"Because of the absence of God in the heart of environmentalism, there is a tendency for it to become radicalised like political movements."
— Lim Ruoxi in Going Green in the Right Direction

"Having zeal for God is bound up with being deeply interested in the church of God and her ministry and her service of the Lord in the world and the cause of Christ's kingdom which she represents." *— Rev. den Hartog in Godly Zeal in the Second Generation*

"Romans 1:26-27 is emphatic that homosexuality (both lesbianism and sodomy) is not natural."
— Rev. Angus Stewart in Homosexuality: What Does the Bible Teach?

salt shakers

joel 3:16 matthew 5:16

Issue 54 | Apr 2019





"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom..."
PROVERBS 9:10





MCI (P) 011/09/2017

CONTENTS

Giants Contending for the Faith	3	Godly Zeal in the Second Generation (2)	12
Wisdom (2): Wisdom and the Tongue	5	Fellowship and the Incarnation	15
Heroes of Faith: Barak	6	How the Reformed Faith Arrived in Kolkata	17
Homosexuality: What Does the Bible Teach? (2)	8	News from the Churches	19
Going Green in the Right Direction	10		

WELCOME TO THE 54TH ISSUE OF SALT SHAKERS!

Dear readers,

As you recall, January's issue was released rather late. Instead of releasing this issue in March, the committee has decided to keep to the two-month gap in-between issues. So be sure to look out for our magazine in June, August, October, and December!

Returning to this issue, you will find Rev. Stewart continuing his series on homosexuality. In this instalment, he expounds on Romans 1:26-27—specifically, the natural use of sex. The explanation is insightful; however, some readers might find its open reference to sexual organs too explicit for younger readers to read.

To be sure, instruction about sex to our children and youth must be done appropriately; the editorial staff is convinced Rev. Stewart's instruction is appropriate.

Let's remember that the world, from sheer vulgarities to unbiblical connotations of filth when discussing anything sexual, has corrupted sex. In our day and age, we hardly see this spiritual state improving; as the salt of this earth, what is our response? Surely not to remain silent. We publish Rev. Stewart's article as a summary of our belief on sex; and, as Reformed readers, we receive the article with a desire to grow in a true knowledge of sex and to witness to others what God says.

Then go back to the spiritual decline of the world. Consider how much our children and youth, in the above-described world, are increasingly exposed to a corrupted view of sex. The government has been pressured in recent years to legitimise homosexuality; one can imagine how our government-controlled public education on sex would feel this pressure as well. Alongside public education, the student body is degrading into a promiscuous generation that incites our covenant seed to every possible form of sexual filth. Not expecting our public education to teach the Reformed, Christian, biblical view of sex, we welcome frank, sound instruction on sex. Fellow parents under baptismal vows, and fellow members who witnessed those vows: Let's teach our children and youth what sex truly is.

Now, surely, we should not hand our children and youth this article and say, "Here, read it," and call it a day. *That*, not the article itself, is inappropriate and insufficient. Parents, give them the article with words along these lines, "Here, read it: Let's talk about it during devotions". Members, use the article as a transition from a casual conversation to godly fellowship. Guide one another, at home and in church, to see God's glory in the creation of sex. With wisdom, use the article for everyone's profit.

In other words, pass this salt!

Your servant in Christ,
Yang Zhi

GIANTS CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH

>> Aaron Lim



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

Introduction

There is a scourging lack of sharp polemics in Reformed periodicals and journals today. Reformed writers are averse to writing sharply against false doctrines that assault the truth and the church of Jesus Christ. Reformed writers fear that if they were to write sharply against false doctrines and name those who teach false doctrines, they will be labelled as radicals who believe that theirs is the only true church. Reformed writers fear to write sharp polemics out of fear that that they will be accused of pride and arrogance.

In two professors we have outstanding examples of what it means to contend earnestly for the faith. These two professors are never afraid to write sharply against false doctrines and heretics on behalf of the truth. Their writings and their style of writing are not popular today. Some would say that their style of writing is harsh and unloving. Many would label them as radicals.

These two men lived through the controversy that engulfed the PRC in 1953. They knew from personal experience the deceitfulness of the lie and its devastating consequences on the truth and the lives of God's people. In times of desperate necessity when the truth was at stake, these two men rose up to defend the truth. They were not afraid of being slandered as radicals. They contended earnestly for the faith, confessing that God's truth is above all.

Professor Herman Hanko

Prof. Herman Hanko was the former professor of Church History and New Testament studies at the Protestant Reformed Seminary. In his years of studying church history, he recognised that controversies frequently confront the true church of Jesus Christ. In his book on heretics in the church, Prof. Hanko writes that controversies "are frequently present in the church of Christ because the church is called to fight the good fight of faith in defense of the truth of Scripture"[1]. But the "salvation of the church lies in her intolerance—intolerance of all that is contrary to God's truth in Christ"[2]. "When the truth of God is at stake, one ought to defend that truth with vigor and enthusiasm—even if one must suffer for it."[3] "In times of apostasy, the church needs trumpet blasts, sharp unambiguous language, men willing to "say it as it is," fearless men who love God and his word above all else".[4]

Along with controversies, there are also heretics who are present in the church. Prof. Hanko defines a heretic as "one who teaches doctrines contrary to those that have been officially established by the church as the truth of Scripture"[5]. A heretic is often not one who *outrightly* contradicts the Scriptures and the Reformed confessions. A heretic does not introduce his false doctrines by announcing to the church that he is intent on contradicting the church's confessions. Rather, Prof. Hanko points out that heretics

> *attempt to clothe their erroneous positions in ambiguous language and outwardly orthodox language. Their motive is deception. They attempt to present aberrations from the faith as genuine Reformed doctrine. They plea that they are simply stating old truths in new and fresh ways, or that they are giving the people of God fresh and innovative insights into long-cherished doctrines. But they lie.* [6]

In his commentary on Galatians, Prof. Hanko explains that another tactic used by heretics is to attack the credibility of those who stand for the truth.

> *Heretics throughout history, attempting to introduce false doctrine into the church of Christ, frequently have used the same or similar tactics. Rather than attack the truth head on—something too obviously wrong to be deceiving—they attack the credibility of the leaders in the church. Heretics may say that these men are old, decrepit, and unsound of body and mind. Or they may brand the defenders of the truth as narrow-minded,*

[1] Herman Hanko, *Contending for the Faith: The Rise of Heresy and the Development of the Truth*, (Jenison: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2010), 53.

[2] Hanko, *Contending for the Faith*, 21.

[3] Hanko, *Contending for the Faith*, 106.

[4] Hanko, *Contending for the Faith*, 158.

[5] Hanko, *Contending for the Faith*, 49.

[6] Hanko, *Contending for the Faith*, 225-6.

> *intolerant, sectarian, promoters of ideas that have no sanction of most of the church world.* [7]

The true church of Jesus Christ and faithful ministers of the gospel may not tolerate false doctrine. There "is no room in Scripture for tolerance of wrong doctrine. A faithful minister and church are intolerant of corruptions of the truth, for these are corruptions of the truth of the God whom the saints love and serve"[8]. Today, there is the thinking that one may compromise the truth in a certain aspect, but still continue as a member or an office-bearer in good standing. Prof. Hanko has this to say about those who compromise the truth: "Sad to say, the church has always been plagued with these great compromisers. They are almost more dangerous than outright heretics, for they sell the truth under the guise of toleration, love for brethren, and desire to be known as peacemakers"[9].

Standing boldly for the truth will mean suffering. It will bring scorn and ridicule from those inside and outside the church. Prof. Hanko assures Reformed believers that when "we suffer for Christ's sake because we represent his cause in the world and his truth over against the lie, there is profit"[10].

Professor David Engelsma

Another stalwart defender of the truth in the PRC is Prof. David Engelsma, former professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament studies at the Protestant Reformed Seminary. He is well-known for developing the truths of God's unconditional covenant, marriage, and the doctrine of the church in relation to church membership.

Much of what appears in Reformed periodicals and journals is heavily nuanced to avoid offending those who teach false doctrine. Rarely is a false prophet named. Reformed writers believe the seductive lie that they ought only to be positive in their writing, and never to be critical, or that it is wise not to offend. The result is that God's people believe that there is no need to guard the truth jealously. Prof. Engelsma never nuanced his writings against those who teach false doctrine. Concerning nuancing, he writes:

> *I confess at the outset that I have the strongest aversion to "nuancing"—the word and the activity. "Nuancing" in contemporary theology is the activity of so qualifying, modifying, limiting, moderating, and mitigating a doctrine or an ethical precept that what remains is a pathetic, puny thing, not worthy of one's life-and-death stand on its behalf. "Nuancing" is the affliction of the scholars, who generally prove to be of little help in the great struggle of the church for the defense of the faith in these last days.*[11]

Prof. Engelsma explains the reason why we must be intolerant of false doctrine in the church:

> *For God's gracious deliverance of his church from that misery, we ought to be grateful. In our gratitude, we ought to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3). We must be intolerant of every error and departure, especially the errors and departures that compromise the gospel of salvation by sovereign, particular grace.*[12]

During his decades as editor of the *Standard Bearer*, Prof. Engelsma displayed a courageous stand for the truth. He guarded the truth jealously on behalf of the PRC. Before he gave up his position as the editor of the *Standard Bearer,* Prof. Engelsma warned that the magazine "is not, and the magazine may not be, loosely Christian or generally Reformed"[13]. The *Standard Bearer* "fights with the Word of God, and with the confessions…The sword of the *Standard Bearer* is sharp. In its controversy with doctrinal and ethical evil, it is uncompromising"[14]. The *Standard Bearer* is "not a slick, friendly, positive, harmless magazine. It is not a magazine that tries to please everybody and tries equally hard to offend nobody"[15]. The "editor of the *Standard Bearer* must be polemical. He must be a fighter, regardless whether this is naturally his character. For this he is most severely criticized, even hated"[16]. "Cursed be the editor of a Reformed publication, particularly the *Standard Bearer,* that does the fighting work of the Lord negligently. And cursed be the editor that keeps back his pen, which is mightier than the sword, from blood."[17]

[7] Herman Hanko, *Justified unto Liberty*, (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2011), 15.

[8] Hanko, *Justified unto Liberty,* 43.

[9] Hanko, *Contending for the Faith,* 169.

[10] Hanko, *Justified unto Liberty*, 184.

[11] David Engelsma, *Bound to Join*, (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2010), 123.

[12] Engelsma, Bound to Join, 127.

[13] David Engelsma, *The Standard Bearer,* March 1, 2005, 250.

[14] Engelsma, *The Standard Bearer*, March 1, 2005, 250.

[15] Engelsma, *The Standard Bearer*, March 1, 2005, 250.

[16] Engelsma, *The Standard Bearer*, March 1, 2005, 250-1.

[17] Engelsma, *The Standard Bearer*, March 1, 2005, 251.

Conclusion

Professors Hanko and Engelsma took seriously their calling as professors of theology to "expound the Holy Scriptures and to vindicate sound doctrine against heresies and errors" (Church Order, Article 18). They are stalwart defends of the Reformed faith. They love the truth and defend it at all costs. It is deplorable that some in the Reformed church world would scorn at their courageous stand for the truth.

The scores of books and articles that these two professors have written are sources of powerful, solidly Reformed instruction to every believer. It is critical that in these last days, where compromisers are aplenty, that Reformed office-bearers and members take heed to their instruction.

When God's people contend earnestly for the faith by searching deeper into the Scriptures to develop the truth over against false doctrines, God blesses their efforts. He causes them to grow in godliness and holiness. He blesses them and their children in their generations. He sees to it that His church remains and grows as a powerful witness to the truth.

WISDOM (2): WISDOM AND THE TONGUE

>>Prof. Herman Hanko



Prof. Herman Hanko is a professor emeritus of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary.

The gift of speech given to man by God is a wonderful gift. We scarcely think about it, for it is a normal part of life. Yet it occupies an important part of Scripture especially in Proverbs and James. It is usually referred to in Scripture by the word "tongue".

Speech is so important because it makes communication possible — communication between person and person; but also communication between God and man. Already in Paradise, God and Adam talked together: God gave Adam commands concerning the two trees. God put in the midst of the garden (Gen. 2:16-17); when Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden tree, God talked with them to pronounce on them the sentence of death (Gen. 3:9-19); but God also brought in speech the sweet promise of a Saviour who would crush the head of Satan (Gen. 3:15).

Throughout the 4000 years of divine revelation, God spoke to His people and His people spoke to Him. That is, the tongue became the instrument of covenant fellowship between God and His people. And thus, with the tongue, the saints had fellowship among themselves and enjoyed the gift of the communion of saints.

Without the gift of speech, all these things would be impossible.

The spoken word is so powerful that God has chosen it as a means of saving fallen men, for it is by the spoken gospel that the elect are brought to faith in Christ. The word of salvation is powerful beyond belief. It is able, through the spoken word and by the Spirit, to change thieves and murderers into the most glorious of saints. In fact, so powerful is the word that God speaks that by it. God called the whole creation into existence and now upholds and governs it by His providence (Ps. 19).

It is with the use of the tongue that we bring praise to God, bless His holy name and even bring our griefs and sorrows to Him in prayer: wonder of wonders, He hears and answers.

A world without speech (the use of the tongue) is impossible to imagine.

But the greater the power, the greater the sin that is committed by it. Read James 3. James spares no words as he lashes out at our horrible misuse of the tongue. And what a terrible power it is in its sinful use. Yet we cannot control it. We are able to control a horse, far bigger and far stronger than we, by a small bit in its mouth. A helmsman on board a huge ship can control the direction of the whole ship with a small wheel. But though our tongues are small, they carry a power so great that the tongue leaves devastation and destruction in its wake.

The tongue is used to promote false propaganda (as in Hitler's rule) that left Europe in smoldering ashes and millions dead. The tongue of "learned" professors and scientists has been used to convince the whole world of evolutionism (a stupid theory) that denies God and His word.

The tongue destroys marriages, ruins the

lives of children, and inspires adultery and fornication of every conceivable kind. A backbiting and gossiping tongue commits a murder of another person whose death is worse than being blown to bits by a shotgun. And worse of all, the tongue is used to bring false doctrine and worldliness into the church so that countless churches have become "synagogues of Satan".

The tongue is used to make right to be wrong and wrong to be right in a sin-riddled world. It is used to destroy the truth, introduce heresy into the walls of the church, cheat others of wealth and reputation, gain places of influence in prestigious circles and make governments corrupt and wholly untrustworthy.

Wisdom! That is the principle thing. And the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

There is only one power in heaven and on earth that can curb and control that little pesky, deceitful and murderous part of our body called the tongue. That power is the power of God's grace. And, let it never be forgotten, the grace that can control a wagging and murderous tongue is the Word of God made flesh: "In the beginning was the **Word**. And the **Word** was with God, and the **Word** was God… And the **Word** became flesh and dwelt among us…. " Christ is God's **Word**! Christ is God's Word for Christ is the one through whom God reveals Himself. He reveals Himself by speaking. And His speech is recorded in Scripture.

Christ, the living and eternal Word of God, gives us His Spirit of grace that can control our tongues and turn them into tools of great blessedness.

Wisdom is the spiritual ability to apply God's word (a word of God imbedded in the Scriptures, which is "profitable for doctrine, reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work" (2 Tim. 3:15-16).

When we apply wisely the Scriptures to our life, the tongue becomes a powerful instrument for good in the lives of God's people. It is used for witnessing to the truth we love; it can be and is used to comfort our fellow saints in their sorrows and so help them by bearing part of their burden; to admonish those who stray and urge them to return to the path of righteousness; to encourage the faltering in their calling and in their responsible positions in the church. We can teach our children the ways of the Lord and help them to live in this world as covenant children. It is by the use of the tongue that this is accomplished.

We can tear down or build up. We can destroy or save. We can murder our fellow saint with gossip or help him or her in their difficult calling. We can cheat or be honest. We can be foul-mouthed and speak dirty stories, or we can speak a word of peace to the troubled.

James says that he who can control his tongue is able also to control his own body. Think of it. If we would control our tongues to speak only what is pleasing to God, we could refrain from sin which so easily become a part of our lives.

What are we? Foolish? Wise? God grant us wisdom in the use of our tongues.

HEROES OF FAITH: BARAK

>>Prof. Herman Hanko

And what shall I more say? For the time would fail me to tell of . . . Barak. Hebrews 11:32

Read: Judges 4-5

Barak is mentioned among the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11. It is of some comfort to the child of God that he too (along with Samson) is added to the roll call of heroes. Barak was undoubtedly a child of God who did not serve idols as so many of his fellow citizens did. He mourned the sad state of the nation which was the church of the Old Testament. He did not dare to go to battle unless Deborah went with him. His faith was weak; and from it we who also struggle with a weak faith may take comfort. God also can and does use us in our weaknesses.

That Deborah was judge was in itself an indication of the sad religious state of the nation. While a judge was not actually a king, he was close to being a king and ruled as leader in that part of Canaan in which he lived. Because only men are called by God to positions of rule in His church, the fact that Deborah occupied this position was an anomaly and actually a violation of God's creation edict. It was tantamount to having a woman as minister, or elder. or deacon in the church today.

The Bible tells us of only two instances of a woman occupying a place of rule in the church: Deborah and Hulda the prophetess who was present in Judah in the days of king Josiah (2 Chron. 34:19-28).

The question has often come up: Why did God put a woman in office? In the apostate church these two instances of a woman in a position of authority are used as proof for women in ecclesiastical positions of authority in our days.

But they are God's exceptions to God's rule. The Lord put these two women of whom Scripture speaks in an office in the church because there were no qualified men. They were a shame upon the nation. The only person in Deborah's day to lead and judge the nation was a woman; and the presence of the prophetess in Judah during Josiah's days showed Israel that, in spite of a good king, Israel had transgressed so terribly that only a woman could be found to bring the word of God. The men were not able to do this, or refused to do it.

The same is true today. Those churches who put women in office are really saying that there are no qualified men to fill a position that, by God's ordinance, belongs only to men. We must be thankful that our churches have an abundance of qualified men to serve in the offices of pastor, elder and deacon.

At the same time, when only women can be found with the qualifications of church office, men ought to be ashamed of themselves that they have not laboured hard in their desire to be an elder (1 Tim. 3:1) to make themselves qualified for the office.

At the same time, Scripture points us to the fact that often, when a church apostatizes, God preserves His church by means of women. The list is long and the deeds of faithful women are imposing. Sarah is mentioned in Hebrews 11 as conceiving her child at ninety years old by faith.

Rebekah, though she used a trick, believed that Jacob, not Esau, was the promised seed, for God had said this.

Hannah wanted so badly to be a part of those mothers who brought forth the Christ that she prayed earnestly for a child when her husband, Elkanah, had no sense of her agony at all and could not understand why she was so sad. He, indifferent to God's promise, was an example of the nation's spiritual lethargy. When she did receive Samuel from the Lord, she sang a song that is in many ways the same song Mary sang when she learned she was pregnant with Christ.

Jehoshabeath had the courage of faith when all the men dared not stand against wicked Athaliah who killed all the royal seed. She rescued Joash and, at the risk of her life, hid him in the temple six years (2 Chron. 22:10-12).

To make the list no longer, women took care of our Lord while He was on earth. They provided for His earthly needs. Mary who anointed Jesus' feet did so because she alone believed in Christ's death and resurrection (John 12:7). It was not to men, not even the disciples, but to women to whom Jesus revealed Himself after his resurrection.

If you read my book *Portraits of Faithful Saints*, you cannot help but be struck by the fact that many of the great heroes of faith in the new dispensation church had godly and pious mothers.

That church with such godly and pious mothers is blessed. And though often unappreciated by us, have a special place in heaven reserved for them.

God underscored the significance and importance of women when he told Barak that the glory of victory would go to women rather than men (Judges 4:8). And so it did.

Barak was a man of faith, but his faith was weak. He had the sense to see that Deborah's faith was stronger than his; and so he refused to go unless Deborah went with him.

Both their faiths were fastened on the promise of God that He would send Christ to Israel who would deliver them from sin, death and hell. But Barak did not, as Gideon, believe that the enemy would be overcome by God's power alone. After all, Sisera, the captain of the Canaanites, had 900 chariots and Israel had none, not even horses to ride into battle. He was scared.

Does not that sound like us? When we face an enemy who threatens us? At work? In our daily life? When we contemplate the great persecution that will come upon the church?

It is interesting that not only did the glory of victory go to Deborah, but it also went to Jael, a most remarkable woman. She was not even an Israelite: although she did have a distant tie to the nation. She was a descendant of Jethro, Moses' father-in-law. Some of Jethro's descendants had lived among the Israelites, and some of them were worshippers of Jehovah (Judges 4:10-11). Heber is another name for Jethro, and his descendants were known as the

Kenites.

Jael had more faith than Barak, for it took a great faith to believe that God would give Israel the victory to do what she did. She took a tent stake and went to Sisera while he was sleeping and drove the tent stake through his temples. I do not know whether I would have dared to do it.

She is celebrated in Deborah's song. The song, with its deadly irony, has always given me the shivers, although it speaks of God's terrible wrath against the ungodly.

> *Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent. He asked water, and she gave him milk; she brought forth butter in a lordly dish. She put her hand to the nail, and her right hand to the workman's hammer; and with the hammer she smote Sisera, she smote off his head, when she had pierced and stricken through his temples.*
>
> *At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down; at her feet he bowed, he fell: where he bowed, there he fell down dead.*

And then this:

> *The mother of Sisera looked out at a window, and cried through the lattice, why is his chariot so long in coming? Why tarry the wheels of his chariot? Her wise ladies answered her, yea, she returned answer to herself. Have they not sped? Have they not divided the prey? To every man a damsel or two; to Sisera a prey of divers colours, a prey of divers colours of needlework, of divers colours of needlework on both sides, meet for the necks of them that take the spoil?*

And then this!

So let all thine enemies perish, O LORD: but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might. – And the land had rest forty years.

HOMOSEXUALITY: WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH? (2)

>>Rev. Angus Stewart



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

For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet (Rom. 1:26-27).

Key Scriptural Text

Within the inner circle or bullseye of texts on homosexuality, Romans 1:26-27 is rightly accorded centre spot. First, it is in the *New* Testament, so it is more difficult to dismiss than verses in the Old Testament. Second, Romans 1:26-27 is the Bible's most explicit, comprehensive and detailed text on homosexuality, so it is tougher to "wrest" or torture it so as to get it to say what the ungodly want it to say (2 Pet. 3:15), though many have tried long and hard.

Let us begin by identifying the sin that is spoken of in Romans 1:26-27. First, this iniquity is committed by women (v. 26) and by men, i.e., males (Greek *arseen*; v. 27). Second, this transgression is in the sexual sphere, with "vile affections" (v. 26) and "lusts" (v. 27) involving "men with men" (v. 27) and women with women (v. 26). Indeed, Romans 1:26-27 is evinced by the Holy Spirit as an awful instance of the divine punishment upon idolaters (vv. 21-23, 25): "God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves" (v. 24).

In other words, Romans 1:26-27 speaks of both lesbianism, the homosexuality of females ("For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature"), and sodomy, the homosexuality of males ("And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet").

This highlights another important feature of Romans 1:26-27: it specifically

addresses lesbianism (and not only sodomy). This is the only passage in the Bible that directly speaks about female homosexuality. A significant factor in the rarity of Scripture's explicit references to lesbianism is the fact that, in the ancient world and even today, lesbianism occurs less frequently than sodomy. Thus Romans 1 underscores the depravity of idolaters who suppress or hold down the truth of God the Creator (vv. 18f.) in that "*even their women* did change the natural use into that which is against nature" (v. 26).

"Against Nature"

Romans 1:26-27 is emphatic that homosexuality (both lesbianism and sodomy) is not natural. As opposed to the "natural use" between a man and a woman (vv. 26, 27), lesbianism is "against nature" (v. 26), as is sodomy or "men with men" (v. 27).

What does "nature" mean here? "Nature" in Romans 1:26-27 especially speaks of the male or female sexual anatomy or genitals. The male phallus and the female vagina are functionally compatible in terms of size and shape, etc. This complementarity between the male and female sex organs is physical, and mutually and pleasurably stimulating, for sex in marriage is a good gift from God (1 Cor. 7:3-5).

"Nature" in Romans 1:26-27 also includes the fact that the male sex organ produces sperm (seed) and the female sex organ produces the ovum (egg) so that together they constitute the two parts needed for procreation, the producing of children.

Thus "nature" here refers to the way God created us as humans: as male and female, with sexually compatible genitals and thus the capacity for procreation (Gen. 1:27-28; 5:2-4; Ps. 128:3; Mal. 2:15; Matt. 19:4-5; Mark 10:6-8). All this occurs, of course, within the framework of a man and a woman in marriage with all their complementarity: emotionally and socially, with the husband as the loving head and the wife as the submissive help, and both fitted or designed for each other under the living God (Prov. 5:18-19; 1 Cor. 11:11-12; Eph. 5:22-33; 1 Tim. 2:15; Titus 2:4-5).

Homosexuality, on the other hand, is "against nature". The sexual anatomy of two lesbians is not functionally compatible and they cannot procreate together. Likewise, the sexual anatomy of two sodomites is not functionally compatible and they cannot procreate together.

Holy Scripture includes both the "active partner" and the "passive partner" in male homosexual intercourse in the vice lists of 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and 1 Timothy 1:9-10. The active partner (Greek *arseenokoitees*) is spoken of in 1 Corinthians 6:9 ("abusers of themselves with mankind") and 1 Timothy 1:10 ("them that defile themselves with mankind"). The "passive partner" (Greek *malakos*) is referred to in 1 Corinthians 6:9 ("effeminate").

The receptacle for the phallus in sodomy is especially the rectum, which is designed for the excretion of faeces. This unnatural act of sodomy is intrinsically unhygienic and biologically dangerous, as well as sinful.

None of this is pleasant; indeed, it is disgusting. But so too are pictures of aborted babies or photos of Jews gassed during World War 2. More repulsive material on homosexuality could be mentioned. But this should be enough to demonstrate the fact that homosexuality and its sexual activity is not a wholesome lifestyle or even an amoral issue, like one's favourite foods that are merely a matter of personal preference. Homosexuality is not only against God's Word but against one's very nature as male or female.

According to research, the average male homosexual lifespan is significantly shorter than the average male non-homosexual[1]. This was proverbial even in the ancient world: "They *die in youth,* and their life is among the unclean," the "unclean" being a reference to ritual homosexual prostitutes (Job 36:14).

Much as it is denied today, the fact that homosexuality is "against nature" surfaces even in the names that homosexuals use for themselves ("queer" or unnatural) and for non-homosexuals ("straight" or those whose sexual orientation is not bent or deformed).

The truth of the natural attraction and intercourse between a man and a woman is taught not only in Scripture but is also manifest in general revelation. Romans 1:19-21 states that the creation declares the eternal power and wisdom of the one Creator God. The visible differences between, and the complementarity of, male and female in sexual intercourse declare it to be

[1] Robert A. J. Gagnon cites studies which place the figure at about 8-20 years (by a team of pro-gay researchers in 1997) or 25-30 years (1998), adding, "By contrast, smoking is estimated to reduce lifespan by two years" (*The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* [Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001], p. 472, n. 208). However, these two studies were conducted near the height of the HIV epidemic, as was the publication of Gagnon's book. With developments in medicine, the gap in lifespan between homosexuals and non-homosexuals is not as large as it was. It is accepted by parties on all side of this debate that homosexuals have disproportionately high levels of depression, self-harm, binge drinking, drug abuse and suicide.

natural: "the natural use" between a man and a woman (vv. 26, 27). God's general revelation in the human body proclaims homosexual attraction and intercourse to be "against nature" (v. 26). As much as some desperately seek to deny it, deep down everybody knows it; not only Christians but also non-Christians, including people who are wretchedly enslaved to the lusts of sodomy and lesbianism.

GOING GREEN IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

>> Lim Ruo Xi



Lim Ruo Xi is a member of CERC.

Environmentalism is a common buzzword in the news today, and even in our environment there are marks reminding us of its presence. We see recycling bins on every corner, signs on shopfronts that show that they use eco-friendly packaging, and energy-efficient stickers on the electrical appliances we use. We also hear of the government and businesses making a greater effort to cut down on pollution and plastic use. In general, environmentalism in Singapore is viewed either neutrally or positively, even though not everyone is active in it. However, environmentalism is far from being neutral in its ideology, even if its net effect is an increase in environmental wellness; and as God's children who wish to steward creation responsibly, we ought to learn more about the ideology behind environmentalism and adopt a biblical perspective.

The environmental movement as we know it today is a broad political movement that concerns itself with the improvement of environmental health, the relation between environmental wellness and human wellness, and the preservation of the environment and its biodiversity for future generations. It aims to balance our use of and reliance on the environment with the environment's health, such that the relationship can be sustained. There are various metrics used to measure the success of this objective, but there is no universal consensus due to the numerous ways environmental issues are actually tackled in real life.

The basis of environmentalism is the fundamental belief that humans have the right to access and enjoy a safe and unpolluted environment. This belief can be captured in a sentiment from the 19th century, where the English poet William Wordsworth wrote that the Lake District, a particularly beautiful mountainous region in northwest England, was a "sort of national property in which every man has a right and interest who has an eye to perceive and a heart to enjoy"[1]. Wordsworth's view was not isolated, as nature was generally romanticised in the 19th century, owing to the reaction and resentment against the Industrial Revolution's impact on the environment. Though this sentiment was largely propagated in the Romantic age, it existed way before then in other parts of the world, like in India and the Arab world. Interestingly, Arab medical treatises from the 9th century onwards discuss environmental science and pollution in a systematic way[2]. Nonetheless, in modern contexts, environmental campaigns emphasise humans' rights to a clean and safe environment, especially in countries where pollution is rife[3].

While it is right of us to enjoy the environment, we must not possess self-entitlement, which reeks of selfishness. The enjoyment of the environment must be balanced out by responsible treatment of the earth, and at this point, we will do well to remember the mandate that God has given man: to steward the earth. By no means does that command mean "do whatever you like"; our enjoyment of the environment comes only when we steward the earth properly. However, even as we steward the earth, let us see environmentalism for what it really is — a vain effort to conserve the earth for future generations and for selfish reasons, without God in the equation.

The rise of environmentalism is largely due to the fact that our planet has seen some devastating effects from pollution and irresponsible usage of the earth's resources. Since the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century, which introduced an unprecedented amount of pollution into the environment, the surface of the earth has been changed, perhaps irrevocably, such that climate change is inevitable. This speaks volumes about the way

we manage the earth, but there have been initiatives to stop environmental degradation. In our local context, there are efforts to curb plastic use, such as Kentucky Fried Chicken's recent move to stop providing straws at its outlets. Subsequently, Yakult Singapore has recently announced that it would stop providing straws beginning in 2019[4]. In a more global context, there are also discussions among governments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and treaties are signed to meet certain goals.

The primary motivation for such campaigns is never first and foremost man's responsibility to steward creation in accordance with God's will. It is instead the ill effects that cause man to realise that if the damage is not curbed, he will suffer the consequences. In short, man only wants to save the environment because he sees that his actions that have caused the earth damage are coming back to bite him. In today's context, plastic reduction began only after the advent of water pollution and the death of sea creatures from plastic products dumped into the ocean, which have resulted in a loss of biodiversity. The move to stop Indonesia's slash-and-burn method was not only because the method is unsustainable on a large scale, but also because it polluted the air in its own country as well as neighbouring countries, including Singapore[5]. Thus, man's conserving of the environment is mostly due to the fact that he has reaped what he sowed and needs to mitigate the situation.

Because of the absence of God in the heart of environmentalism, there is a tendency for it to become radicalised like political movements. In the UK, there is a group of environmentalists called the Earth Liberation Front, which seeks to prevent profits from being gained from environmental damage. While that seems like the right thing to do, since directly profiting from environmental damage is exploitative, the methods they use to carry out their beliefs are radically violent for a group that espouses environmental health. From its inception in 1992 until today, the Earth Liberation Front has caused property damage in a series of incidents, including the burning and destruction of public and private property, which became known as "eco-terrorism". Also, while causing harm to the environment for no other purpose than to earn money is wrong, sometimes environmental damage is inevitable, for it is a side effect of human activities. For example, to build houses on land, one must clear a forest and cause forest animals to seek refuge elsewhere. Of course, there can be measures to mitigate those negative effects on the environment, but the point is, the environment should not be conserved to the extent that human welfare is affected, because the environment exists for human use! Nevertheless, the child of God is to steward the earth in faith and avoid the radicalism mentioned above, as we are compelled by our convictions to respect the authorities and "to obey them in all things which are not repugnant to the Word of God"[6]. We should also seek to live in peace with one another and not "confound that decency and good order which God hath established among men"[7].

Another example of extremism in environmentalism is veganism, which has gained popularity in recent years. Veganism is a lifestyle which involves not consuming any animal products. First and foremost, there is nothing wrong with not wanting to consume animals for food or clothing because you like animals, you feel sorry for them, or you think it will be better for your physical health. However, the primary argument made by vegans is that animal consumption is immoral — the heart of veganism is the belief that animals have the same rights as humans and that it is wrong to eat them. Though the human race was probably vegan in definition before the fall, because plants were given to humans and animals for food[8], God has allowed animals to become our food after the fall, and thus it is wrong to say that eating an animal is immoral. Also, while we ought to treat animals kindly as we are stewards over them as well[9], it is extreme to raise their rights to the level of a human's.

While environmentalism can be similar to political movements in the tendency to become extreme, it is inherently political today. In our local context, the Keep Singapore Clean Movement (KSCM) calls itself "a national rally for Singapore to move from being a 'cleaned city to a truly clean city'", and one of its aims is to "incorporate positive messaging on social graciousness and consideration for others" through keeping our

[1] Nature Conservation Britain. 2013. https://web.archive.org/web/20130122133729/http://www.eh-resources.org/timeline/timeline_conservation.html (retrieved 16 Jan. 2019)

[2] Gari, L.. 2002. "Arabic Treatises on Environmental Pollution up to the End of the Thirteenth Century", Environment and History, 8 (4): 475–488, doi:10.3197/096734002129342747

[3] 2017. https://lexpress.in/environment/right-clean-healthy-environment-fundamental-right-india

[4] ChannelNewsAsia. 2 Jan 2019. https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/yakult-singapore-looking-no-straws-at-alternative-materials-11079432

[5] 2017. https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/indonesia-aims-to-bury-slash-and-burn

[6] Belgic Confession. Article 36

[7] Ibid.

[8] Genesis 1:29-30 KJV

[9] Genesis 1:28 KJV

country clean[10]. When this campaign was first launched in 1968, then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew also said that "there is no hallmark of success more distinctive and more meaningful than achieving our position as the cleanest and greenest city in South Asia."[11] This statement highlights the government's attempt to use an environmental campaign at the national level to promote patriotism and nationalism on top of the environmental mindfulness the campaign supposedly wishes to cultivate[12], which shows how environmentalism is a front for nation-building in Singapore. While it is inevitable that there will be other motives behind environmental conservation, as children of God we need to remember that environmentalism is part of our duty to steward the earth rightly and not a mere tool to forward a political agenda, no matter how neutral or positive it is.

As God's people, we rightly understand that God has given man stewardship over all the earth, and that we will be held accountable for how we have used the resources given us. Thus, we should conserve the environment and avoid the materialist and consumerist attitude that plagues all of society today. However, let us also be sober-minded and remember that the earth has been groaning in its existence since death entered into the world via the fall of our first parents. In other words, the earth will only continue to degenerate, whether with or without our involvement in accelerating the process, and we will never, by our hands, restore the earth back to its former glory. That is for God to do, and we only need to be faithful with the things we have been given.

[10] National Environmental Agency. 2018. Keep Singapore Clean Movement. https://www.nea.gov.sg/participate/campaigns/keep-sg-clean-movement Last updated: 20 June 2018

[11] Teo, Peter. 2004. "Clean and Green – That's the way we like it": Greening a country, building a nation. From Journal of Language and Politics, 3(3), 485-505, published by John Benjamins. https://repository.nie.edu.sg/bitstream/10497/4673/1/JLP-3-3-485.pdf

[12] Ibid.

GODLY ZEAL IN THE SECOND GENERATION (2)

>> Rev. Arie den Hartog



Rev. Arie den Hartog is a minister emeritus of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America. During his active ministry, he served as a missionary (1979-1986) and minister-on-loan (2002-2005) to Singapore. Since 2018, he has often provided pulpit supply for CERC during her vacancy.

We wrote in our first article on this subject that some of the members of Covenant have expressed concern about the decline of godly zeal among the second generation in the Lord's church among us. Having observed life and behaviour in CERC recently when we had the great joy of being with you again for a time, we agree with this concern. There is evidence that at least some, though not all, seem to have lost their first love for the Lord. This sometimes becomes evident in the lack of involvement in the life and activities of the church. Sometimes this shows itself in the spirit and enthusiasm which we perform our calling in her midst.

The loss of her first love was the chief sin for which the church of Ephesus was admonished in one of the letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor found recorded in Revelation 2. This was the judgment of Him who loves His church dearly and is deeply concerned about her true character and the behaviour of her members. The letters to the seven apostolic churches of Asia Minor are preserved in the Scriptures for the spiritual instruction and admonition of the New Testament church of all ages and places until the glorious day of return of the Lord at the end of the world.

The church of Ephesus had many things for which the Lord commended her. There were characteristics and qualities which the Lord saw in this church in which He greatly delighted. These were a great testimony in the world and an example to other churches. But the Lord had this one very serious concern for her. The church which He Himself loved so dearly had lost her first love for Him and for the fellow members of the church for one another.

The admonitions and warning which the Lord addressed to the church who had lost her first love was a very serious. The seriousness of the situation in the church is reflected in the words of Revelation 2:4 and 5: "Nevertheless I

have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent". If the Lord takes His candlestick from the church she is no longer a church at all in the true sense, even though she may still exist in her outward manifestation. She is then no longer the light of the world which the Lord had made her to be when He first saved her.

The decline in love for the Lord is so serious because love for the Lord and love for each other is the most important thing for true Christian living and for the church's calling to glorify Christ in the world. This love must be the source of all true zeal and devotion. Her knowledge of the truth without love becomes dead orthodoxy, her worship of God mere cold ritual and ceremony, her service of God empty and vain. Heartless formalism in religion is displeasing to the Lord. Mere outward religious show and practice and the following of tradition is something which the Lord grieves at. Decline in the first love is really the beginning of apostasy and departure from the Lord. When God is not served with love for Him no amount of religious activity can cover up for this sin.

It is a great sin when hearty affection for God has grown cold in us. There is every reason why we should serve Him in love and thankfulness. Considering the great love whereby God has saved us, presenting ourselves as living sacrifices of thankfulness is our reasonable service to Him. See Romans 12. The sin of the loss of love for God must be acknowledged and repented of by the members of the church. We are corporately responsible for the fellow members of the church and for the church as a whole. Continuing in true Christian living requires constant self-examination and judgment of our own motives and hearts in how we are serving God. This must lead to daily repentance and humility and great spiritual efforts to bring up the change of that which is lacking and deficient among us. In the first article I pointed to some of the things which might be the cause of the loss of our first love and the decline of our zeal in serving God. In this article I will write about some of the remedies for this fault.

We must remember from which we have fallen. We have fallen from God's great work of saving us. God has given to His church among us great and blessing of the knowledge of His own greatness and power and glory. He has caused us to see His own glory and to experience the blessedness of fellowship with Himself. He has blessed with the works of His own wonderful sovereign love and the amazing grace of His salvation. The heritage of the Reformed faith has been given to us! This heritage is the knowledge of His truth, the doctrines of His amazing grace and the certainty of the hope of His everlasting and heavenly glory. Especially to the Reformed Church the Lord has given the living and rich experience of truth of the Lord's everlasting covenant. It is and should be the case that when this heritage is first received there is great excitement and joy and fellowship with the Lord in midst of the church. This truth is the heart of Christian marriages and the living reality and joy of Christian families. The excitement over this reality in the church should break forth from the heart of the members of the church in thankfulness and praise to God and in glorying in His goodness and the faithfulness of His mercies. A particularly wonderful aspect of how God realizes His everlasting covenant in His church is the fact that He is pleased to gather His church from the generations of the covenant, with believers and their God-given children. Spiritual decline happens in our lives when we take the blessings of God for granted. We no longer have the profound appreciation for God's goodness to us that we ought to have. We need always to be reminded over and over again that the blessings of salvation are ours only because of sovereign grace and never because of any merit or worthiness on our part. Because of our sinful nature when a new generation arises in the church, there can grow among us the foolish imagination that the heritage of the Lord was passed down to us somehow because of what and who we are in ourselves or because we are so much better than others around us in this world. Lack of sincere appreciation and thankfulness to God will soon cause us to change the conversation among ourselves so that it will only about worldly things or human achievements rather than about the praising God for blessings and goodness.

We must remember that all the blessings of salvation which we enjoy were merited for us through the precious blood of Jesus Christ, and through His awful suffering and great sacrifice on the cross. We must remember the great cost which our dear Lord paid for our redemption. "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold, from your vain conversations received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of the lamb without blemish and without spot: who verily was foreordained from

before the foundations of the world, but was manifest in these last days for us" (1 Pet. 1:18-20). So many of the great truths taught and maintained by the Reformed Church through the ages are found in these verses. Think of what this passage of God's Word says about the atonement of Christ for His people through His death on the cross. Consider deeply that the salvation of God's people was eternally ordained of God from before the foundations of the world, that is, from everlasting. God saved us because He loved us with everlasting love!

True revival always comes through the renewed interest and deeper study and consideration of the rich and profound truths of the Word of God. It never comes by the mere stirring of vague religious feeling or emotion. Zeal for God cannot be sustained by always looking for some new religious experience in our lives. The Reformed faith has the highest imaginable esteem for the Word of God. This has and must have practical implications. We need always to be engaged in the deeper study of the Word of God and of its inexhaustible treasures of God's truth. Recently my wife and I travelled across the US between California and Michigan. We have children and grandchildren living in both places. The length of the drive between these two places is about 2,300 miles. It took us almost four days of driving. On the way we were greatly inspired by the beautiful scenery we drove through. What a majestic display of the greatness and glory and power of our God and the wonderful works of His creation. In addition to this, while we were driving we listened to the reading of the Word of God by means of an outstanding set of CDs, no special commentary, just reading with expression and in a very captivating and dramatic way. We listened to the reading of whole books of the Bible in one session, listening sometimes for more than an hour at once and with great concentration. What a blessing we received from doing this. Find some time and place in your life to do this kind of thing. Do not let the busyness of life crowd out times for reading God's word. Nothing can bring revival to the soul like the reading and concentrated listening to the word of God itself. The riches of God's Word as it reveals our God Himself and His wonderful works of salvation are so overwhelming. The hearing of them moves us at times to tears, it deeply humbles us and stirs us up to utter amazement and wonderment about our God. We tremble before the prophesies of His judgments on this wicked world, know that we were delivered from these judgment when we ourselves deserved the same because of our own sin. What great reason we have for fearing the Lord as our great God. The more deeply we read the Bible through His Spirit in our hearts the more we will learn of Him as our great God and Father and the God of our salvation.

Increase in zeal for God comes through continually growing in our knowledge of Him. Remember the words of the prophet Jeremiah, really God speaking through Him. "Thus said the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am God" (Jer. 9: 23-24).

Returning to the Lord and proper devotion to Him requires that we put away all our idols. Idols can slowly arise in our lives again even after the Lord has delivered us from the folly of worshiping and serving them. They may not be the same idols of pagan religion which we once worshipped and from which the Lord has redeemed us. They may be new idols which we begin to serve because we have given our hearts to other things than to God only. The Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 35 where it comments on the first commandment has this significant thing to say: "What is idolatry? Idolatry is, instead of, or besides that one true God who has manifested Himself in His Word, to contrive or have any other object which men place their trust". Scripture teaches that covetousness is a form of idolatry. See Colossians 3:5. The inspired apostle Paul classifies this kind of covetousness in this passage with many other very grievous and abominable sins. Many 'idols' of our own making steal our hearts away from the whole-hearted and zealous devotion we owe to God alone. This will cause our spiritual zeal for the truth God to decline and every earnest purpose to serve Him to be compromised. The answer for this sinful cause of decline in zeal is repenting and putting away all personal idols. When Jacob returned from Haran to the land of Canaan, which was the land of God's covenant blessing and came again to Bethel, where the house of God was, he was commanded to put away all the idols that were in his own house. So to turn again to the Lord we need to examine our own hearts. To what do we in our daily lives devote our interest and time and labours? We need to judge ourselves whether these things have become personal idols. For some these idols can be worldliness. For others the love of pleasure and ease in life. For others it can be worldly friendships. For others this can be the secret lusts and passions of our sinful natures. Without living in

sanctification and holiness we cannot have true fellowship with God. There is a great need for re-ordering priorities in our lives and evaluating what we are truly living for and to what we devoting ourselves. This involves mighty spiritual exercise great faith in God. Remember that devotion to God requires personal sacrifice and self-denial and crucifying our sinful nature and its sinful lusts and passions.

Having zeal for God is bound up with being deeply interested in the church of God and her ministry and her service of the Lord in the world and the cause of Christ's kingdom which she represents. Many Christians wrongly imagine that they can forsake the church or allow interest in her to decline because of other priorities in life. They begin to tell themselves that one does not need to be involved in the life the church overly much to be a good Christian. These are wrong thoughts. One of the great reasons why every Christian must be a member of a faithful church of Jesus Christ is because this is the place where God wants us to serve Him and be devoted to Him. We have a purpose and calling to serve our fellow church members. Doing this by the grace and Spirit of God will stir up our zeal and devotedness to God. Being active in the communion of the saints and serving one another in the church is so important for every Christian. By the very doing of this and understanding that this is serving the Lord we will greatly encourage one another and we ourselves will be spiritual blessed.

Self-centeredness is a sin. This sin will inevitably lead to spiritual decline. We must have great spiritual concern for one another in the church. Let us listen to the beautiful and practical instruction of Paul to the church of Philippi in Philippians 2:4 "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others". In the way of losing ourselves we gain the reward of God's grace in His favour and blessing on us. Through a common faith in Him we have the assurance of His presence with us and the proper understanding of His purpose in our lives.

The church of Jesus Christ is called of God to stand together against her common enemies in the world. The devil and this wicked world are our spiritual enemies, and even our own sinful flesh. We are together continually engaged in a great spiritual warfare. We must resist the devil and stand against and overcome sin and temptation. We can do this only through the strength of faith we all have from the Lord. The church and her members together must be zealous and courageous to stand for the truth of God and the cause of Christ. In the great spiritual battle to do this the members of the church must have great spiritual courage and zeal. They must stand together united in their love and zeal and continually help those who are weak, encouraging each other. The revival of courage and zeal comes from the Spirit of God who dwells with us and in our hearts. Willing and active participation in the battle and the common reliance up the Lord will generate a holy zeal among us. This zeal must never be allowed to decline. Our great interest must be the glory of God and victory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our great concern must be that not even one of us falter or grow weary. Let us pray continually that the Lord Himself will give us the necessary courage of faith and undiminished zeal for this great purpose and glorious cause.

FELLOWSHIP AND THE INCARNATION

>> Josiah Tan



Josiah Tan is a member of CERC. He is currently studying at the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary in Michigan, USA.

John 1:14 "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us"

Introduction

What is fellowship, according to Scripture? How are we in danger of mere socialising instead of having true fellowship? The *Salt Shakers* committee requested that these issues be dealt with. There are two possible scenarios we face in the church with regards to fellowship.

One situation could be that fellowship in the church has the beginnings of growing cold or has even grown cold. Even before one steps into church, one hopes not to bump into certain church members at the bus stop or in the carpark. In the church, gazes are averted; the existence of another is ignored. In cliques, invisible boundaries

are erected; conversations are repeated, shallow and cold.

A second situation is that at present, fellowship is flourishing, and we simply cannot get enough of it. There is a spring in one's step as one catches up to walk and talk with another member. In church, everyone looks one another in the eye, and with genuine Christian joy greets another. Yes, there are groups of friends formed, mothers sharing with each other the same struggles, but there are no boundaries between such groups. Conversations are filled with spiritual matters. Friends engage in frank sharing of the spiritual highs and lows of their Christian walk. One is ready to receive encouragement as much as to give it. One simply cannot get enough of this blessed fellowship and is sad to leave church.

As a church called Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church, we are deeply interested in true fellowship. For that is how the Scriptures understand the concept of the covenant: not as a cold contract, but as a warm relationship of friendship. And the heartbeat of that friendship is fellowship.

What is true fellowship?

True fellowship among believers is the sharing of all things in light of our relationship with God, realised in the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

To fellowship is to share in all things with another. But what does this mean? It means that there are some things that belong to us as individuals which we must share with others. These may be unique struggles, personal problems, or secret struggles. But to fellowship is to appoint someone, and then give to that person a certain portion of all these personal things. Now it is not just one person that is carrying the burden, but two. By that verbal sharing, two hearts now share and participate in that same suffering and joy together. To fellowship is to share.

This sharing is in light of our relationship with God. If this is not so, all our conversations and interactions with one another would be mere socialising. By "mere socialising" we refer to having conversations that are void of a spiritual mindedness. It is talking about things for things' sake. It need not be just talking about the news, weather, food, or sports. Merely socialising can also be talking about church matters. It is mere socialising when we backbite and destroy the good reputation of other church members. Whereas biblical fellowship involves talking about God and the things concerning God, "mere socialising" is fellowship without its heart, Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, we may be discussing something as normal as the weather, but there can still be true fellowship. Don't think so? Hear what David says to us about the weather: "The clouds poured out water: the skies sent out a sound: thine arrows also went abroad. The voice of thy thunder was in the heaven: the lightnings lightened the world: the earth trembled and shook" (Ps. 77:17-18). Or how about talking about the weather and sports at the same time? "(T)he firmament sheweth his handiwork … In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun, Which … rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race" (Ps. 19:1, 4-5). The difference between fellowship and mere socialising is not the subject of the conversation, but the worldview and spiritual discipline to be spiritually minded in all our conversations.

This fellowship is not merely made possible by Jesus Christ and the cross, but it is realised and made effectual. It is crucial to remember this. If we don't, the warm fellowship in the church will slowly evolve into isolation and avoidance of each other. To forget our fellowship in the Son (1 Cor. 1:9) will result in the isolating of oneself. That is where one attempts to live apart from the body of Jesus Christ even though one is engrafted to it. It is like if a body part is cold, numb, and frostbitten, perhaps by bitterness, offence, or some sin,so that now that part of the body does not communicate with the rest of the body. This happens in the church when members mark other members, seeking not to say anything to them, or do their best to keep all interaction to a minimum. This isolation and avoidance, like frostbite, does not just harm the body part itself, but the whole body is painfully affected.

To fellowship with each other, we must remember our fellowship with the Son. Therefore, we now turn to that beautiful and mysterious doctrine of the incarnation. The incarnation is God's gracious act of the Son of God taking on our full, weakened, real human nature, in order to fellowship with us. This amazing truth is taught in John 1:14: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us".

To let the full force of this truth sink into our souls, we must ask first: just who is this Word? He is the second Person of the Trinity! He is "the only-begotten Son of God". He is "begotten of the Father before all worlds". He is "God of God". He is "Light of Light". He is "true God of true God". He is "begotten, not made, being of one essence with the Father". He is the one "by whom all things were made"[1]. The

Word is God!

Now just what did God do? He took on our flesh! He became human, like us in all things, sin excepted. To say that He stepped into our shoes is a gross understatement. The second Person of the Trinity has a human nature so real that now there is nothing that we go through in this life that Jesus does not understand. So weakened and complete is this human nature that He is so moved by our sufferings and sorrows of life that He even wept together with us (John 11:35)! He is Immanuel, God with us.

But why will the Son of God leave heaven, come into our world, and take on our complete human nature? He did so to fellowship with us.

What is the relationship between the two phrases in John 1:14: "And the Word was made flesh" and "dwelt among us"? It is the relationship of purpose. The Word was made flesh **in order to** dwell among us. The word "dwelt" means "to tabernacle" in the original. The tabernacle is the OT picture of God dwelling, living with His people in covenant fellowship. This is the purpose of the incarnation — God dwelling with us, God fellowshipping with us.

Have you ever wanted to fellowship, to have intimate and personal conversations, with someone that hates you, slanders you, offends you by doing the exact opposite of what you say?

This is what Jesus does to us. He fellowships with us. Jesus, who is truly God and perfectly righteous, did not hold us filthy sinners at arm's length. He did not give us the cold shoulder or a forced "hi". He did not come to merely socialise with us. He did not just come to tell us we are sinners and to point out our sin and weakness.

He shared in all things with us. He shared in our greatest suffering, sin. He took upon Himself all the guilt of our sin. He took on even the curse of our death that rightfully belonged to us. He did not hesitate to be numbered with us shameful sinners. The extent of Jesus' fellowship? The depths of hell for us. At the cross He was alienated from the Father so that we might be reconciled and have fellowship with Him. He now shares with us the secret of the Father, the covenant (Ps. 25:14). He now shares with us His resurrection life and righteousness. There comes a day when He will share with us His glory when we are glorified in heaven (2 Thess. 2:14, Rom. 8:30).

The reason for the union of the divine nature and human nature in the one person of Jesus Christ for all eternity is none other than for fellowship. That fellowship has saved us from sin, and it daily transforms us.

What does Jesus' fellowship with us have to do with the fellowship in CERC currently? Everything. The extent and warmth of our fellowship with those whom we find most difficult to fellowship with now is but a reflection of our understanding of the Son's fellowship with us. Will you "merely socialise" or have true fellowship in Christ this Lord's Day?

In the next article we will focus on how the truth of the incarnation shapes our fellowship.

[1] Nicene Creed

HOW THE REFORMED FAITH ARRIVED IN KOLKATA

>> Rev. Emmanuel Singh



Rev. Emmanuel Singh is CERC's missionary pastor to Kolkata, India.

The mission work is not an human idea to spread the gospel to the heathen or the work of a mission agency to send the gospel out. It is not a work of a self-appointed man. Mission work exclusively belongs to the faithful church, since no ministry exists outside of the church. The highest calling of the church is to preach the gospel to the uttermost part of the world. Romans 10:17 says that faith comes by the hearing of the word. Christ's sheep hear the voice of the Shepherd and is gathered as a church by Christ alone.

In 2006 when I came to Kolkata, I came with the burden of preaching the Reformed gospel. I knew this city was very pagan and its Christianity was full of Arminianism. Few were those who claim to be Calvinist. Even if they did, they deny the reality of the Sabbath because they believe that the age of the church is over. There were a

few Presbyterians but they did not hold to any Reformed confession or creed. All these made me very sad, and my passion for preaching the Reformed faith increased. I felt that the Reformed faith was a voice in the wilderness.

This is how I started doing mission work as a independent missionary. You can say that I was an independent preacher. As I was learning more about the Reformed faith under PR ministers over seven years, I came to the conviction that mission work cannot be accomplished by my own effort and labour. I was doing so much gospel preaching and holding Bible study groups in many locations from Kolkata to far distance areas like Pachuakhali. Whenever a church invites me to preach, I would take the opportunity and try to preach Reformed doctrines to the congregation, but there was no fruit from the work.

Elder Fai Chong from CERC used to say to me, "Pastor Emmanuel, don't hit the ball everywhere". The consistory of CERC also guided me biblically to concentrate work more in Kolkata, so that one instituted church may be established first, and then from there we can spread to other parts of the city and to far villages.

Finally, in God's own time and providence on 28 June 2015, our first Lord's Day worship service began under the care and supervision of CERC. CERC accepted the work of Kolkata as their own mission work. What a joy to begin the small journey and be a Reformed testimony in this pagan land. We are the first Reformed church in Kolkata. In 2017, I was officially installed as a missionary pastor by CERC to work in the mission field of Kolkata. What a blessing it is that I am no more alone fighting for the Reformed faith. The church universal is a militant one. We are proclaiming the true gospel and protesting against the false Arminian gospel. We are obeying the great commission, having the highest calling to preach the gospel.

Pastor Haak, Pastor Berney, Pastor Jason Kortering and Pastor van Overloop are the men of God who initially guided and encouraged the mission work in Kolkata. At the same time, CERC also came forward to oversee the mission work in Kolkata. Pastor Lanning, Elder Fai Chong and Elder Lim Seow Thong took practical initiative to visit Kolkata from time to time until I was finally examined, called and installed as the missionary pastor.

After four years of labouring, God has gathered the souls from paganism and false religions to the genuine Reformed faith. Right now at each Lord's Day, thirty to thirty-five people worship with us. On 2 September 2018, we had our first baptism and confession of faith. Seven adults and three infants were baptised. Another seven became members through confession of faith. It was so glorious time to see the fruits of labour on the mission field.

To reach out to others, we conduct gospel meetings, and sometimes personal evangelism by meeting the person. Also, apart from this, we distribute tracts and pamphlets out in the open. Six times in a year, we conduct gospel meetings. We have seen the fruits of them, and many have started to come to our church through these meetings.

There are a few potential brothers we have in our fellowship who are going through classes to be trained as office-bearers. God willing, once their training is completed, we will seek to be established as an instituted church.

We thank God our heavenly Father that finally we are not independent. Our desire and prayer is that the Lord may establish the testimony of the Reformed faith through an instituted church in Kolkata to shine the light of the gospel among the heathen in this part of the world.

Mission work exclusively belongs to the faithful church, since no ministry exists outside of the church.



Singapore

We are thankful once more for pulpit supply provided by Rev. S. Regnerus (Lynden PRC) and Rev. H. Bleyenberg (Providence PRC) in February and March 2019. Mrs. Deb Bleyenberg (a Grade 2 teacher in Heritage PR Christian School) had a sharing and Q&A session with us regarding her work. It was greatly useful to help us understand what a typical day is like and how classes are taught in a PR Christian school. We hope that this will help us in our quest to set up a covenant Christian education to teach and nurture our covenant children in the fear and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

We are happy to welcome back Rev. and Mrs. Arie den Hartog into our midst. We are thankful for the love and care that Pastor and Sherry have for our church and look forward to fellowshipping and worshipping with them once more until June 2019, D.V. Rev. den Hartog will also be our church camp speaker.

USA

The PRC seminary has a new website (https://www.prcts.org) which has new features and updates, including a blog. Users can also sign up to receive seminary news by email.

Work continues on the seminary addition project including decisions regarding the layout of the archive room as well as planning and preparations (such as wood work, new carpet, ceiling tiles and lighting) for the library renovation which will take place in the summer.

Grandville PRC has called Rev. Spronk of Faith PRC to be the minister-on-loan to CERC. We pray that God will guide Rev. Spronk to a clear understanding of His will and to answer the call with a clear conviction of his heart.

Northern Ireland

The CPRC is holding a mini-conference over 13 April, 17 April and 1 May 2019 to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the Synod of Dordt. Prof. Engelsma will be the speaker and will also be preaching at some of the CPRC worship services D.V.

The Philippines

The PRCP has written to CERC to establish a sister relationship with us in February 2019. CERC has decided to establish a sister relationship with PRCP as both churches manifest unity in doctrine, worship, church polity and life. We thank God for this ecclesiastical development between the PRCP and CERC.



We rejoice with Milton & Celina on their marriage in January this year!



Rev. Spriensma conducting the baptism of baby Asher



Rev. Regnerus enjoying some Singaporean cuisine



Baptism of baby Jeshurun



The Glowing Candles Bible Study had Rev. Bleyenberg lead one of their sessions while he was here



Dinner fellowship with the Bleyenbergs at a neighbourhood coffee shop

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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