed confessions are the doctrinal forms for baptism, confession of faith, Lord's Supper, excommunication, marriage, and the installation of officebearers.

These documents are called *Reformed standards*, creeds, symbols, and confessions. They are called Reformed standards because they are the rule of what is and what is not Reformed and the judge of all doctrinal controversies in Reformed churches. An appeal to the creeds is the end of controversy for the Reformed church and believer. They are called *Reformed creeds*—from the Latin *credo* (I believe) because they are the statement of what every Reformed believer and church believes to be the truth of the word of God. They are called *Reformed symbols*—from the Latin *symbolum* (badge) because like a distinguishing insignia they separate the Reformed believer and church from all others and state what it means to be Reformed. They are called *Reformed confessions*, from the Latin *confessio* (to speak together with) because by means of the creeds believers speak together as members of Reformed churches with Christ and all likeminded Reformed believers. According to scripture, what one believes must be spoken with the mouth:

But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed (Rom. 10:8–11).

These confessions are the standards of unity for Reformed churches, and they state what is necessary for the Reformed believer to believe and a Reformed church to teach in order to be considered Reformed.

In the light of certain controversies, it is necessary to state that there is no room in the Reformed standards—they specifically deny it—for any doctrine of a general favour of God to the elect and reprobate. This has and remains the issue in the controversy over common grace and a conditional covenant. The issue is not whether certain people or churches can find some texts in the Bible that they suppose teach common grace and a conditional covenant. The issue is whether the Reformed creeds teach these things? Are they Reformed according to the creeds? No proof is forthcoming. On the basis of supposed scriptural texts no one has argued that these doctrines should be included in the Reformed creeds.

The Reformed creeds do not teach a general offer of grace and salvation in the preaching of the gospel. They do not teach a general operation of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the reprobate, which restrains sin in them and allows them to do good works in God's eyes. The creeds do not teach a general favour of God expressed toward the unregenerate in giving them rain and sunshine and other gifts of creation. The creeds do not teach a

"The Reformed creeds teach that the grace of God is for the elect only by teaching that the grace of God flows out of election.."

general favour of God in the covenant, by which God gives grace to every baptised child and promises to be the God of every baptised child. Today these false doctrines are all assumed to be Reformed, and those who deny them are set outside the bounds of Reformed orthodoxy or ridiculed for their rejection of them.

The Reformed creeds teach that the grace of God is for the elect only by teaching that the grace of God flows out of election: "Election is the fountain of every saving good, from which proceed faith, holiness, and the other gifts of salvation, and finally eternal life itself, as its fruits and effects" (Canons 1.9).[1] The creeds teach the grace of God for the elect only by teaching that the cross of Christ, which is the ground of every blessing, is for the elect alone: "It was the will of God that Christ by the blood of the cross…should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation" (Canons 2.8). The Reformed creeds, as the standard of what is or is not Reformed, reject the doctrines of general grace as inventions and intrusions into the Reformed confessions and condemn them as false doctrines.

Being Reformed is also to be covenantal in one's doctrine and life. The doctrine of the covenant is more distinctly Reformed than the doctrine of election. The covenant, specifically as the bond of friendship and fellowship between the triune God and His elect people in Christ their Head, is the peculiar heritage of Reformed churches. This doctrine is most simply and beautifully expressed in the Reformed Form for the Administration of Baptism: "God the Father witnesseth and sealeth unto us [by baptism] that he doth make an eternal covenant of grace with us, and adopts us for his children and heirs".

There is also a very important practical element of Reformed orthodoxy—especially Reformed covenantal orthodoxy—in the development of the truth of marriage as a lifelong, unbreakable bond. The Reformed church is always reforming, and this is true with regard to the doctrine of marriage. Marriage was always highly esteemed among the Reformed, even to the point of making its confirmation a part of the worship service. The Reformed, according to scripture, also connected marriage with the truth of God's covenant. For instance, the Form for the Confirmation of Marriage exhorts the husband to love his wife as his own body, "as Christ hath loved his church". The form exhorts the wife to be obedient to her husband, "as the body is obedient to the head, and the church to Christ". And the form calls the marriage bond "a holy state". All these statements allude to the great marriage passage in Ephesians 5:32, where Paul speaks of the "great mystery" of the marriage between Christ and His church. In the Form for the Confirmation of Marriage the Reformed fathers made statements that hint at this later development of the marriage doctrine: "Hear now from the gospel how firm the bond of marriage is, as described in Matthew 19:3–9". In that passage Jesus said, "I say unto you, whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery".

"The Reformed standards are authoritative for the Reformed believer and the Reformed church..."

In practice the Reformed did not carry through the principle that the marriage bond cannot be broken except by death. Later, in connection with the development of the truth of the covenant as unconditional and unbreakable, the truth regarding marriage was also developed, specifically basing this truth on the reality that God's grace toward His people never fails and His covenant is unbreakable. In that light it was seen that the covenant of marriage cannot be broken in this life. A Reformed church today must preach this, and Reformed believers today must believe this and practice it as a development and application of the Reformed truth of God's grace and covenant.

The Reformed standards are authoritative for the Reformed believer and the Reformed church, because in all points of doctrine they do fully agree with the word of God. Every Reformed officebearer swears in the Formula of Subscription: "We heartily believe and are persuaded that all the articles and points of doctrine contained in

[1] Quotations from the creeds and forms are taken from The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005).assigns to each covenant mother what children of God's covenant they must bring forth, and to them He gives this great privilege. Christ determines His "children."

the Confession and Catechism of the Reformed Churches, together with the explanation of some points of the aforesaid doctrine made by the National Synod of Dordrecht, 1618–19, do fully agree with the Word of God".

Because they fully agree with the word of God, the Reformed faith of the forms of unity is not the creed of one nation, tribe, or tongue, but is universal. It is universal because it is the teaching of the word of God, which is universal and holds for all men in all time and places. The authority of the Reformed faith is not derived of itself, by virtue of its antiquity, or because of the theological brilliance of those who wrote the creeds, but its authority is derived from and is dependent on the word of God. The Reformed faith as it is expressed in the three forms can also only be judged by the word of God. To preach it is to preach the word of God. To believe it is to believe the word of God. To confess it is to confess the word of God. To defend it is to defend the word of God.

Reformed is also a church political term. Church polity is as distinctly a Reformed matter as is confession and doctrine. Church polity refers to the organisation and government of the church institute—the local church—in the world. By her unique polity Reformed churches distinguish themselves from all others. The Reformed also highly value this polity as essential for church life. Wrong church polity is the frequent cause, or at least major contributing factor, in doctrinal departure, chaotic church life, and paralysis in the church's work.

"Wrong church polity is the frequent cause, or at least major contributing factor, in doctrinal departure..."

The Reformed themselves stated the source of proper church government: "We believe that this true church must be governed by that spiritual policy which our Lord hath taught us in His Word" (Belgic Confession 30). The policy that must govern the church is not manmade, of man's wisdom, or a matter of convenience, but it is the Lord's and is taught in His word. It is His law and wisdom concerning the organisation of the church as His kingdom in the world. The church ignores it or sets it aside to her ruin. Jesus Christ is the sole king of the church, and His policy is the only policy that may rule in the church. The Reformed summarised this policy as to its main principles and certain practical applications in the Church Order of Dordrecht, which it adopted at the Dordt synod in 1618–19.

The importance of this polity is also expressed by the Belgic Confession in article 30: "By these means [right church government] the true religion may be preserved and the true doctrine everywhere propagated, likewise transgressors punished and restrained by spiritual means; also that the poor and distressed may be relieved and comforted". All the grand and glorious work of the church—also the maintenance and spread of right doctrine—depends on right polity.

"The policy that must govern the church is not manmade..."

Without it the church descends into chaos, ceases to function, and eventually dies.

Being

The second term that is necessary to define is *being*. *Being* Reformed is the issue, that is, whether an individual or a church is Reformed. To be Reformed is not merely a claim or a name, either on the church building or in the name registered with the government. If it is only a name, to be Reformed is nothing but hypocrisy. A church and believer must be what they claim to be.

To be Reformed is not being a certain ethnicity, coming from some nation, or having some racial or national pedigree. *Reformed* is not a parochial or provincial term. Reformed is as universal as the word of God is universal and as applicable to one tribe, nation, and time as it is to another tribe, nation, and tribe. Being Reformed is not having some Reformed doctrines among one's creeds, if there are other doctrines in those creeds that contradict and overthrow them. Reformed is not synonymous with Calvinism, and there is no such thing as a Reformed Baptist.

To be Reformed is not finding support for one's doctrinal or practical positions among certain theologians who

> **"To be Reformed is not merely to have the Reformed creeds as one's official creeds..."**

identify themselves as Reformed. To be Reformed is not being able to speak learnedly of the Reformed tradition, for as highly as it values tradition and as suspicious as it is of anything novel, it values scripture above all else and demands that all things in the church—in doctrine, life, and worship—wholly conform to the word of God. To that end the Reformed faith demands that all conform to the creeds and church order as the faithful summary of the word of God concerning faith, life, and church government.

To be Reformed is not merely to have the Reformed creeds as one's official creeds so that if some churches have the Reformed creeds as their creeds they may uncritically be assumed to be Reformed. If churches have the Reformed creeds as their creeds and by that make the claim that they are Reformed, then that claim may and must be tested as to whether they actually hold to those creeds faithfully.
To be Reformed, then, is to be faithful to the creeds and church order in all things. It is very popular in these ecumenical days—false Reformed ecumenicity—to excuse error in the name of unity by substituting another standard for faithfulness that sounds similar but is fundamentally different. That other standard is faithfulness to one's own tradition, faithfulness to one's own interpretation of the creeds, or faithfulness as far as one's church confesses the creeds. It consists at best in a reduction of the creeds to those doctrines in the creeds that the greatest number of people can agree on, and a willingness to set aside other doctrines in the creeds as less important or non-essential. This erroneous idea of being Reformed leads those who espouse it to speak of lesser Reformed churches and to excuse fellowship with them on the basis that they at least they have the Reformed creeds as their official confession, or are faithful to their church's confession and interpretation of the creeds as far as it goes.

Rather, being Reformed according to the creeds means that there are churches in the world that are truly Reformed according to this standard who faithfully teach and stoutly defend all of their doctrines. It also means that there are churches that apostatize from this standard by approving of doctrines and practices that conflict with the Reformed standards. These are not less faithful, or lesser Reformed churches, but apostatizing and unfaithful Reformed churches, which therefore are not truly Reformed but have departed and are departing from the Reformed faith. The standard, the only standard, is faithfulness to the creeds in their entirety and rejection of all that is contrary to the creeds.

To be Reformed then means heartily to believe and to be persuaded that all the articles and points of doctrine in the creeds fully agree with the word of God. To be Reformed means that one confesses this truth and adorns it with the godly life that it demands and is disposed to defend that truth. To be Reformed means to reject all that is contrary to the creeds and militates against them. For a church to be Reformed means that this doctrine is openly taught, readily received, and faithfully defended in the pulpit.

To be Reformed is also to be organised as a church according to the polity of the Church Order of Dordt. For an individual to be Reformed also means being a member of such a church in the world. The Reformed faith truly becomes a confession—to say with others—only when one confesses it as a member in a true church of Christ where these things are faithfully believed and preached.

Necessity

The final term to define is *necessity*. What is the necessity of being Reformed, Reformed as has been defined here? Is there a necessity to be Reformed, or may an individual pick and choose his confession as a consumer picks his favourite food from the menu? *Necessity* implies an imperative, a demand, or command. For the believer his necessity can only be the word of God. It is necessary in this sense to be Reformed.

> **"The Reformed faith fully agrees with the word of God. "**

> **"The necessity is a matter of faithfulness to her Lord and to the gospel. Rejecting it one hardens himself against Christ."**

The Reformed faith does not come—and no Reformed church may preach it so—as an option, as a system or philosophy that men may take or leave, or alter, add to, or diminish at their pleasure. It comes as the gospel and the very word of God. The Reformed faith fully agrees with the word of God. The Reformed faith comes with the same call as the word of God: believe and thou shalt be saved; and it warns sharply that those who reject it do so at their peril. Departing from the Reformed faith one imperils his own soul and the souls of his generations. A Reformed church that departs from it imperils the souls of all its members and their generations. Believing it one believes the word of God, believes the gospel, and has the promise of salvation and life.

Because the Reformed faith fully agrees with the word of God, knowing and believing these things one knows God in Jesus Christ and that knowledge is eternal life (Jn. 17:3). Being ignorant of these truths one is ignorant of eternal life.

For the Reformed church and believer to be Reformed in confession and polity is necessary as a matter of obedience to her sole king, Jesus Christ. The necessity is a matter of faithfulness to her Lord and to the gospel. Rejecting it one hardens himself against Christ.

The necessity is thus also that being Reformed the gospel governs the whole life of the church and the believer. It is liberty for the church and believer to be ruled by the word of God and not by the word, doctrine, and commandments of men. Therein also she is useful in the maintenance and spread of the gospel, for in maintaining and spreading the Reformed faith, she maintains and spreads the gospel.

Most of all, God revealed these things for His glory; therein is the ultimate reason to be Reformed. It glorifies God in the confession of the truth of God as God himself intended in its revelation. Departing from it one must necessarily say something false about God to the denigration of His name, which for the believer is the most horrible thing imaginable and that at which he shutters. The confession of the Reformed faith, the life of holiness that the Reformed confession demands is the believer's and the Reformed church's *soli Deo gloria*.

About the necessity that compelled him and his fellow believers to be Reformed, the author of the Belgic Confession, Guido de Brès, wrote to their chief persecutor, Philip II, king of Spain:

> *The banishments, prisons, racks, exiles, tortures and countless other persecutions plainly demonstrate that our desire and conviction are not carnal, for we would lead a far easier life if we did not embrace and maintain this doctrine. But having the fear of God before our eyes, and being in dread of the warning of Jesus Christ, who tells us that He shall forsake us before God and His Father if we deny Him before men, we suffer our backs to be beaten, our tongues to be cut, our mouths to be gagged and our whole body to be burnt, for we know that he who would follow Christ must take up his cross and deny himself.*[2]

In the suffering and loss that inevitably followed upon their confession, they comforted themselves—and us—with this comfort that belongs in the final judgment to those who faithfully confess Christ's name in the world: "The faithful and elect shall be crowned with glory and honour; and the Son of God will confess their names before God his Father and his elect angels; all tears shall be wiped form their eyes; and their cause, which is now condemned by many judges and magistrates as heretical and impious, will then be known to be the cause of the Son of God" (Belgic Confession 37).

Let us be boldly, faithfully, and unashamedly Reformed in doctrine, life, and polity.

[2] *Dedicatory Epistle to Reformed Confession of Faith, Addressed to Philip II, 1561*, Trans. Marvin Kamps, Dutch and French versions in *De Nederlandse Belijdenisgeschriften,* ed. J.N. Bakhuizen van den Brink (2nd ed. Amsterdam, 1976 pp. 62-69.

WORKING SMART AND WORKING HARD

>>Patricia Wee

Patricia Wee is a member of CERC.

Preamble

Students need to manage their school work ever more these days as compared to the past. The ever piling up of work from school does not seem to end. The student cries out for more time to finish his work. How about their other responsibilities to church and family? How about time for themselves? School work has become an albatross round your neck that almost consumes your time, leaving little time for other commitments.

It is prudent to consider making your life simple by taking note of how you do things. You can come up with a plan or system to make things more manageable, and therefore not be stunned by all the tasks needed to be completed each day. With time management you can do more even with hectic schedules. By working smart you can get more things done within the allocated time frame or even with **less** time, and working hard sees you through what you have planned, never to give up quickly in the face of obstacles like hardships, frustrations and failures.

Your role as a covenant student is not merely studying for your own sake, because you are aware that you have to walk worthy of your calling (Eph.4:1), doing it heartily as unto God (1 Cor. 10:31). For you are accountable to God on the day of Judgment (Rev. 20:12).

Working Smart:

God has given man 24 hours a day. He has designated everything with a season, time and purpose (Ecc. 3:1). And He makes time fluid such that when it is passed, it is gone. There is no way to rewind the clock. Thus, it is necessary that you manage your time well.

Managing time well is working smart because you get the important things done. This is the key to time management. The benefit of managing time effectively helps to reduce stress and you could do more things each day.

Time management is essentially how you plan and organise your time for the tasks. The emphasis is on quality rather than quantity. It does not mean getting more things done quickly.

Here are some suggestions to help you develop good time management skills.

1. Cultivate good study habits

a. Set aside time to study or do homework each day so it becomes a habit. Turn off your phone and do not respond to calls or texts when you work. Do not check your email or surf the net unless you need them for work.

b. Find a good study area where it is quiet and free from distractions.

c. Be mindful of pockets of time. Your time spent waiting for appointment, taking the train or bus could be the extra time. You could take advantage of that time to review your work or get something done.

d. Find a productive time of day when you would be more efficient in your work.

e. Mark down in your yearly calendar the important fixed dates like scheduled exams, school breaks, holidays, projects, and meetings.

2. Make a to-do list everyday

List out the tasks you want to do for the day. It could include your routines, assignments, errands and study time. Flag the important ones which you need to do first.

3. Don't be afraid to say NO!

It is OK to say 'No' to your friend who asks you out when you have an important task to do. Postpone it to another time when available.

4. Set priorities

a. Budget your time since there is a constraint. Tasks or activities with high priority should be allotted time, such as family, church, spiritual and personal life.

b. You have to determine how much time you have before you add any commitments.

5. Overcome procrastination

Procrastination is one that is difficult to overcome. You may justify yourself by saying: "I work better under pressure." Usually this is an excuse to put off the task. Beat procrastination with effort and start achieving.

6. Study methodology

a) It is necessary to adopt a method of study that is most helpful to you since every student has different leaning styles.

b) Understanding is the key to study (Pro.4:5). It enables you to apply, analyse, synthesize, and evaluate facts and ideas. When learning is enhanced, it becomes meaningful, the information committed to memory will be retained for a longer time. Understanding makes learning stick.

Working Hard:

As you will discover, the easy part is learning the skills but the hard part is doing them.

Working hard is to ensure that you follow through with the plan. You would set out to do what you have planned even when there are setbacks. Managing time can be a grind, becoming tedious, stressful to a point of being discouraging.

Let me share some facts about ants (Pro.6:6-8). We can see many parallels in the ants to draw inspirations.

1. Proactive

Ants live in colonies consisting of millions of individuals. They do not have leaders, moms or dads. Although there is a queen ant which does tell the other ants what to do, every ant knows its own roles and carries out its tasks faithfully.

2. Self-motivated

Ants are able to work together effectively because they all have the same goal. They work for the good and unity of the colony. Although most of the time the larger ants will do the work of a worker ant, they are more effective for fighting. They are self-motivated and purpose-driven. They never quit.

3. Diligent

Ants are industrious – they spent their entire life working. They are always on the move. They take on different roles. A new worker ant spends the first few days of its adult life caring for the queen and young. As it grows, it may then move on to digging and other nest work, and later to defending the nest and foraging. When under attack, more soldiers will be summoned to the defence, leaving their worker roles for the more urgent task.

4. Planners

Ants plan for the future. In summer time they gather food, bring it back to the nest and use it for daily meals. They make sure to store food for winter also.

5. Team spirit

Ants work in teams to move extremely heavy things and to capture prey. Ants can lift 20 times their own body weight. If a worker ant finds a good food source, it leaves a scented trail so that other ants in the colony can locate the food.

Encouragement

To walk worthy is to walk circumspectly, redeeming the time (Eph. 5:15-16). To redeem the time is to walk in Christ. Walking in Christ certainly impacts everything you do – your motivation is Christ, you see your goal in Him, use your gifts and abilities for His glory, and your relationships with others demonstrate empathy, understanding, meekness, and care.

God not only calls, but He also strengthens you and supplies all your needs so that you can fulfil His calling (Phi. 4). Do not fret about the tall order because God through Jesus Christ will see you through until the end of life (Isa. 43:2). He will strengthen you with all might according to His glorious power unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness (Col. 1:10-11).

ISN'T SHE LOVELY?: THE CHURCH

>>Elder Lee Kong Wee

Lee Kong Wee is an elder in CERC.

Introduction

Dear young people, what catches your eye, your attention? Is it that new mobile phone? Or the sleek sports car? Or the attractive young lady or handsome young man? What about the *church*? Yes, the church of Jesus Christ that comprises all the elect people of God gathered infallibly from the beginning to the end of the world. Yes, the local church – CERC – that is a manifestation of the one catholic, invisible church.

Isn't that *church* lovely? Isn't she lovely *to you*?

The Church – Lovely?

When we say that something is lovely, we mean that we are attracted by it. We like it very much. It gives us a good feeling. There is an allure. There is something about it that captivates our heart.

Now apply it to the church. To CERC. Does she attract you? Is there something about her that captivates your heart? Isn't *she* lovely? Well, I won't be surprised if perhaps you hesitated a moment to answer this question. After all, CERC is an imperfect church. *Very* imperfect. You and I who are members of this church know this all too well. We know this by personal experience. I've been hurt, or am hurting now. I've hurt others also. Forgiveness is not forth-coming, and I'm too proud to admit any wrong-doing on my part or at least grant the possibility that I could be at fault – and really mean it. The church does not seem to minister to my needs. Things do not happen the way I think they ought to. We are not zealous enough in evangelism. Fellowship is superficial. Imperfections…we can go on. Essentially, our hesitation in answering the question in the affirmative is because we realise, only too well, that CERC is a *sinful* congregation. Her membership consists of sinners, every one of them without exception. (In fact, anyone who claims to be sinless would not be admitted into her membership.) But especially one particular sinner in her membership causes us to hesitate to say that CERC is lovely – and that is *me* : I am a sinner, the *chief* of sinners in this church. I know my own heart. I see within the pride, hypocrisy, and self-centredness. And I am a member of CERC. Isn't CERC lovely? Admittedly, I struggle to answer, whole-heartedly, "Yes". Even if I can admit she is somewhat lovely, the reality of the sinfulness of every member, and especially my own sinfulness and sin, looms as a large pall that mars her loveliness.

The Church – Lovely!

But make no mistake. The church *is* lovely. CERC *is* lovely. The reason why she is lovely is because she is the church *of Jesus Christ*! That is, she has been redeemed with the precious blood of her Saviour. In and of herself, she is ugly, filthy, unimaginably repulsive (Ezek. 16:2). But because God has sovereignly rescued her from the pit of sin, cleansed her thoroughly, and adorned her with pure white robes of righteousness, she is exceedingly lovely. In the sight of the thrice holy God, she is spotless. Absolutely pure. Not one sin can be found on her record that can be counted against her. Furthermore, not only is she without one droplet of sin, she is filled with righteousness, perfect righteousness. Not her own for sure, but the righteousness of her Saviour that has been "deposited" into her spiritual account so that it becomes hers, counted as hers so that she now stands before the righteous Judge of heaven faultless, righteous, measuring up perfectly to every single demand of the law. Thus saved by God's amazing, sovereign, almighty grace, she is now

"...make no mistake. The church is lovely. CERC is lovely."

> **"Is the church lovely? Then we must love the church!"**

wholly consecrated to the service of her Lord and Saviour, when before she was given over to the service of the devil. She has been made holy.

That the church is holy and without sin, in principle, is a matter of faith, altogether apart from the fact that she is still sinful while on this earth. We confess this when we make confession with our hearts and mouths that article of the Apostles' Creed: "I *believe* an *holy* catholic church." Just as I believe from my heart that "though my conscience accuse me that I have grossly transgressed all the commandments of God, and kept none of them, and am still inclined to all evil; notwithstanding, God, without any merit of mine, but only of mere grace, grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ; even so, as if I never had had nor committed any sin: yea, as if I had fully accomplished all that obedience which Christ has accomplished for me" (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 60). So we believe the church is holy, for every elect member of the church is holy, freely and fully justified by grace alone. When I look on the church through the eyes of faith, I see a pure and spotless congregation.

As the church of Jesus Christ, bought with His blood, she is holy. And because she is holy, she is lovely. The adornment of holiness makes the church lovely. That the church is holy means that she looks like Jesus Christ! And there is none more lovely than Christ Himself, Who is the Holy One, the Lamb without blemish! Because the church is conformed to the image of her Head, she too is lovely! "*Thou art fair, my love*," Christ says to the church, "*behold, thou art fair*" (Song of Sol. 4:1). As the body and bride *of Christ*, made holy, she is a stunning beauty to behold, lovely beyond compare. For in her we see Christ.

Our Response

Is the church lovely? Then we must love the church! That means we love the brother or sister who is sinful and perhaps has offended or hurt us. We forgive them, for love covers a multitude of sins (1 Pet. 4:8). Love "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things" (1 Cor. 13:7). Moreover, if God has forgiven me, the chief of sinners, of my greater offence against Him, how can I not forgive my brother who has sinned far less against me (Eph. 4:32)? Do we mean what we say when we pray, "*Forgive us our debts, **as we forgive our debtors***"?

> **"Is the church lovely? Then we must repent of our lack of love for her."**

We show our love for the church also by serving her with our talents and our time, spending ourselves and being spent for her (2 Cor. 12:15). The words of the song-writer echo within our hearts:

I love thy kingdom, Lord,
The house of Thine abode,
The Church our blest Redeemer saved
With His own precious blood.

I love Thy Church, O God!
Her walls before Thee stand
Dear as the apple of Thine eye,
And graven on Thy Hand.

For her my tears shall fall,
For her my prayers ascend,
To her my cares and toils be giv'n,
Till toils and cares shall end.[1]

Is the church lovely? Then we must repent of our lack of love for her. We must repent when we love ourselves more than we love her, when we think the church exists to serve us, when we think lowly or lightly of her, when our love for her waxes cold and we do not prefer her above our chief joy (Ps. 137:6). If the church is the apple of God's eye, ought she not also be the apple of our eye?

Conclusion

Look at the church. Look at CERC. Isn't she lovely? Look at her with the eyes of *faith*. Look at her as the church *of Jesus Christ*. Then, you will say, whole-heartedly, "YES! She *is* lovely!!"

[2] Timothy Dwight (1800), I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord (http://hymnary.org/text/i_love_thy_kingdom_lord#authority_media_flexscores).

MONEY

>>Eric Lanning

Eric Lanning is a youth in CERC.

Take a look around your house, flat, or condo. Probably everything you see was bought with money. Money is something necessary in life. It probably would not be too much of an exaggeration to say that we would die without money. God gives us money to buy everything we need to live. If we have no money, we have no food or water, no clothes, and no place to stay.

The Bible mentions money in a few places. In Bible times money was measured in mites, farthings, shekels, and talents. Naaman wanted to give money to Elisha to heal him (2 Kings 5). Solomon's kingdom was very rich (1 Kings 10). In Bible times, if you did not have enough money to pay debts, you could be forced to pay with your children.

"They mistakenly think money brings happiness."

As Christians, we need to be careful with how we view money. We should not view money as the world does. For many people, their main goal in life is to get a successful job and earn as much money as they can. They mistakenly think money brings happiness. Sometimes they judge people by the wealth that they have. A sad practice in the world today is for parents to put their children in daycare so that the mom can go to work and earn a few extra dollars. They neglect their children for money.

On the contrary, we as Christians should not have our main goal in life to be the pursuit of earthly wealth, but instead the pursuit of spiritual riches. We have to be careful not to make money an idol and love it more than God. In fact, our wealth should not even be a major concern in our life, as God provides for our needs. Matthew 6:31-32: "Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things". We should be content with what God has given to us. "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" (Pro. 30:8-9).

"He has given us all spiritual riches, and one way in which we show thanks to Him is by giving liberally for the causes of His kingdom."

1 Timothy 6:10 tells us that the love of money is the root of all evil. That does not mean that without money there would be no evil, but that the love of money leads to all different kinds of evils. Some of the sins it leads to are greed and lying, as in the case of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5). Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus because he loved money. He was given 30 pieces of silver to betray Christ (Matt. 26:14-16). A couple other evils the love of money can lead to are usury and receiving bribes. When Jesus rose from the dead, the elders of the city gave money to the soldiers as a bribe to say that the disciples had stolen His body (Matt. 28:11-15). Psalm 15 speaks of those who may dwell in God's holy hill. In the four verses listing requirements to abide in God's tabernacle, two of those requirements have to do with money. We may not put out our money to usury (loan it at excessive interest rates) or take bribes ("taketh reward against the innocent," vs. 5).

However, money does not always lead to these sins. It can be used for very good purposes. Every Sunday we put some money into the offering bag to support the minister, our missionary, our seminary student, and the poor, as well as to pay for our church activities. We can do this even if we are poor and do not have enough money, as Christ teaches us in Mark 12:41-44, in the story of the widow who cast two mites into the treasury, although that was all she had.

We should give cheerfully, as 2 Corinthians 9:7 says: "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver". We should give generously, remembering how much God has given to us. In 2 Corinthians 8:9 we read, "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich". He has given us all spiritual riches, and one way in which we show thanks to Him is by giving liberally for the causes of His kingdom.

We are called to be good stewards of the money God has given us. God has given us many things, and we should use them wisely. He is the owner of all things (Ps. 24:1; 50:10-12) and has committed some of it to us for our care. He commands us to be faithful with that which He has given to us (1 Cor. 4:2). Popular activities in the world are betting, gambling, and buying lottery tickets. These are examples of bad stewardship, of an unwise use of the money God has given to us. One way to be a good steward is to save our money for things we might need later in life. We do this realising that God is in control of our future, but we may plan ahead for things that may happen in His providence.

A popular gospel today is the health and wealth gospel, which says that God blesses us with health and earthly riches when we are good Christians. This is a false teaching, as God does not give wealth to reward us. Our hope as Christians is not that we become healthy and wealthy, but that we have spiritual riches and an eternal inheritance. We must not forget that although money is important, it cannot pay for everything. Only Christ's blood can pay for our sins and give us salvation.

Remembering 500 Years of the 1517 Reformation

Polycarp's Quote:

"I have served Him for eighty-six years and He has never done me any wrong. Why then should I blaspheme against my King and Saviour?...I bless thee for deigning me worthy of this day and this hour that I may be among Thy martyrs and drink of the cup of my Lord Jesus Christ…"

Polycarp's answer when he was put on trial by the Romans and an excerpt of his final prayer on the burning stake

Source: Portraits of Faithful Saints by Prof. Herman Hanko

News from the Churches

Singapore

CERC's annual Church Camp was held from 12 - 15 June at Awana Genting. Pastor Andy Lanning gave four messages on the theme "Zion Founded On The Mountains". Apart from the messages, there were also group discussions, games, and time for fellowship during free time and over meals. Seven Americans from the PRCA joined the camp as well: Lydia Smits, Cobie Lenting, Monica Koole, Bruce and Emily Feenstra, and Brian and Rachel Buiter. We thank God for this opportunity to fellowship with saints from our sister churches.

The Covenant Keepers/Covenant Keepers Senior (CK/CKS) June retreat was held from 24 - 26 June at Changi Cottage, with the theme of the speeches being "The God of Zion's Youth". Pastor Andy Lanning was unable to speak in person at the retreat as he was representing CERC at the PRCA Synod. Instead, the youth watched the speeches that Pastor recorded on video beforehand. The Buiter siblings were able to attend this retreat as well.

At the CERC Annual Congregational Meeting on 24 June, the following men were elected to the following offices: Bro. Lim Seow Thong (Elder), Bro. Chew Lap Meng (Elder), and Bro. Lee Meng Hsien (Deacon). These brothers will be installed on 16 July, Lord willing. We thank God for providing and equipping men to serve His flock, and remember them in our prayers.

Philippines

From 7 - 10 July, a delegation of the Classis of the PRCP visited the Protestant Reformed Fellowship in Albuera, Leyte to further evaluate the possibility of the PRFA being a mission field of the PRCP.

Seminarian Matt Kortus and his wife Sarah arrived near the beginning of July and are currently visiting the Philippines mission field for eight weeks in order to experience and be involved in missionary work.

Rev. Daniel and Sharon Kleyn will be having a four-week furlough in the USA during the month of August, during which time Rev. Kleyn will give various presentations and also one of the speeches at the Protestant Reformed Young People's Convention.

United States

Rev. Doug Kuiper accepted the call to serve as Professor of Church History and New Testament Studies at the Protestant Reformed Seminary. We thank God for providing a man to serve in this position. Remember Rev. Kuiper and his family as well as Edgerton PRC as they prepare to make this transition.

At the CERC Annual Camp 2017, which had as its theme, "Zion Founded on the Mountains"

Group discussions were held after each of the four church camp speeches

Playing "crab soccer" at the CKCKS (young people's) retreat

More games!
Loser of mental sums gets splashed in the face

The young people of CERC, along with Brian and Rachel Buiter, at the CKCKS retreat

Farewell Sunday for our American visitors, who got to savour a local dish for every question answered wrongly

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

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

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

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