

salt shakers

joel 3:16 matthew 5:16

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- GOD KNOWS THAT MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, WHEN WE ATTEMPT TO PULL THE DUST OUT OF OUR BROTHER'S EYE, THERE IS AN ENORMOUS BEAM IN OUR OWN THAT WE ARE OBLIVIOUS TO.

*Josiah Tan - Speaking The Truth In Love:
Speaking Jesus Christ In Jesus Christ*

- "WE OUGHT TO ASK OURSELVES, "IS WHAT I AM GOING TO DO GOING TO GLORIFY GOD?" THIS WAY, WE VIEW ALL THINGS POSITIVELY WITH CHRIST'S KINGDOM IN VIEW."

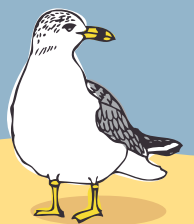
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- BUT HOW DO WE DISCERN THIS WILL OF GOD? HOW DO WE KNOW WHAT IS IT THAT GOD WOULD HAVE US DO?

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- BUT YOU CANNOT BE A GOOD FATHER IF YOU ARE ENSNARED IN THE LUSTS OF THE FLESH. NOR MUST YOU THINK THAT YOU WILL PUT AWAY THESE THINGS ONCE YOU GET MARRIED, OR ONCE YOU HAVE CHILDREN. IT DOES NOT WORK THAT WAY.

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LET YOUR **LIGHT SO SHINE** BEFORE MEN,
THAT THEY MAY SEE YOUR GOOD WORKS,
AND GLORIFY YOUR FATHER WHICH IS IN HEAVEN.

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DEAR READERS, WELCOME TO THE 36TH ISSUE OF SALT SHAKERS!

As we end the old year and begin the new year, it is a good time to “take stock” of everything that has happened in our lives in the past year. Taking stock is an activity in business done in order to account for the state and on-going condition of something. It is an activity that measures profit—or negative profit—so that one might act accordingly.

In our lives, there are many “barns” which we can examine and take stock. It could be the barn of our studies, or that of family, friends, work, or even our bank accounts. As servants of the Lord, we have a barn named “Things Done for the Lord”. Though we acknowledge that we are unprofitable servants, and that all that we have is given of the Lord, and that all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags, yet a true and faithful servant would be interested to know the state of this barn. He does not sleep as a sloth just because he is unprofitable, but he wants to take stock of this barn so that he might live in greater obedience and service so as to be as least unprofitable as possible. The servant hopes for the stock levels here to be ever increasing because God is glorified when this happens (Matthew 5:16). Are you interested in the stock levels in this barn of yours? Would you pray for strength and blessing that the Lord may fill this barn of yours? Or would you rather hide in blindness and approach the day of reckoning as an unfaithful servant?

And then, there is another barn. One that all servants dread to open—much less to take stock. It is the barn of our sins—a storage so terribly difficult to open because it reeks of the deathly stench of our guilt and shame. Though we know that our sins are certainly forgiven and forgotten (Hebrews 8:12) because of the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, yet a broken and contrite servant would be interested to know the state of this barn. With tears streaming down his cheeks, he shall open it to know how much he has been forgiven. In the light of God's Word, he studies the tactics and cunning of the enemies in these fallen battles so that he may have the trusty Word close and effective at the next battle. In reliance on God, he resolves to live unto the Lord each day in greater hope and holiness. The servant deeply desires in his heart that the stock levels here never increase but instead decrease with each passing year through the sanctifying work of Christ (Matthew 6:13). Are you interested in the stock levels in this barn of yours? Would you pray for the LORD of hosts to help demolish this barn of yours? Or would you also rather be blind?

As we prayerfully examine our lives, may the Lord grant us grace to lift up those hands which hang down, and those feeble knees too, that we may live and labour evermore in thankfulness to our great God for the blessing of salvation that He has given us through our Lord Jesus Christ. As we look ahead, may this year's journey be to our LORD's glory alone.

God bless your reading of this Issue, and remember, pass the *salt!*

Christ Regardless, paul

Regarding the Future

>> Chua Lee Yang



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What will the future bring? Everything around us is always changing. If there is anything certain about this temporal world that we live in, it is change. This year, some of us may have new jobs, new schools. Some may enter into, or leave relationships. This year throughout the world, earthly fortunes will be made and lost; rulers raised and brought low; wars will start and cease. Lives will begin and lives will end. Wicked men will find new ways to sin. The Gospel continues its journey through the nations, bringing forth its twofold fruit of conversion and disobedience.

But what will 2016 bring for us personally, as we continue on our journey and pilgrimage? As those who hold on to the promises of God, we know that He will lead each one of us through many joys and successes, and also many trials, chastisements and sorrows. Though sanctified daily, and assured that God indeed works all these things for our good, the latter – troubles in life – can be especially hard to bear. Though righteous in Christ,

yet in this world we struggle with sin daily. Though to some it seems that the evil days do not come, and there is sunshine all year round – to others who struggle with great burdens, fears and uncertainty, it may often seem that the night is endless. Like Job, we wonder what will be the end of all these things, and long for the sunshine that God is brewing behind the thunderclouds. So often in our difficult way we want to cry: Lord, how long? What is the purpose of these afflictions in my life? Why, God?

Often we desire to look into the future, and we want to know just what 2016 will bring for us in God's will and counsel. Yet God often chooses to not to reveal the details, or why exactly certain things happen to us in His providence. To the struggling child of God, this can seem a hard thing to take – why does God not tell us? Why are these things happening to me? Why is God doing this? Very quickly, our “why” questions becoming exceedingly sinful. With these, we imply that we would not have things this way if we could change them. In these questions we chafe at His will for us. We imply that we know better than God and question His wisdom in sending these trials to us.

To all these “Why, Lord?” questions, God indeed answers us, as always, in His word – but perhaps not as we might expect. His answer is given in Job 38-41, and they come in the form of questions to us. Beginning with “Where wast thou when I laid

the foundations of the earth?”, God proceeds to ask 77 questions that humble us. Have we perceived the breath of the earth or treasures of the snow? Who makes a way for the lightning? Behold Behemoth and his power! Behold, Leviathan, who I have made. If we cannot begin to understand the least of God's ways regarding the creation, how can we begin to understand God's greater dealings with men and with regard to eternal salvation?

How silly then that we demand of God an explanation of His dealings with us! Jehovah speaks to us in these questions – if I can look after the whole of this creation, the least function of which you cannot explain or understand, why do you not trust me to look after you?

God shows us that we do not always need an explanation for God's specific dealings with us. But He does tell us that rather than ask “Why?”, we need to ask instead – “Who?” In our uncertainties and afflictions, what we do need to know is who God is – the eternal, supremely wise and powerful One. He is Jehovah, who was before all things, who governs all things. In Job 38-41, God shows us that He alone is worthy of our trust by virtue of His upholding every detail of the universe. If He can govern all the things of the creation, cannot we trust Him to look after us?

But that alone is not enough, for while God does indeed uphold everything

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I have declared
the end from the
beginning. I am
the ending and the
beginning.

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in the creation including mankind, how do we know that He looks after us in His favour? For God does not uphold the wicked in an attitude of grace or favour, but they like the devils are reserved unto judgment at the final day. And looking honestly at ourselves and into our hearts, we see our own profound and unchangeable wickedness. We see that we wrought the wages of sin—death—with every action we take. How can sinners who have angered the almighty God, look to Him? How can they trust in Him to lead and guide them to anywhere but their deserved destruction and hell?

As children of God and of the Reformation, we know rightly that that answer is not found in any of our supposed goodness, our works or anything we could possibly merit with God, but by God-given faith in Christ alone.

Looking to Christ alone, who bore our sins as the only way that God could justly be favourable to us once more; this is the only way we can see God as the one who is infinitely good and infinitely merciful – and good and merciful for *us*, we who are bought by the blood of the Lamb. In the blood of Christ, we who are His, justified by faith alone, can confidently express the beloved assurance of Romans 8:28 – that all things indeed work

together for good for God’s people. The unrepentant workers of sin and iniquity, those who attempt to be justified by their faith *and* works, all those who do not believe in Christ as the *only* way of salvation (John 14:6) – they cannot have the assurance of God’s working in favour towards them. But with regards to even the future, which for now is unseen, Christ’s people have perfect peace.

It is for good reason that God does not reveal all His ways to us, for we must be taught to trust Him for who He is. We must learn to have faith in Him as Jehovah, who upholds everything by His hand, and that He will never leave or forsake His sheep that are His by Christ Jesus. Only as we learn this, do we begin to have peace. Often we learn this only through the way of trial and struggle.

God knows that His people need this peace and comfort along the way, and that we are weak and easily discouraged. As the merciful God, He gives you and I means, and so He gives you and I means by which we may learn to trust him. We are given membership in faithful churches, in which we hear His comforting voice speak directly to us each Sunday. We have the means of godly friendships and church activities by which believers can meet, encourage and pray for one another. And chiefly, we have His Word – a personal love letter to each one of us by which He makes known all His will and His promises for us to take hold of. Are we using these means that God has given us as we ought? If we are not, it is no wonder that we have no peace in the midst of life’s storms. Let us encourage one another to learn to use them and grow in our use of them.

And dear readers, as we enter into 2016 and all its uncertainty, turmoil

and struggle, let us look into God’s Word together for comfort and peace. With regard to the future, let us consider a name of hope, that has been given to encourage us and all of God’s people throughout all times and occasions, joy and suffering, light and darkness. It is a name of power, one that we can call upon when we are afraid or doubtful. It is a name of joy that we will sing with all our hearts in praise of when we reach our heavenly destination, when the sorrows of life are past. It is a name of Christ, upon whom all our hope lies. It is a name that calls out to us now in January 2016, calling us to trust Him in whatever may come.

“I am Alpha and Omega”, Christ says to us. Whatever may come; whatever is done upon the creation, it is by my hand – I have declared the end from the beginning. I *am* the ending and the beginning. You, whom I have bought by my very own lifeblood, trust in me – Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, which was, and which is to come, the Almighty (Revelation 1:8)!

This is a name that is found unique to the book of Revelation – a name that is found only in the first and last two chapters. No one calls Christ by this name – Christ reveals Himself by this name. Our parents give our earthly names to us, but His name is a declarative description of who and what He is. All things may change, but Christ does not. In this name, which we have on our lips as we enter this new year, we have a rock and a fortress. It is a name that speaks faithfulness, comfort and strength for God’s people through all the ages.

With regard to the future, not asking why, but who – we have comfort and hope. With regard to the “why” – Christ has it all answered. He is the

beginning and ending of all our paths, and we shall indeed know the answer to why we have walked the paths we have walked, and how each step truly served our good and was the very best

way possible, when we see His face in heaven.

At the beginning of 2016, let us confess and meditate together upon this name of Christ. He is Alpha and

Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. He will feed the thirsty soul and bring us home to our heavenly end. Regarding the future, let us trust in Him.

Discerning the Will of God in Our Lives

>> Cheryl Lim



Cheryl Lim is a confessing young adult in CERC.

In the pilgrimage of our lives, we are oftentimes required to make decisions. Indeed, hardly a day passes in which we do not make a choice, or express our wills and desires. But what guides us in all of life's decision-making? When we walk along life's pathway, what determines if we should take a left at the fork, or keep on going?

The title of this article assumes that we, as Christians, desire to know the will of God for us, and to order our lives according to that will. As fallen, depraved creatures, our own wills are by nature wicked and selfish. We are drawn to that which is carnal and earthly, that which profits only our flesh. God's will on the other hand, is perfect and only good. And so by God's grace, we confess like Christ, "...My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." (John 4:34) We conclude our prayers

as our Lord did in the garden of Gethsemane, "...nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." (Matthew 26:39) It is the will of God therefore, that must rule and regulate the whole of our lives. But how do we discern this will of God? How do we know what is it that God would have us do?

The Will of God

In desiring that the will of God be done, we must first understand what is meant by the will of God. In Scripture, the "will of God" is used in different ways to reflect various aspects of this one will. There is first of all, the will of God's decree. This refers to the eternal counsel of God and what God has planned to happen. It includes predestination (Ephesians 1:5) and providence (James 4:13-15). Then there is also the will of God's command. This is God's requirement for how we ought to live and conduct ourselves. It includes the laws and commandments that God has laid out for us (Matthew 7:21ff). While not entirely distinct, we may also consider a third aspect, that is, God's will for us in our day to day callings. This includes what He would have us do in our station of life and the decisions that we have to make. While there may not be specific commands that address these issues, we nevertheless

endeavour to perform the will of God in such circumstances (e.g. John 4:34).

Though we have considered these different aspects of God's will, His will is only one, in which there is no conflict or contradiction. Our lives may not violate any of these aspects of God's will but must seek to be aligned with them.

Discerning the Will of God

How then do we know what the will of God is? There are a number of ways in which God makes known His will, but the most important and fundamental way of all is through the Bible. The Holy Scriptures "fully contain the will of God" and "whatsoever man ought to believe unto salvation is sufficiently taught therein" (Belgic Confession Art. 7). Through the written word, God has revealed to us all that is necessary for our faith and obedience. Doubtless then, the Bible ought to be our guide in life, the basis for decisions we make, the map and compass of our sojourning.

What should I do when my classmates and colleagues engage in gossip? The 9th commandment (Exodus 20:16) and Ephesians 4:29,31 give us instruction. Whom should I seek to date and marry? Take a look at 1 Corinthians 6:14-17, Amos 3:3,

Proverbs 31 and other like passages. They lay down significant principles. What job should I consider? Matthew 6:33, Romans 12:1, Exodus 20:8-11 etc. make plain our goals and boundaries. For all of life's circumstances, the Bible contains pertinent commands and principles for us to abide by.

Yet, we recognise that even with Scripture, it is often difficult to know for sure what God would have us do. This could be due in part to our lack of wisdom, and an inability to apply what is declared in the Bible. Hence, let us take heed to the exhortation of Solomon who wrote "Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end." (Proverbs 19:20), for "Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety." (Proverbs 11:14) Older saints, especially, with their wealth of knowledge and experience have an important role to play in this regard (Titus 2:2ff). And let us not neglect to seek wisdom from on high (James 1:5), in prayer imploring our Father to show us His way.

At times, (and I say this cautiously) we may use circumstances around us to learn of God's will. This is certainly true when we speak of God's decree. We do not know the details of God's plans for the future, but as we live our lives daily, we are witnesses of the will of God unfolding before us. Take a moment to consider your current station. The fact that you are in a certain school, or in a particular job, or a mother, or enduring a trial—are not these all part of the Lord's good plan? We may also look back in history and see the workings of providence; confessing that the fall of Adam was ordained, that the World Wars were part of God's counsel, that

my education route was in His decree from the beginning. So in the midst of all of life's uncertainties, we may speak as taught in James 4:13ff "... If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that".

Circumstances, in the form of opportunities, may at times indicate what our path of action should be. More than once, the apostle Paul describes this with the analogy of an open door – "For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries." (1 Corinthians 16:9) and "Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 2:12).

However, using circumstances alone as the sign of God's will can be ruinous. Elimelech, looking at the famine around him, perceived that circumstances were unfavourable and left the Promised Land to dwell in Moab (Ruth 1). A family considering its financial woes may deem it necessary that the mother goes out to work, whilst her young children are taken care of by their grandparents. A woman evaluating her gifts of leadership and teaching could suppose herself fit for seminary and the ministry. It is obvious then, that circumstances by themselves cannot dictate our path of life. Circumstances must be evaluated in light of Scripture and a proper response made to the situation.

Response to God's Will

When the will of God has been made plain to us, we must respond in a fitting manner. This comprises obedience, submission and rejoicing. If action is required, we must be swift to obey. The Heidelberg Catechism's explanation of the Lord's Prayer petition "Thy will be done" includes "grant that we

and all men may renounce our own will, and without murmuring obey Thy will" (LD 49, Q&A 124). Our prayer is that we deny our own wills and desires, and perform that which is the will of God. Without murmuring! We do it not grudgingly as one forced against his will, but let every man "attend to and perform the duties of his station and calling as willingly and faithfully as the angels do in heaven" (LD 49, Q&A 124). And this is possible because of the new man in us which acknowledges that all things are in the hand of our Heavenly Father, without whose will not a hair can fall from our heads, and who works all things unto our salvation (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 1, Q&A 1). If all things are for our profit, will we not always rejoice (Philippians 4:4), and will we not be thankful for all things (Ephesians 5:20)?

Even when we are unable to discern the will of God, we pray for the grace to submit when it is revealed and we draw comfort and contentment from the Lord even in uncertainty. David himself prayed fervently for the life of his son, but when God took him away, David submitted himself to the perfect will of God (2 Samuel 12).

May God arm us with the mind of Christ, who Himself humbly submitted to the will of His Father, suffering for us in the flesh. And let us diligently seek to know and perform the will of God, renouncing our own wills.

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A CHURCHMAN

>> Pastor Ronald Van Overloop



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The title “churchman” is not very familiar to us. But it should be. It is a simple and clear description of a beautiful quality found in any believer in Jesus Christ. A “churchman” is a man or woman who has a great love and concern for the church of God. He or she loves the church as a whole, as an organism—the body of Jesus Christ. He or she also has a great love and concern for the church in its institutional form, that is, in the local congregation of which they are a member, in the denomination of which their church is a member, as well as for the true church wherever she manifests herself on the earth.

It is worthy to note that the church is one body. Either the whole church is saved or not one of us is saved. We must realise too that it is in blessing the church that God blesses each individual saint. What each saint needs, as a part of the church, the whole church needs. The church is the one body of Jesus Christ.

A churchman, while absolutely motivated by a love for and fear of Almighty God, has also a great concern for God's church. His concern for the church arises first from the simple fact that the church is God's. His great concern for the church is also because the church has such an impact on his own life. Therefore he is concerned for its well-being, i.e., its spiritual health and development and its physical health and development.

A churchman prays for the church. He knows what to pray for with regard to the church. And he knows how to pray for the church. He prays for the church day and night. He prays even (and especially) when he does not see changes for the better.

A churchman labours for the church. He gives himself selflessly for it, and he does so all his life.

A churchman always includes the church in his consideration of things. He sees events in history and present circumstances from the viewpoint of their impact on the church of Christ.

The apostle Paul identified Timothy as a churchman when he described him as a “man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state,” who sought “the things which are Jesus Christ's” and served with Paul “in the gospel” (Philippians 2:20-22).

A churchman whose attitude and conduct I would like to highlight is Nehemiah. He is identified as a man

who was moved “to seek the welfare of the children of Israel” (Nehemiah 2:10). He did not say that about himself. While God would have said it directly, the record of this wonderful description of Nehemiah comes out of the mouth of the enemies of the children of Israel: Sanballat and Tobiah. Nehemiah was known by the world to be a man who sought the welfare of the church of God. Even the world could identify him as a churchman.

Nehemiah came to Jerusalem around 446 B.C., which was about 160 years after Jerusalem was destroyed and the church was taken into captivity, and about 90 years after Zerubbabel led about 50,000 Jews out of captivity back to the land of Canaan. To put that in terms of today, if Nehemiah heard of Jerusalem's troubles in the year 2015, then the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babyonians was in 1855 and the return from captivity led by Zerubbabel would have taken place in 1925. The temple's foundation was laid two years after the captives returned, but it was not finished for another eighteen years.

Who is Nehemiah? He did not return to the land of Canaan, either with Zerubbabel (likely not yet born) nor with Ezra (who led a band to Canaan thirteen years before Nehemiah came to Jerusalem. While he did not do so, he was obviously a God-fearing man. He held the very prestigious position of cupbearer for Artaxerses, the king

“ A churchman... prays for the church day and night. He prays even (and especially) when he does not see changes for the better. ”

of Persia. He lived in luxury and in earthly splendour. He was very trustworthy and learned how to govern, just as Moses learned to govern while in Pharaoh's court. Nehemiah was not a prophet, priest, nor a king. One does not have to be an office-bearer to be a churchman! While Nehemiah was not a prophet, he surely did know the Scriptures as they were available to him. And though he was not a priest, he surely was devoted to God's church.

Nehemiah's heart was in Judah. He sought news of Zion out of genuine concern and not because of mere curiosity. And he grieved in response to the news of the poor physical and spiritual condition of Judah and particularly of the capital city of Jerusalem. After 90 years nothing had been done to restore the wall of Jerusalem. It was a "reproach," that is, a shameful disgrace. It was an embarrassment that the capital city of the country of his fathers was in such complete disrepair and that it was so for so long a time. At no point in the 90 years since 50,000 Jews had returned to Canaan under Zerubbabel had the people done anything to repair their capital city. A city in ruins, without any protection indicated poverty, oppression, a lack of unity, and a failure to put things in order.

A churchman grieves when he hears that the church is in such poor condition with nothing being done to repair and restore it. "Not songs but

sighs to us belong when Zion's walls in ruin lie" (Psalm 139).

What brought "great affliction" to Nehemiah was that Jerusalem was the true church of God in the world. Nehemiah knew serious distress, misery and adversity because such a condition of the state of the church brings blasphemy on God! The wall of Jerusalem represented the spiritual safety and defence of God's people because the wall is the nature of God's saving relationship to His people. Isaiah 26:1 and 60:18 identifies the walls as "salvation" and the gates as "praise." Gracious salvation is the wall in which God secures His people and defends them from Satan, his host, and those humans who seek their destruction. This wall is the church's security against any foe. Jerusalem's wall consists of divine gracious salvation, which not only saves and secures but also defends and protects against error in teaching and life. Further, the secure wall and gates of Jerusalem indicate that everything was in place and in good order. The fact that nothing was done to Jerusalem's wall after 90 years indicates that the people could not and would not agree to work together for such an important cause!

Nehemiah "sat down and wept and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven" (Nehemiah 1:4). If you would read through the book of Nehemiah you

would quickly see that Nehemiah was a man of prayer. In this particular situation he prayed "day and night" (6). And he did not weary to pray day and night—not for a few days, nor a couple of weeks, but for four months (compare the Jewish months mentioned in 1:1 and 2:1). Such a response indicates that the church was the love of his heart. Even though he did not return with the band which Ezra led back to Canaan thirteen years earlier, he loved the church. He did not voice some criticisms of the church in Canaan and then quickly get back to his work. Nor did he self-righteously talk about the sins and liberalism of the church over there, but he fasted and prayed for the church. He loved her and was committed to her well-being. He desperately wanted the walls of truth and godliness to be built.

His day and night prayer over four months is recorded in Nehemiah 1:5-11. His prayer indicates how much Nehemiah was familiar with the Scriptures of his day. He quotes Moses, Daniel, David, and Ezra. He knew God's promise to punish sin but also to gather His people upon repentance (Deuteronomy 28 and 30). His prayer indicates that He knew God to be great, a living God who sees and hears, a God who has redeemed His people and who keeps Covenant and mercy. His prayer indicates his identification of himself with the saints in Canaan and Jerusalem, confessing his sins with theirs, and doing so in great humility

so he has no right to demand but only beseech Jehovah. His prayer indicates that He knew that God's relationship to Israel is that they are "Thy servants", "Thy people", and the "redeemed."

A churchman is motivated by love for the church of Christ. Nehemiah was concerned that the church prospered spiritually and whether the pure doctrines of the Gospel were proclaimed. What counts in my life? My job, business, family, or the church of Christ?

A churchman thinks corporately—not independently. Nehemiah did not think about those guys over there in Canaan, but he knew the Covenant union of all of God's people. He always included himself in their sins. The important key to such thinking is that we think humbly and repentantly.

A churchman knows that "God of heaven," who is "the great and terrible (awe-inspiring) God" who kept and "keepeth Covenant and mercy for them that love Him and observe

His commandments." The display of God's grace in the past assured Nehemiah that God would be faithful and not cease to keep His Covenant because of His boundless mercy.

Nehemiah was a churchman who loved and lived for the living God. Thus, the cause of God in the church of Christ was the centre of his soul and life.

Speaking The Truth In Love: Speaking Jesus Christ in Jesus Christ

>> Josiah Tan



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The Singapore government has in recent years stressed the importance of developing soft skills. Since then, schools have stressed upon us the development of presentation and communication skills, often through class debates and group discussions. Technology and Web 2.0 have also tremendously transformed how we communicate. Behind this force that is changing communication, society is developing her own worldview of

speaking and communication. Thus, if we do not weigh what we are taught by the world against God's Word, we risk taking in a destructive worldview of speaking.

I will only highlight two ways in which the world focuses wrongly on speaking—even though there are many others. The first is the world's stressing on the art of persuasion and "authenticity". To the world, there is no truth and any claim to it is marked as arrogance. Thus, man should focus on speech that is all about careful sentence construction, flowing with elegance and eloquence. Speaking must be according to what one feels strongly about, especially if it is against the Bible. It is the kind of speech that excites the heart of another; but when the conversation is over, the soul is starved. While there is much value in the training we get

in schools in the skill of expressing ourselves clearly, if Truth is not at the core, centre and foundation to all our speaking, we become vain. If such a worldview of speaking creeps into our church, the life of the family of God will be severely affected. Soon, the preaching and the Bible studies of our church will become neglected and even despised, because the people are interested in just speaking, and not the Truth.

The second focus of the world is related but different from the first. It is about worldly wisdom. The goal of worldly wisdom is to substitute, rival and destroy True wisdom. The world works hard to confuse God's people that speaking the truth of Christ is great foolishness because they cannot fit God into their scientific framework. Thus, with greater fervour every year, schools penalise students

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Like a candlestick of Christ, we shine the truth of Christ in love to every neighbour God brings into our lives. The preaching gives us the Truth to speak.

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who speak the truth of Jesus Christ. If the church adopts this worldview, then the wisdom of God will be replaced with worldly wisdom in the conversations of God's people.

The remedy to the wrong focus on vain speaking and worldly wisdom is to speak the Truth in love. This remedy in Ephesians applies to every member of the church (1 Corinthians 13:1-13, Galatians 6:1, 1 Peter 3:15). Just as we have been reminded many times that the struggle to speak the truth corporately as a church is real and intense, so too is the struggle to speak the truth in love with our own lips in our personal lives. The Church is the pillar and ground of truth, and our mouths ought to be the fountain of continual blessing. Both are tremendously important responsibilities God has given His people. So much so that Prophet Isaiah cried out because he knows how the old man of sin covers the

mouth with violence. God teaches us that though all beasts in the world can be tamed, no man can tame the tongue. Only God can change our speaking.

In the book of Ephesians, God reveals to us a relationship between speaking the truth and love with three things. First, the preaching of God's Word (4:11-14). Second, the growing in Christ (4:15-24). And last, our duty to speak as members of one another (4:25-26). Together, these three relationships show us that it is the hallmark of every Christian to open his mouth and pour out blessings of Truth to all around him. The tap of Truth cannot be shut up because it is steadfastly stuck in the love of God.

To learn how to speak, we have to recall what God has spoken to us. The central message that God speaks to us every day is that Truth and love are married together in Christ. Therefore, they are not to be separated at any time in our speech. Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other (Psalm 85:10). The Truth in Psalm 85 is the truth of God. Truth reveals and exposes us as the liars we are. The Truth is that we all justly deserve divine condemnation. This is God's Truth. Nevertheless, God always speaks His Truth to His people with Mercy. His mercy in Jesus Christ, the Truth, was displayed by the shedding of Christ's blood. Christ confirms that mercy and truth are married together by speaking the words "It is finished" and by His resurrection from the dead. Having undeservingly received God's mercy and truth together, we by God's grace keep them always together in all our speaking.

Before we speak the truth in righteous judgment to our beloved spiritual

family members, we must first be aware of our obvious sins that we are oblivious to. God knows that more often than not, when we attempt to pull the dust out of our brother's eye, there is an enormous beam in our own that we are oblivious to. A man is always wise in his own eyes. It is obvious that we have the old man of sin in us because we are very prone to speak the truth sinfully. Some of us are more inclined to speak God's truth without love, cutting others down. Others have the tendency to totally remove inflicting "faithful wounds" through our speaking, which hurts our friends even more spiritually as we watch our brother continue in sin. The latter characterises the age of sinful tolerance we live in.

Each of us has a clear strength in speaking strongly in particular truths. Often, in our speaking, when others do not share the same intensity, we begin to wonder if God really loves them to begin with. On the other hand, we oftentimes miss out many important truths others are speaking about, because those aspects of God's truth are sinfully not as important to us. With "tunnel vision", we often exalt ourselves above others while putting others down.

In addition, we must consider that, each of us has the tendency to speak the truth to only certain people. Our speaking, just like our sensitivity to sin, is not consistent and can sinfully defer from people to people. The result of this done repeatedly is that we grow to look at certain people in church with an evil eye not because they are more sinful, but rather because we are more keen to recording their sins in our minds. God's truth remains constant and true eternally. However, our hearts and lips are inconsistent and constantly changing.

We must be aware of our nature in order to speak the Truth. We must not confuse the infallibility of God's Truth and the infallibility of our own words as imagined by our deceitful hearts. At the Cross of Christ will we find the strength to pull out the plank of partiality, inconsistency, fear of man, and self-righteousness from our eyes. Then, we can have a deeper understanding of how we are wretched sinners who are called to speak to other wretched sinners, all covered in Christ's blood.

Because speaking God's truth cuts our neighbour's old man of sin, we should expect that he might turn to hurt us. However, even if speaking God's truth hurts our neighbour and even if our neighbour responds by hurting us, we must still speak God's truth and in greater love. We must have greater love because we must suffer more for the sake of our brother's soul. Sometimes, God's sheep can behave like dogs or swine, attacking those who out of godly love reach out to give holy pearls of truth. Jesus Christ has given us the Pearl of Great price, yet we have oftentimes responded according to our old man of sin with attacks of our Master like wild dogs (Ezekiel 16). Nevertheless, Christ maintains His Covenant of love with us. Similarly, we must be ready to suffer for righteousness, for the soul of our brother is more important than all suffering and our pride. Our hearts know that we have been shown way too much undeserved love by God to ignore our calling to speak Truth in love even if it hurts us and our spiritual family members.

Even when a person much older or in a position of authority makes a grave sin, we must speak the truth in love in the same posture as Noah's two sons did for their godly father. Our faces

turned around, walking backwards and covering the sin. Never do we mock and spread the sins of God's precious sheep.

The preaching on the Lord's Day gives us truth, and we need the whole of it, not just half of it. We know so little of the truth, and that is why we are weak and speak little. However, at the preaching of God, we are fed the bread of life. This bread perfects, edifies, and lifts up our souls. We are built up to the full measure of Jesus Christ. The preaching gives us strength to speak. At the preaching of God's Word, we are put to rest in the land of Beulah. Our souls, tired from the night of mourning, now rejoices in the truth that God delights in us. The preaching gives us the delight to speak. The preaching God sets our hearts on fire like glowing candles in the darkness. Like a candlestick of Christ, we shine the truth of Christ in love to every neighbour God brings into our lives. The preaching gives us the Truth to speak.

God places huge responsibility on our shoulders by making us brothers and sisters of each other in His blood and eternal Covenant. We are all bound and connected to each other more so than we can imagine. We are joined to one another and united as a body; we are living stones constructed together as God's holy temple. In the family of God, our spiritual blood is thicker than earthly blood and we are all soldiers in the same unit. Whether we feel it or not, we are bound by the blood of Christ in this life and the next. Jesus Christ is knitting us all closer together by the preaching of God's Word. The preaching unites God's people together in truth and faith. Therefore, with every sermon discussion, every WhatsApp message of spiritual encouragement with a

verse, every small contribution spoken in the bible study discussion, every conversation that ends with "I will remember you in my prayers", every family devotion, and every whisper of our friends to us "hope thou in God", we give expression to this marvellous verse...

"But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."

Together, in all of our daily struggles, we constantly whisper to each other over and over again, "Ebenezer, God is with us." This is what God has made and crafted our mouths for—to continuously speak truth that all may constantly grow in to our head, Jesus Christ. Our God gives us grace to speak Jesus Christ in His Spirit to all.

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The world works hard to confuse God's people that speaking the truth of Christ is great foolishness because they cannot fit God into their scientific framework.

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THE WELL-MEANT OFFER OF THE GOSPEL

>> Cornelius Boon



Cornelius Boon is a confessing young adult in CERC.

What is the Well-meant Offer of the Gospel?

As the name suggests, those that hold to the Well-meant Offer believe that God offers salvation to all who hear the preaching. They also say that this means God has a favourable attitude towards all humans in general and not just to the elect. The Well-meant Offer is closely linked to another false teaching called Common Grace, but we will not be touching on that error in this article.

At first glance, the Well-meant Offer might not seem to be a serious error. After all, God indeed uses the means of preaching to save His people and He also instructs us to preach the gospel to all nations. But as we will see later on in this article, this error has some serious implications for the believer.

The Charge

Those that hold to the Well-meant Offer often charge us of being unreformed doctrinally and practically. Listed below are three

objections that they use against us (there might be more, but for the sake of this discussion, we will limit it to the three below).

How can God call and command the non-elect to repent and be saved but yet not desire their salvation?

If God does not offer salvation through the preaching, then the preaching of the gospel is rendered powerless.

There is no assurance of salvation if salvation is not offered freely to all who hear the gospel (how can someone be assured of something if it is not offered freely?).

Response to the 1st point

The fundamental error made by those holding to the Well-meant Offer is failing to distinguish between the internal and external call of the gospel. The external call, or call by the preaching alone goes out to all nations. The reason why this external call also goes out to the reprobate is to leave them inexcusable and to harden their hearts.

The internal call is given to God's elect alone, by the working of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. This internal call works powerfully and irresistibly in the elect to turn them to Christ. So we see that although the external call goes out to everyone, the internal call is only given to the elect; Matthew 22:14 "For many are called, but few are chosen."

The effectual, saving call that comes to the elect consists of the external preaching (external call) accompanied

by the inner work of the Holy Spirit (internal call). This must be distinguished from the call to the reprobate by the external preaching alone, unaccompanied by any regenerating operation of the Holy Spirit.

Response to the 2nd point

The question to ask is: does God offer salvation? To this we answer with an emphatic NO! Salvation is the work of God alone. By saying that God offers salvation implies that man is able to choose if he wants to be saved and this gives glory to man rather than to God. Scripture also makes it very clear that this view is wrong, Romans 8:30 "Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified." The golden chain of salvation is all by the work of God alone, and the calling referred in Romans 8:30 is the effectual, saving call (both external and internal call) that comes to the elect.

The reason why the preaching of the gospel has power is because it is the work of God alone. If salvation is left in the hands of men as what is implied in the Well-meant Offer, then the gospel would indeed be powerless. The saving call (both external and internal call) of the gospel is efficacious (definitely able to accomplish the desired result) because the Gospel is the very Word of God and God's Word will definitely come to pass; Isaiah 55:11 "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of

my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.”

This teaching is also clearly stated in the confessions. Canons of Dordt, Head I, Article 8, “There are not various decrees of election, but one and the same decree respecting all those, who shall be saved, both under the Old and New Testament: since the Scripture declares the good pleasure, purpose and counsel of the divine will to be one, according to which he hath chosen us from eternity, both to grace and glory, to salvation and the way of salvation, which he hath ordained that we should walk therein.”

Response to the 3rd point

As mentioned in the earlier point, only this view of the call (where God is sovereign in the calling) gives all glory to God. Only this view gives encouragement to the church, that the preaching of the gospel is the very Voice of Christ and all who are His will hear His Voice, John 10:27 “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me”. Only this view gives comfort to the believer; to know that salvation is the work of God alone, that God infallibly draws the believer to Himself, that God who is Jehovah our unchangeable covenant God works mightily in our hearts, Ezekiel 36:26 “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.”

Implications of the Well-meant Offer

Holding on to the Well-meant Offer leads to adopting many other errors as well. As discussed at the start of this article, those that hold on to the Well-meant Offer also hold on to the

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So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.”

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error of Common Grace where God has a certain favour or grace to all men. They argue by saying - how can God offer salvation to all yet not want them to be saved? This means that Irresistible Grace goes out the window, because holding on to the error means man has the ability to resist the grace of God when they reject the “offered” salvation.

Limited Atonement and Double Predestination (Election and Reprobation) are also attacked. The proponents of the Well-meant Offer say that since God offers salvation to all, He desires to save all. So they say that Christ died for all men head for head and Christ did not die only for the elect (there goes Limited Atonement). And since God wants to save all, how can God choose some to suffer eternal damnation? As a result, Double Predestination is rejected as well.

In fact, all the five points of Calvinism can be rejected by those that hold on to the Well-meant Offer.

Total Depravity

Common Grace means that God has a favourable attitude to all men, and so they cannot be totally depraved.

Unconditional Election

The Well-meant Offer implies that men are able to choose God.

Limited Atonement

Limited Atonement is rejected as discussed above.

Irresistible Grace

Irresistible Grace is rejected as discussed above.

Perseverance of the Saints

Since men have a part to play in salvation, men are able to lose that salvation.

Conclusion

The Well-meant Offer is nothing but Arminianism at heart and one question that those holding on to the Well-meant Offer are unable to answer clearly is this: Why are some saved by the preaching while others are not? The answer cannot be the sovereign grace of God because they say that the saving call is given to all. There are three possible answers for those that hold on to this error:

1. It is a mystery. God is able to both love and hate the same man. Somehow God both desires a man's salvation yet decrees his damnation.

Our response: This is an evasion and not a proper response. There are no contradictions in the nature of God and Scripture is also clear that God does not love all men, Romans 9:13 - As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. Scripture also

states clearly that God is the one who chooses His elect, Acts 13:48 - And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.)

2. The free will of man.

Our response: This is the Arminian response and clearly denied by Scripture; Romans 9:16 “So then it

is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.”

Universal Salvation. This view means that God’s grace saves everyone in the end.

3. Our response: This is entirely unbiblical in all aspects as Scripture clearly teaches that not all men are saved. This view is the death knell of

preaching; why preach when everyone is saved? Why live an antithetical life if in the end everyone ends up in heaven?

We see that one error will lead to more errors being introduced, so may we continue to be diligent in our study of Scripture and ever vigilant in spotting the lie, Soli Deo Gloria!

Follow-up Work: The Committee

>> Marcus Wee



Marcus Wee is a confessing young adult in CERC.

Follow-Up Work: The Committee

Something unheard of in many conservative churches has been continuously taking place in Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church (CERC). In 2015, God has brought about 50 newcomers through our doors, and an average of about 30 newcomers in the preceding two years. In other regions, where Christianity has been long established, it is unheard of for conservative churches to have so many newcomers. God is pleased to bring many newcomers to our church, some of whom, in His sovereign counsel, join our church as members.

In this context, follow-up work becomes immediately and practically relevant to us. We have a responsibility to do it, as we have seen previously, but there also is an urgent need for it. Where does the Follow-up Committee become involved? It will be profitable for us to answer this question by considering the role of the committee.

Role of the Follow-Up Committee

1. *To facilitate follow-up work, by ensuring that newcomers receive godly hospitality and are properly integrated into the life of the church (Heb 13:1-2).*

Notice that the committee’s role is not only to do the follow-up work; this is the responsibility of every individual, and not limited to the committee. Rather, the committee facilitates this work. This means that the committee is sensitive to the presence and the needs of newcomers in the church, and organises the follow-up resources (people) within the church to meet these needs. This involves informing people of the presence of a newcomer, which they may have been previously unaware of, so that they can approach and welcome the newcomer. In the long term, this also involves encouraging people to be committed to personally befriending the newcomer, meeting up, encouraging him/her in God’s Word, and integrating him/her into the organic life of the church.

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“Everybody’s job is nobody’s job”... Let “everybody’s job be everybody’s job”,

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The committee is aware of the various follow-up work being done by and with various people, and seeks to organise the work efficiently, such that all the work does not fall on the shoulders of only a few individuals. The committee seeks to ensure that people are not over-taxed in doing follow-up work, constantly checking in with those involved on their own and the newcomer's well-being, and are always on hand to provide support if need be.

2. To raise awareness of the need to be hospitable, godly friends, and to galvanise and develop others to that end (Proverbs 27:17, 17:17).

As a church, we are growing in our awareness of the need for follow-up work, and our ability to perform it. The committee serves as a catalyst to raise awareness of the need for follow-up work, and spur us onward, provoking each other unto love and good works, and sharpening others in this aspect. Awareness is raised as we approach church members to do follow-up work. This is also done through workshops organised, such as the Godly Friendships Workshop (2013), and Importance of Cell Groups (2015), the former more directly relevant to follow-up work than the latter. The committee also seeks to equip others, from Scripture, with the tools to carry out follow-up work.

3. To lead by example by being a hospitable, godly friend (I Tim 4:12).

The committee members must practise what they preach! How can one teach others to show love for their neighbour in follow-up work, when one does not even do so oneself? What weight do one's words carry then? Committee members must themselves be active in follow-up work because they recognise that God's calling to love their neighbour applies first of all to themselves, before

they encourage others to heed that same calling. In doing so, committee members show themselves to be godly examples to the rest of the church.

4. To help members and newcomers grow closer together in unity (Psa 133:1).

Through the facilitating and encouraging of follow-up work to be done, members of the church are drawn closer to each other in the bonds of Christian love. The Body of Christ realises the importance of its many members, some of whom God is pleased to add from without the church. The committee also organises the annual Church Outing, which serves as a means to church members and newcomers to bond, recognising that it is ultimately unity on the truth of God's Word which is the important and lasting unity.

Some Points of Clarification

1. The role of the Follow-up Committee is not to exclusively do all follow-up work. This has been mentioned earlier in the article and in previous articles, but cannot be emphasised enough. The responsibility to do follow-up work stems from the duty to love our neighbour as ourselves. It is YOUR responsibility (and mine), not the committee's. How many times have we seen a newcomer in church and thought, 'Oh he's a newcomer, let the Follow-up Committee members talk to him', or, 'She's a newcomer looking neglected; why isn't the Follow-up Committee doing their job?'

In such situations, perhaps the committee isn't properly fulfilling its role. But we should ask ourselves: why aren't I doing MY job? Why am I sitting there, worrying about whether the committee does its job or not, and not worrying about MY own responsibility to do follow-up work? Let us always be considering how we can best serve God,

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The responsibility to do follow-up work stems from the duty to love our neighbour as ourselves. It is YOUR responsibility (and mine), not the committee's.

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also in the area of follow-up work, and not be more concerned about whether others do so.

2. Organisation of follow-up work by the committee does not make follow-up work a mere task, and nothing more. Sometimes we have this notion; if people are encouraged to befriend others, then such a friendship is insincere. Better not to have any such organisation, and let people welcome newcomers out of their own initiative, out of true brotherly love. However, such a notion is premised on the belief that true brotherly love and organisation are mutually exclusive; that having one entails the lack of the other. I submit to you that this belief is false.

Sometimes we do not do follow-up work because we lack know-how, are fearful, or simply because we are unaware of the need. As mentioned earlier, the committee serves to raise

awareness of this need, and thereby encourage and equip us to do follow-up work. The committee, being most sensitive to the situation of newcomers within the church, are in the best position to encourage and organise our fellow brothers and sister in Christ to do follow-up work.

The committee does not arbitrarily approach people to befriend newcomers; many factors are taken into consideration, such as compatibility, an already evident desire for follow-up work, and the person's willingness to specifically befriend the newcomer, coupled with the awareness that such an action must be motivated by love for him/her. It is simply false that being organised by the committee to befriend a specific newcomer necessitates insincerity on the befriender's part.

However, this charge must not be taken lightly, for it does bring to our attention a real danger – that follow-up work *may* (though not will) become a mere task. This is so especially when the work gets long-drawn, and fraught with difficulties. This means that the individual assigned and the committee, aware of this danger, must constantly and fully depend on God as we do follow-up work, and seek His grace to persevere and to do it in true brotherly love.

A Framework for Newcomers

This year, the committee is trying to develop and refine a follow-up framework for newcomers, with various measures to accompany their journey

from their first visit till membership in the church, God willing. We mail newcomers a welcome postcard upon their first visit, and upon subsequent visits, invite them for a fellowship dinner with other church members, at the home of our pastor's family. Meanwhile, we encourage certain church members to personally befriend these now-regular-worshippers, meeting up and studying the Bible with them, and encouraging them to attend the church's cell groups and where applicable, the youth group activities. These regular worshippers will also be encouraged to attend the church's pre-confession class, where they learn more about the beliefs of the church as they consider joining as members.

We hope to be able to work closely together with cell groups, as we recognise their enormous potential as a means to integrate these regular worshippers into the church. Through cell group meetings, bonds of friendship are built up, and cell group members edified by the instruction and discussion from God's Word.

How You Can Help

1. Do follow-up work. I fear that I belabour the point, nevertheless, here goes: follow-up work is not an exclusive, or even the main work of the committee. Recognise the responsibility that you have to do follow-up work, the need for it within the church, and take the initiative to sincerely befriend newcomers. If you are unsure how to proceed, you may indicate your desire to the committee, and we will be more than happy to involve you.

There are other small ways in which you can help as well. The committee gives out visitor cards for newcomers to fill in their details so that we can contact and follow-up with them. We have missed out newcomers in the past; you can help prevent this by passing them these cards! You can also inform committee members of the presence of newcomers in the church, who may escape our notice. Informing us that you are bringing a friend to church will also help us organise follow-up resources to make your friend feel welcome to the church.

2. Pray for the follow-up work done within the church, which is a means used by God for the salvation of His people. We get to do mission work – right on our very own doorstep! Remember to pray for this mission work too. Pray that members of the church (including yourself) will be sincere while engaging in follow-up work. The Follow-up Committee also covets your prayers for us. Pray that God will bless the measures we implement for the newcomers, as a means to fulfil His divine counsel.

Conclusion

“Everybody's job is nobody's job”, goes a familiar refrain. Let that not be true of our service to God. Let that not be true of our follow-up work. Let “everybody's job be everybody's job”, such that we, recognising the calling that God gives to each one of us, seek to be faithful in it, and encourage our brethren in Christ to do likewise.

What is Reformed? Reformed In Church Government (III)

>> Prof. Hanko



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Introduction

In the last article, I discussed the offices in the church that Christ has established. They are the offices of Elder, Minister, and Deacon. They are important and necessary for the church to exist in the world, for Christ is present in the church through these offices, and only through these offices. And the work of the offices directly affects our life in the church.

In fact, there is one more office in the church. That is the office of all believers. In a way, the office of all believers is the most important office in the church. And every one of you who belongs to the church holds this office. We shall have to say something about how you function in that office, and what is the relation between that office, which you

hold, and your Minister's, Elders' and Deacons'.

The Office of Elder

Let me first say a few things about each office and the work each office bearer holding that office is called to do. I do not do this for the benefit of your Elders who know the responsibilities of their office: I do this for your sake, so that you may know what Scripture teaches and how you, in relation to your elders, are to function in your own office of believers.

Elders in the church take the place of kings who ruled in the church in the old dispensation. So, Elders rule in the church. They rule in the name of Christ, who is the King of the church, who rules over His people by His Word and Spirit; Christ does this through the Elders.

Because the Elders rule, they have authority over those under their rule, that is, the congregation. Authority means three things: First, it means the Christ-given right to decide for others what is right in God's sight and what is wrong before God. Elders do this on the basis of Scripture, which is Christ's Word. Second, authority means that Elders have the right to insist that those under their rule do as they say. Third, Elders have the right to punish those who will not obey them. Their punishment is the exercise of the keys of the kingdom in discipline. And because what they do is what Christ wishes, that which is bound (decided) on earth

is bound also in heaven (Matthew 16:19).

That authority from Christ is limited within the church. That same authority is given to parents in the home and family. The government holds the same authority, but in the State. And the employer holds that authority in the work place.

The Elders rule over the entire congregation. They rule over all the members, including the children; they rule over the Minister so that he is obligated to do what they tell him. They determine whether his preaching is the whole counsel of God and is that which the congregation needs. They rule over the Deacons, so that our *Church Order* requires that an Elder be present at every Deacons' meeting. They rule over their fellow Elders: the *Church Order* requires that each Elder has opportunity to point out to other Elders how they may be lax in executing the duties of their office prior to the administering of the Lord's Supper.

One item that is sometimes neglected, even within our circles, is the calling to warn the people against false doctrine. My wife and I were having our devotions this morning on Ezekiel 33. The prophet calls Ezekiel and the elders the watchmen on the walls of Zion. They are to warn the people of the coming of the enemy. If they do not do this, and the enemy does evil or harm to the congregation, the Elders are the ones who will be held responsible

before Christ and they will certainly be punished.

This part of their calling is also mentioned in the *Formula of Subscription*. Office bearers vow before God that they will warn the people of God of all false doctrine and errors in godly living. We are sometimes content to preach the truth, and that is a great calling; but we have failed in our calling if we who are Elders do not specifically point out the errors of doctrine and life taught in other churches. I refer to doctrines such as the gracious offer of salvation, common grace, the conditional covenant, and justification by works. We are also called to warn against serious errors that deny that God's Covenant is established with infants, that teach man has some part to play in his salvation, and that teach divorce and remarriage are acceptable in the church of Christ.

The Calling of Ministers

Ministers are Elders as well as those specifically called to be Elders. Scripture teaches this in 1 Timothy 5:17: "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they that labour in the word and doctrine." Paul clearly calls Ministers, Elders: the distinction being that Ministers labour in the Word and doctrine.

While ministers surely must preach the Word on the Lord's Days and whenever

there are special services, they also must bring the Word of God to the children in Catechism classes. They also bring the Word of God to the sheep in personal pastoral work. This is primarily in family visitation, but also in the visiting of the sick, the aged, and those who need special care because of the trials of life.

But this work ought to be done primarily by the Elders, for Ministers, in giving themselves to the Word and prayer, need all the time available to them to prepare sermons. I know that I did. It took me, generally speaking, four days of the week to make two sermons. A minister must be chained to his desk in his study.

It seems as if that remains true all the life of a Minister. It is as difficult for me now to make sermons as when I was first in the ministry; and sometimes it seems more difficult, for the responsibility of it all weighs even more heavily now than then. To be the mouthpiece of Christ is weighty.

It is easy and very tempting for a minister to hold a wetted finger in the air to determine the prevailing congregational winds and adjust one's sails to catch those winds; that is, to preach to please the congregation. A good motto for ministers is found in Galatians 1:10: "For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should

not be the servant of Christ."

And, by the way, the word "servant" can just as well be translated, "slave". Paul was proud to be a slave of Christ. He boasts of it at the end of his epistle. He does not want to be bothered any more by the heretics in the Galatian churches, for proof of his faithfulness to Christ lies in the fact that he bears in his body the brand marks of a slave of Christ (Galatians 6:17). In Paul's day slaves were branded. I used to brand cattle on a ranch in Montana. Branding a cow hurt the cow, but was necessary to prove ownership. Christ put his brand on Paul to prove that he was Christ's slave. What were those brand marks? They too hurt Paul. They were the scars of his beatings. They were the barely healed wounds of his stoning—a stoning that took place among the very churches in Galatia organised on Paul's first missionary journey when he was among them (Acts 14:19-20). They hurt Paul. But they proved Christ owned him. They were the brands Christ burned on his body.

I highly recommend that every minister put this text of Galatians 1:10 in large letters on his desk where he can see them every day.

We must say something yet about the work of Deacons and the responsibilities of those who hold the office of believers. But this will come, God willing, in the next article.

“ 1 Timothy 5:17: “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they that labour in the word and doctrine.” ”

Our Children's Education: A Covenant Necessity (IV) - The Spiritual Blessings of a Covenant Education

>> Aaron Lim



Aaron Lim is a confessing young adult in CERC and has been studying in the Protestant Reformed Seminary since August 2013.

Pastor Ronald Hanko properly defines Christian education:

“Christian education is education that is completely and consistently Christian. It is education that is Christ-centered and Bible-based. It is education that is controlled not by the civil government but by Christian parents” (Christian Education, <http://www.cprf.co.uk/pamphlets/christianeducation.htm>).

Because Covenant parents have the high calling to raise up children for the LORD, they must desire the highest quality of Covenant education. They may not be satisfied simply with a Christian education. They must insist on a uniquely Reformed education, one that imparts to them the powerful truths of Scripture as the basis for all knowledge. It must be an education that is according to the distinctive “aforesaid doctrine” of the church, as the Baptism Form puts it. An education of this nature must rely on the church’s confessions.

Again, Prof. Engelsma writes:

“...we insist that the creeds must be retained as authoritative for Christian education. To let them go would be to lose Reformed, Covenant education. The confessions are not an authority alongside Scripture, but they are the authoritative interpretation of Scripture for the Reformed faith... they are the truth for the redeemed, Reformed believer’s entire life” (pg 30, Reformed Education).

We cannot begin to list all the benefits of a Covenant education, but they may be broadly categorised into these few headings. Scripture demonstrates numerous of these blessings to us. It is important to note that the blessings are always spiritual in nature. We are not pursuing material blessings in Covenant education.

1. The Vanity of this Life

Contrary to public education which sinfully promotes the pleasures of this life, a Covenant education strives to teach Covenant children the vanity of this life. We teach them that a man’s life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses (Luke 12:15). We teach them that all of life is vanity without God (Ecclesiastes 2:11). We teach them that riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivers from death (Proverbs 11:4). We teach them to count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord (Philippians 3:8). For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? (Matthew 16:26). Knowing

this, Covenant children confess, “Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am (Psalm 39:4).”

Because all of life is vain without God, we rear Covenant seed so that they find their hope and strength in God (Exodus 15:2). Like the psalmist who knew the Lord from his youth, our Covenant children declare, “For thou art my hope, O Lord GOD: thou art my trust from my youth (Psalm 71:5). The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? (Psalm 27:1)”

2. Preparation for the End Times

What makes public education so spiritually dangerous for Covenant children is that it sinfully disregards the day of final judgment where the world shall come to an end. While the world promotes a life of merry-making and sinful pleasures, Jehovah’s children must be taught that the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night (2 Peter 3:10), where He will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or evil (Ecclesiastes 12:14).

For this reason we must teach our children to be sober, to watch and pray for the Lord’s return where persecution will increase. Covenant education must prepare our children to “suffer persecution for the cross of Christ” (Galatians 6:12). They are not in this world to enjoy its pleasures, but to deny themselves, take up the cross, and

follow after Christ (Mark 8:34). They must learn to walk the narrow way where very few will tread (Matthew 7:14). They must learn that they will be hated of all men for the sake of Christ; but he that endureth to the end shall be saved (Matthew 10:22).

Covenant education functions like a camp that trains young soldiers to fight their spiritual warfare in life. Covenant parents only know too well that the spiritual battles in this life are fierce and unending. They are wrestling “against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:12). Hence, they must equip their Covenant young to the best of their ability with the spiritual armoury necessary to fight this intense spiritual warfare.

With an adequate spiritual preparation, our Covenant young will not be caught unawares when persecution comes upon them as the day of the Lord draws

nearer. They will stand up unashamedly for Christ according to all that they have been taught and trained for. Even if death should threaten them, they will resist the mark of the beast, for they fear God rather than men (Acts 5:29).

3. Preparation for Eternity

Because the church is the only institution on earth that will abide for eternity, we must educate our children to love this eternal institution. God and His church must be central in their lives. God’s people must be their closest companions in this life, for it is they with whom our children will spend eternity with. Our children must say, I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts (Psalm 119:63).

We teach our children, in the beautiful words of the puritan Matthew Henry, “that a holy heavenly life spent in the service of God, and in communion with him, is, without doubt, the most pleasant and comfortable life any man

can live in this world” (The Pleasantness of a Religious Life).

In Covenant education, our children will learn to look forward to the day of our Lord’s coming with “a most ardent desire”, as our Belgic Confession puts it (Article 37). Their suffering in this life will not be in vain. Their choice to suffer afflictions rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin will be vindicated. The Lord will wipe away their tears when He returns (Revelation 21:4). He will give them a crown of righteousness because they love His appearing (2 Timothy 4:8). Then they shall reign with Him forevermore in the new heavens and new earth.

In view of all these blessings, we trust that we and our Covenant seed will be counted amongst those to whom the Lord shall say, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world (Matthew 25:34).

Preparing for Fatherhood (II): Challenges

>> Pastor Daniel Holstege



Pastor Daniel Holstege is Minister of the Word at First Protestant Reformed Church of Holland in West Michigan, USA. In March 2012, he came to Singapore to assist CERC in her pulpit needs.

“It sometimes happens that young men (especially young men, but sometimes young women too), postpone looking for mates because they love too well the things of the world and material possessions. They want to buy this, and they want to buy that. They want to enjoy this, and they want to enjoy that before they really begin building a home. Envy is such a great evil that it already threatens even starting a home. But, after marriage takes place

and a young man and a young woman enter into marriage, the same evil threatens. Envy becomes the reason why having children is put off. And maybe sometimes envy is the reason a husband and wife decide not to have any children at all, or maybe just one or no more than two. Envy does that. Children get in the way. Children cost money. Children make it impossible for husbands and wives to buy the things they want and to enjoy the things of

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Preparing for fatherhood involves the challenge of learning to deny yourself and to serve others; to say goodbye to the illusion of freedom without responsibility...

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life. Especially when you have to pay Christian school tuition...”

Young men face many challenges with regards to fatherhood, as the quote above from Prof. Herman Hanko indicates. By “challenges” I do not mean things which are difficult from a natural point of view. You may think it’s going to be a challenge to know why your baby is crying all the time, to know what to do in various scenarios, to make sure your children get adequate nutrition, and so forth. That’s all true. But by “challenges” I have in mind things which are difficult from a spiritual point of view. I mean temptations hurled at young men on the road of the Christian life. I mean sacrifices that must be made. I mean challenges of the heart. These are the greater challenges. Let us look at some of them.

First of all, there is the challenge of becoming a man. To be sure, there is a natural development that takes place from boyhood to manhood. Boys naturally become young men. Young men naturally become men. But there is also a spiritual dimension here. On the one hand, some young men become desperate in their yearning for a mate and children. They are not content in single life. They long to be married immediately and to become fathers. But sometimes God says “not now”. So, they must learn to wait on the Lord. But others strongly resist

becoming men, even though they are in their twenties or thirties. They do not want to put away childish things. They are infatuated with thinking like boys, talking like boys, and acting like boys. They cling to immaturity. One example I think of is video games. We may play games. But playing is mainly an activity of children. I wonder how much time Christian young men waste staring at a television or computer or smartphone, trying to defeat make-believe opponents, or striving to advance to the next level. Hours and hours, I fear. I used to play video games too when I was a teenager. So I am not one who has no experience in these things. But when we become adults, we need to put away childish things more and more. Paul writes, “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things” (1 Corinthians 13:11). In the same vein, he later adds as a parting exhortation, “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong” (1 Corinthians 16:13). Young men, it is time to start leaving behind the lifestyle of boyhood. It is time to start acting like men. It is time to start talking like men. This is a challenge. For some it may be difficult. But you must be a man to be a good father. Prof. Barry Gritters has a sign in his room at the Protestant Reformed seminary that says something like this: “A boy can preach. But it takes a man to teach. But it takes a

man to teach catechism.” I have found that to be true too. A boy can stand up and address people who listen silently and respectfully. But it takes a mature Christian man with the right blend of wisdom, kindness, and firmness to teach rambunctious little children. Similarly, it takes a mature Christian man to be a good father.

Second, there is the challenge of youthful temptations. There are certain temptations which are particularly strong for youth. David felt guilt over giving in to such temptations, and he wrote, “Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to thy mercy remember thou me for thy goodness’ sake, O LORD” (Psalm 25:7). Paul warned young Timothy, “Flee also youthful lusts” (2 Timothy 2:22). By nature, we all love the things of the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16). But we are especially drawn to the world as youth. Our bodies have developed to the point that we are now physically attracted to the opposite sex, and we begin longing to fulfil those desires. Our minds often become curious about the things that we are forbidden to do: drinking to the point of drunkenness, sensual dancing, movie watching, and worldly music. Our purposes and plans for life begin to take shape, and earning lots of money or acquiring power and influence begin to allure us. Read the quote

at the beginning of this article once again. The evil of envy or covetousness is a great threat to the building of a Christian home. Therefore, the devil attacks us viciously by tempting us to postpone getting married and having children and to set out to become rich. Sometimes Christian young men give in to those temptations, captivated by the glitter and glamour of the world, and even become ensnared. But you cannot be a good father if you are ensnared in the lusts of the flesh. Nor must you think that you will put away these things once you get married, or once you have children. It does not work that way. If you let the world into your heart now as a young man, the world is not going to leave willingly just because you become a husband and father. Preparing for fatherhood involves facing the challenge of youthful temptations and fleeing from them, or fighting against them, by the grace of God and through prayer.

Third, there is the challenge of transitioning from the freedom of youth to the responsibilities of fatherhood. This is a great challenge. As a single young man you gain more and more freedom from your parents, but without much responsibility. This is, as I see it, one of the great illusions of youth. There is nothing wrong with it per se. It is simply a fact. But it can create an illusion in the mind of a young man, namely, that being an adult means freedom without responsibility. That could not be farther from the truth. Of course, as a young man you do have some responsibilities already: homework, chores, or perhaps a job. But you also have much freedom to come and go as you please. You are not always chained to your parents. You can go places without them. The older you get the more freedom you obtain. You can go where you want, do what you want,

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Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them [children]: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate. ”

when you want, all within the bounds of the Christian life, of course. But you do not yet have a wife and children of your own who have needs and desires of their own. So you have the freedom to focus on what you want: whether traveling abroad, or playing sports, or socialising with peers. Youth does little to teach selflessness. On the contrary, it tempts us to think that our life is the centre of the universe. Therefore, one of the great challenges of becoming a husband and father, which you need to know in advance, is that you will have to give up that freedom and that living for yourself. You will have to take on weighty responsibilities and live for others. As Paul exhorts us, “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:4-5). Preparing for fatherhood involves the challenge of learning to deny yourself and to serve others; to say goodbye to the illusion of freedom without responsibility and to embrace a life of performing your duties.

Do the challenges mentioned here deter you from desiring fatherhood? Let that not be the case. Do not forget the great challenge that God placed upon Himself as our Father. He so loved us that He gave up His only begotten Son. Do not forget the challenge that Christ overcame so that we could receive the adoption of children. He gave Himself for us, shedding His blood and dying the death of the cross. Do not forget that we are children of a faithful heavenly Father who has taken us into His everlasting Covenant, who provides us with all things necessary for soul and body, and who turns all evils which He sends us in this valley of tears to our advantage. Do not forget that He who loves us also calls us to desire and seek fatherhood (Genesis 1:28), and promises to gather His elect out of our children (Genesis 17:7, Acts 2:39).

Also let us remember, young men, the great blessedness that belongs to the God-fearing father. “Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them [children]: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate” (Psalm 127:5). “Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways. For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee. Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table. Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD” (Psalm 128:1-4). Being a Christian father will bring you great joy. The joy of giving selflessly to your family. The joy of raising the children of the Covenant and seeing them become stalwart sons and daughters. The joy of fellowship with your wife and children in a godly home. Let these joys spur you on to desire fatherhood and prepare yourself, should this be God’s will for your life.

PRAYING FOR OUR PASTOR

>> Cornelius Boon



Cornelius Boon is a confessing young adult in CERC.

We have heard pastor pray for the needs of the congregation many times; at least two times on Sunday every week and also at many other events. What we often forget is that we are also called to pray for pastor as he labours in our midst. We do not start praying for him only when he faces difficulty in the ministry, or when he is facing some challenge. We should always be praying for him, even when things are going fine. Let us first see from Scripture that it is biblical to remember the minister in prayer. The Apostle Paul is a good example as he calls his brethren in Rome to pray for him.

Romans 15:30 Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me;

Here Paul almost seems to be begging for the brethren to pray for him and that should give us a sense of how important he views prayers for him. So much so that he says that for Christ's sake and for the love of the Spirit, to remember him in prayer. Why is it so

important? Because Paul is doing the work of Christ by bringing to gospel to the lost. By Paul's preaching and ministry, the Holy Spirit works salvation in those that God has chosen. We can say that this is the most important work that anyone can do, and so Paul needs the prayer of his brethren.

Paul does not mean to say that the prayers of the brethren is the deciding factor that brings lost souls to Christ, for God is sovereign in salvation. But God uses the means of prayers to strengthen and give the grace required by the minister to preach the Word. By the Word, God works in the hearts of His people. Not only that, but God also uses prayer to strengthen the faith of those that pray. As we remember our minister in prayer, we see God's hand in everything that happens and we are sanctified as well.

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What we often forget is that we are also called to pray for pastor as he labours in our midst.

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Not only in Romans do we read about Paul asking for prayers. In other places such as in II Corinthians and 2 Thessalonians, Paul also makes reference to the brethren's prayers for him. We see that Paul asking for prayers was not just a one-off request, but constantly throughout his ministry, he requested and received prayers from the brethren. Below are two other instances in scripture that Paul mentions the prayers for him.

2 Corinthians 1:11 Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf.

2 Thessalonians 3:1 Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you:

As Paul faced many challenges in his ministry, the faithful minister today faces similar challenges. We live in perilous times where the environment is hostile against those that teach an absolute truth. The faithful minister is called to be antithetical and polemical in his preaching and this requires much wisdom and courage. He does not only face challenges outside the church, but within the church as well. We as sheep have all gone astray and the calling of the minister is to guide the flock with faithful preaching that carries both encouragement and rebuke from the Word of God. And not only that, the minister still has to face the challenge within him. Like all men, the minister

“ That he may be endued with wisdom and valour to rule the congregation aright and preserve them in Christian peace... ”

has that old man of sin that he must contend with. He must always be vigilant against pride, anger, laziness and other sins that might seep in. He must always be wrestling with the Word of God, studying and meditating it.

And so, the minister requires the constant prayers of the congregation. As mentioned briefly earlier, if the church neglects to pray for her ministers, it does not mean that the work of God will not succeed. For God's work of grace does not depend on the prayers of men; if that were the case, it would make God a weak and powerless God. The purpose of prayer is never to impose our will on God, that somehow by our prayers God is moved to change His will. But having said that, we would do well to heed the instruction to pray and not underestimate the power of prayer. Our prayer ought to be one of submission to God's will. When we pray for the minister, we pray that God's will be clear to us and that God may grant us the grace to accept and obey His will.

One example of the power of prayer is that of Peter when he was in prison awaiting his execution by Herod.

Acts 12:5-6 Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison.

The church initially would have prayed for him to be spared but as time passed, it seemed as though that was not the will of God. So the church would have prayed for God to give Peter the grace to be faithful and content as he faces death. The result was that even on the eve of his execution Peter could sleep peacefully in submission to the will of God. So when the church faithfully prays for the minister, God is pleased to use prayer as a means to bless not only the minister but also the entire congregation as well. Through prayer, God gives not only the minister but those who pray as well, a child-like dependence and trust in Him. Through prayer, we have peace with God, assured that He is in control and that He will always hear us.

The Bible also gives us instruction on what we should pray for. From the passages that were referenced earlier, we see that anything concerning the ministry ought to be remembered in prayer. Below is a list of some of the things that Paul requested prayer for and we see that Paul asks not only that the gospel may be spread to all nations as the Lord see fits, but also for his physical and mental well-being as well.

1. That I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judaea
2. That my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints
3. That I may come unto you with joy

by the will of God, and may with you be refreshed

4. That for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf
5. That the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified
6. That we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men

Finally, we do not pray that our minister will be influential in politics or the affairs of this world. The prayer at the end of the form of ordination of a minister also gives us good instruction on how we should pray for our minister. That prayer lists some petitions that we ought to remember when we pray for our minister.

1. That he may be qualified daily more and more by the Holy Spirit for the work of the ministry unto which he has been called.
2. That his understanding may be enlightened to comprehend the holy Word of God.
3. That he may boldly preach the mysteries of the gospel.
4. That he may be endued with wisdom and valour to rule the congregation aright and preserve them in Christian peace, to the end that God's Church, under his administration and by his good example, may increase in number and virtue.

5. That he may have courage to bear the difficulties and troubles which he may meet with in his ministry,
6. That he may be strengthened by the comfort of the Spirit and be steadfast to the end.

That, with all faithful servants, he may be received in the end into the joy of his Master.

Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

Shame and Face-Saving

>> Elder Chan Chee Seng



Chee Seng Chan is an Elder in CERC.

In Singapore we often use the phrases “save face”, “lose face” and even “no face”. A face-saver is someone who tries to salvage his or her prestige or dignity. Therefore to “save face” is to prevent shame to another or ourselves. A person who “loses face” feels ashamed. In this article, I will use the terms “loss of prestige or dignity” and “shame” and “loss of face” interchangeably. As we explore this theme in greater depth, we aim to answer these questions: 1) Is “saving face” a cultural norm that is unique to Asians? 2) How does understanding this social norm affect our Christian walk?

When one is shamed, the possible cause of shame could sometimes be the result of one’s own doing. For example, a person caught stealing red-handed brings shame to himself. However, we must be careful not to be too quick to equate shame with evil, for not all shame is evil to be despised.

It is possible that an innocent person bears shame as a result of another man’s deeds. An example would be Jonathan who was ashamed of what his father, King Saul, did to David. (1 Samuel

20:34) Jonathan was innocent of the action, but his father’s sins made him feel ashamed. Our Lord Jesus Christ endured the cross, despising the shame—a shame which really was ours to bear, but He took it upon Himself for our salvation.

There may be many reasons why we may feel ashamed. Perhaps we did not do as good a job as we wished we could. Perhaps we were embarrassed in an act, sinful or not. Perhaps we are outcast by our peers. We may feel that there are several reasons why we may feel ashamed or embarrassed. In reality, there is only one legitimate reason to be ashamed. The prophet Jeremiah puts it this way, “We lie down in our shame, and our confusion covereth us: for we have sinned against the LORD our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even unto this day, and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God.” (Jeremiah 3:25) When we do not obey the voice of God, hearing his word but not obeying it, we sin against Jehovah and this is the only reason to be ashamed and sorrowful.

Sometimes, because of our old man of sin, we are foolishly ashamed of glorious things. Jesus warns us about one such thing, “Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.” (Mark 8:38) To be ashamed of Christ, in the context of this verse, is

to love this world more than Christ. Sin is the only reason for shame and Christ is our only deliverance from our sin. What a grievous shame it is when a man is ashamed of Christ. At the cross, our Lord Jesus took our sin upon himself, “lost face” on our behalf, so that in Him alone, may we meet God face to face.

I pondered for a time over whether “saving face” is a uniquely Asian mindset and came to the conclusion that isn’t, as the fear of losing dignity is universal.

“Saving face” is practiced all over the world, every day. For example, when someone carelessly spills a drink, we would quickly say something to try to salvage an otherwise embarrassing situation. It is also commonly practiced in business negotiations, where each party, not wanting the other to “lose face”, compromises their own position in order to reach a settlement. We give our children “face” by not admonishing them in public but waiting until we arrive home. These are largely good reasons for “saving face”. On the contrary, the tradition of honour killing practiced in the Middle East and India is an example of “saving face” for a terrible reason.

Although the Bible never uses the phrase “saving face” or something similar, the application is a Biblical one. The Apostle Paul was careful to tell the Corinthians that he did not write to shame them. “I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved

sons I warn you.” (1Corinthians 4:14). This is a poignant and instructive verse. Paul recognises that “shame” would make one defensive, and instead comes to them in love, identifying them as “beloved sons”. His approach is one of brotherly love. Similarly, telling a brother of his sin should not be to the end of shaming them. The most obvious Biblical application on how we should deal with our Christian brother or sister is found in Matthew 18, when our Lord gave command on how we should resolve disputes between brethren. The overriding principle is to do so in love, and as privately as possible, so that a brother is not put to unnecessary shame. Again, although the Heidelberg Catechism never uses the term, it expresses the idea of “saving face” positively in this way, “always upholding the honour and good character of the neighbour.”

The motivation for “saving face” for the unbelieving world defers from that of the Christian. The Christian “saves face” for the brother because that brother is a member of the body of Christ. The hand will not want to put the feet to shame because we belong to that one body, with Christ our head. A member of the body of Christ must love and uphold the honour and good character of every other part of the body of Christ.

Having written about the good motivations for “saving face”, some wrong uses of it must also be pointed out. “Saving face” is wrong when it is used to make light of sin or turn a blind eye to it in order to excuse sin.

We have a negative example in the lawyer described in Luke 10 who did not love his neighbour as he ought to. After he was pricked in his heart by Jesus’ reply, he asked, “And who is my neighbour?” Luke 10:29 tells us that he

was “willing to justify himself”. This man, when confronted by the word of God, chose to save his own face over the salvation of his soul. He tried to justify his own sin. It is very tempting to try to justify our own sin or the sins of people whom we really care about in order to “save face”.

Returning to our first question, one possible reason why “saving face” might, at first glance, appear to be a uniquely Asian norm may be the fact that the Chinese language has arguably more terms referring to it than any other. Another contributing factor is that it is practised so openly, especially during festive seasons such as Chinese New Year. The season offers opportunities aplenty to do things in order not to lose face. One striking example is the giving of “ang pow” (“red packet” in Mandarin, where money is put in well-decorated red, or sometimes gold envelopes and given by adults to children).

I recall a conversation with individuals who felt embarrassed, having not given “ang pow” that was monetarily as large as others during the Chinese New Year. It was almost as if there was competition as a result of the prosperity status accorded by the size of the “ang pow”. While the practice of giving “*ang pow*” is not wrong in itself, giving at the expense of the Kingdom or giving in excess of one’s ability in order to “save face” is a misuse of God’s gifts. Another bad Chinese New Year practice is in the over-stocking of snacks and titbits, much of which are left wasted because nobody likes to “lose face” over having little to offer their visitors in their homes. Chinese restaurants lure the superstitious with auspicious sounding menus that burn holes in pockets. The Christian may find it difficult to resist joining the crowd for the sake of “face”, but we ought to be discerning and not wasteful.

What should be our approach when confronted with situations where we might be tempted to “save face” for the wrong reasons? We ought to ask ourselves, “Is what I am going to do going to glorify God?” This way, we view all things positively with Christ’s Kingdom in view.

Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. The King of the Kingdom of God gave His life for His subjects, including you and I. How could we not seek first the good of His Kingdom? Even if I had to suffer shame, I must love His Kingdom. Christ despised shame for you and I. (Hebrews 12:2) Hence, I will save my brother’s “face” for the sake of Christ’s Kingdom. I will not embarrass him even when I have to deal with his sin because he is a citizen of Christ’s Kingdom. How can I deal falsely with a brother and claim to love God? “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? (1 John 4:20).

In this world, Christians will suffer afflictions and shame for Christ’s sake. “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.” (Matthew 5:11) In the history of the church, God’s people suffer greatly, both at the hands of those from within and without the church. “Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.” (1 Peter 4:16)

By all means, “save face” for ourselves and for others, but never at the expense of the Kingdom of Christ.



News from the Churches

SINGAPORE

CERC Gospel Meeting and Church Retreat

On 25 December 2015, CERC celebrated Christmas with a Gospel meeting with visitors encouraged to attend. Pastor Lanning gave a speech on the theme “Wise Men Worship the King”, based on Matthew 2: 1-2.

On 1st January 2016, CERC gathered together for the first time in the new year to celebrate and give thanks to God for the many blessings He has given the church. CERC’s Session presented CERC’s theme for 2016 which is the same as last year: “The Gospel: A Witness to All Nations” based on Matthew 24:14.

Infant Baptisms

With praise to our Great God, we rejoice with the parents of Noah Lee De En and Liu EnXue, Naomi whose infant children received infant baptism on 27 December 2015.

Psalm 127:4 “As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth.”

Adult Baptisms and Confession of Faith

We rejoice with our brethren, Kuang who received the sacrament of baptism and made confession of faith on 10 January 2016 and Huggy Lee who made confession of faith on 6 December 2015. May the Lord give all His children the grace to walk in holiness before Him.

Matthew 10:32 “Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.”

Weddings

On 9 January 2016, our former Salt Shakers chairman, Josiah Tan, and secretary, Koh Hui Qi were joined in the bond of holy matrimony. They have since moved to Michigan for Josiah to commence his pre-seminary studies.

Following Josiah and Huiqi’s wedding is the wedding of our current Salt Shakers chairman, Chua Lee Yang and current secretary, Joanna Tang, who will be married on 20 February 2016, Lord willing.

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

PHILIPPINES

Pastor Daniel Holstege is currently in the Philippines to assist Pastor Daniel Kleyn in the labours of the mission field in Philippines from 8 January to 25 January.

Pastor. J. Engelsma and Lee Hoekstra representing the Foreign Mission Committee and Doon PRC plan to make the annual visit to the Philippines Mission field in mid February.

In other news, the Classis of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines is scheduled to meet on Thursday, February 25. The meeting will be hosted by the Maranatha PRC and held in their church building in Valenzuela.



CK/CKS Camp 2015



Baptism of Kuang & Confession of Faith of Huggy



Baptism of Noah, son of Elder Lee & Dorcas



Baptism of Naomi, daughter of Paul & Anthea



We rejoice with Josiah & Hui Qi



Letters to missionaries from Vacation Bible School's campers

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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