

SHINE

We can read about Jesus' command to us to shine, in Philippians 2:14-16. It reminds us of a children's song that many of us know:

**'Jesus bids us shine, with a clear pure light,
Like a little candle, burning in the night,
He looks down from heaven, sees us shine,
You in your small corner, and I in mine.'**

'Shining' seems to be a controversial issue in our church these days. The necessity of being a light to the world has been emphasized. But why should we shine if it is not dark? We read that we live among 'wicked and crooked people' (Phil 2:15) whose hearts are minefields of all kinds of unfathomable evil (Jer17:9). So it is dark in the world. Moreover, we also once belonged to the darkness (Eph 5:8). That broken man, that drunkard in the ditch at the side of the road, that foul-mouthed prostitute is me. When Jesus ate with the tax collectors and sinners, He ate with us. We are the lost sheep for whom God sent His Son into the world. But now we are no longer called 'the world', but we have been transformed – and are constantly being reformed – as His true bride. the Church. Now. as people who have been

VOLUME 11 ISSUE 4 JULY 2006

Editorial: Shine	C Groenewold	1
From the EIC	E Terpstra	2
Footsteps of the LORD	Rev J Smith	3
Under the Spell of Harry Potter	R Versluis	8
The Attributes of GOD	K Dekker	10
Letter to the Editor	R Vermeulen	11

SHINE (continued)

called out of the world, we have been given the command to shine in it.

In order to shine, we need a source of light, and of course Jesus is that light living inside us. The gospel of Jesus Christ inside our hearts is that light which we must allow to shine on all our comings and goings. Therefore our thoughts, words and deeds must be holy. Therefore we must crucify our old nature and be devoted to serving God. From day to day and even from minute to minute we have to make the right choices. Because when we are disobedient, the light of the gospel inside us will be off and we can't shine.

How can we be obedient to God? Where are His orders for me today? What does He want me to do right now? The answer may seem too simple: He wants us to do our duty – you in your small corner and I in mine. Our specific duties are given to us by our teachers and elders, our employers, our parents, the government, and all those in authority over us. Through the authority figures in our lives the Lord tells us what to do. When we do our daily tasks as well as we can in the way that God wants us to – without cutting corners and without complaining – then we can 'shine like stars in

the universe holding out the word of life.' (Phil 2:16)

Holding out the word of life in this way benefits the salvation of many people. We ourselves benefit, because when we shine, we allow the Holy Spirit to work in us. Our brothers and sisters benefit because they may be brought back to the right way because of us (James 5:19). Unbelievers may benefit, because through our walk of life their sin and misery is exposed.

We must be very careful, then, how we live because our way of life has the power to expose the evil in the lives of unbelievers. (Eph 5:13-15). Calvin says that then: 'their eyes are opened... they begin to blush and be ashamed.'

However, our motive in shining should be firstly 'to please God' (Rom 12:1). Then, in His wisdom He uses our lives in order to promote His Kingdom in a way chosen by Him. He may hide the light from some people (2 Cor 4:4), blinding them to it, lest they believe and are saved, or He may reveal it to them through our shining, so that His name may be praised.

Colette Groenewold

From the EIC

Welcome to another edition of the Contender:

After our family evening meal, we are at the moment reading from the book of Proverbs. It had been a while since we have read from that particular book, so I think it is for that reason that I experienced the wisdom contained in the proverbs especially refreshing; it was almost like reading these profound truths for the very first time.

In Proverbs 1:7 it reads, "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge." Proverbs 9:10 states, "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." What

exactly is meant by the fear of the Lord? The new Genevan Study Bible describes it quite neatly when it says, "... [it is] the reverent awe and worshipful response of faith to the God who reveals himself as the Creator, Saviour and Judge. A reverent awe and worshipful response of faith are beginnings on the path to knowledge and understanding. It is also the beginnings of becoming a wise person as opposed to a fool.

Knowledge, understanding and wisdom are not characteristics people are born with. Rather they are gotten over a period of time. People are working every day again,

reading, writing, studying, teaching, learning, and listening in order to obtain knowledge understanding and wisdom. The Holy Spirit works the "fear of the Lord" in our hearts. It is for that reason that we make time to really know God, to understand His plans for our lives, understand His plans for this world, and to honour Him, who is the true fountain of all wisdom.

Proverbs chapter 3 outlines five promises which are given when we seek knowledge, understanding and wisdom with the fear of the Lord in our hearts. Verse 2 mentions: length of days and long life and peace they will add to you. Verse 4 includes finding favour and high esteem in the sight of God and man. Verse 6 promises that God will direct our paths. In verse 7 we read of health for the flesh and strength for the bones, and in verse 10 barns full with plenty, and vats overflowing with new wine. From this it is very clear that the Lord will also reward in this life those who seek knowledge and wisdom in His Word.

The Lord allows all people to obtain knowledge and understanding. But they are not all wise, for not everyone is prepared to acknowledge God as the Creator, Saviour and Judge of the world. For these people too, Proverbs has a message. Proverbs 8:36... "All those who hate [wisdom] love death". Have a read of Proverbs 9:13-18 and see there too the way of folly and its outcome.

*** **

The editorial board is at the moment under some change.

Rose Vermeulen, our longest serving editor has resigned from the editorial board. It is with some regret that I have to say goodbye to Rose for she stayed on another 6 months or so while the EIC changed over. Rose thankyou for the time and effort you gave Contender over the years, thankyou also for taking on the job of getting the new front cover organized and providing extra assistance whilst I found my feet on this editorial board. Your work has been truly appreciated.

At the time of writing, Rose' position has not yet been taken over. Hopefully soon we will be able to advise you of a new appointment. In the mean time, we welcome another editor to the board, Jeanette Janssen from West Kelmscott church. Jeanette will be the Contender representative for Kelmscott and West Kelmscott. Thanks Jeanette for taking on this role.

In the mean time, I hope you are enjoying the Contender. Feedback is always welcome. Do remember that we are always on the lookout for article with spiritual value, so if you have something that can be adapted for Contender, or would be willing to write something for Contender, please do forward it to one of the editors or your Contender area representative.

Till next time,

Eric Terpstra

FOOTSTEPS OF THE LORD

Author's note¹

When we look at some of the catastrophic events that have happened during the last year or so, we can start to wonder, are we hearing the footsteps of the Lord Jesus approaching? Is He about to come back? A little over a year ago a tsunami in southwest

Asia left more than 200 000 people dead. In Sudan's Darfur region tens of thousands have died and several million more have lost their homes. There were hurricanes and floods in Mexico and the southern United States last year, and a mudslide in Guatemala that took more than a thousand lives. A massive earthquake in October claimed 25 000 lives in Pakistan. Cancer, AIDS, and other diseases continue to take millions of lives, and medical authorities keep raising the spectre of a

¹ This is a revised version of a paper initially prepared for the West Albany Bible Study Clubs' Annual Kick-off Meeting in February and presented again for the Albany Combined Youth Societies in May.

FOOTSTEPS OF THE LORD (CONTINUED)

worldwide bird flu pandemic. So many disasters in such a short time, with fear of more on the horizon. How are we as Christians supposed to interpret such events?

The Bible speaks of the signs of the times, certain events which will happen before Christ returns. We read in Matthew 24 that these include wars and famines and pestilences and earthquakes, the same sorts of things we hear about in the news. Are we supposed to conclude that the Lord Jesus is about to come back? Or are there some signs of the times that have not happened yet?

To answer these questions, I'd like to focus on one passage which deals with the signs of the times in detail, namely Matthew 24. It may be helpful for you to have your Bibles open and follow along as you read this article.

The entire chapter is Christ's answer to a question which the disciples asked Him. Jesus had just walked out of the temple, and the disciples pointed out the buildings of the temple to Him. It was a magnificent structure, originally built after the Jews returned from exile in Babylon, but greatly expanded and remodelled over the last 46 years (John 2.20) thanks especially to the efforts of King Herod. But Jesus did not stop to admire the temple. Instead He predicted that it would be completely destroyed so that not one stone would be left upon another. The disciples were shocked and asked, "When will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?"

It is important to notice that the disciples in fact asked two questions here. The first question is: When will these things be? That is: When will the temple be destroyed? And the second question is: What will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age? WE know that the answers to these two questions are very different. The temple was destroyed by the Romans a long time ago, in A.D. 70. But the end of the age has not come yet. In the minds of the disciples, though, these two events were connected. And that is

not surprising, when you consider what the disciples had just heard Jesus say in the previous chapter, Matthew 23. In the last words of Matt 23 Jesus said that he would not come to the temple again, until He would be greeted with the words of Ps 118: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." So when Jesus told them that the temple would be destroyed, the disciples probably concluded that Jesus was coming back to destroy the temple.

In the rest of chapter 24 Jesus makes clear to his disciples that they ought not to combine the destruction of the temple with the return of Christ. First of all, He shows them that a number of events would precede His coming. Wars and rumours of wars would take place. Nations and kingdoms would rise and fall; famines and pestilences and earthquakes would happen in various places. But even these terrible events did not mean that the world was coming to an end. No, said Jesus, all these are only the beginning of sorrows.

The word that is translated as sorrows in verse 8 really means birth pangs. It reminds me of what we read in Romans 8:20-22, that the whole creation has been groaning in travail ever since the fall when God subjected it to futility so that it produced thorns and thistles; famines show that creation is being held back from its potential to produce food; earthquakes are the groanings of a creation which longs to be redeemed. The fact that there are earthquakes and famines and pestilences show that Christ has NOT come back yet.

In other words, these are signs which do not help us to predict WHEN Christ will come back, but they bring us to the conclusion that He's not here yet. Now, you might ask, isn't it obvious that Christ hasn't come back yet? We don't need an earthquake to figure that out. But remember that Jesus told his disciples that there would be people who claim to be the Christ and they would deceive many. How can they tell that these are false Christs?

Because earthquakes and famines and pestilences and wars are still going on. If the real Christ had come, these things would not happen anymore. In other words, don't think small when it comes to the return of Christ; His return will affect not just Jerusalem or the temple but all of creation; He's coming on a grand scale. Earthquakes, wars, famines, pestilences, and the rise and fall of empires are events not restricted to the time just before Jesus comes back; they have been happening throughout history, and they teach us only one thing: the end is not yet; Christ has not returned. And so we groan along with the rest of creation, longing for the day when death and decay is gone. These signs of the times teach us to say, "How long, O Lord? Maranatha -- come back soon!"

The next section of Matthew 24 also shows that much had to happen before Christ returned. Verses 9-14 speak about the progress of the gospel. It would be accompanied by persecution, false teaching, apostasy, and the love of many Christians would grow cold. Notice that Jesus does not predict a mass conversion to Christianity. He does say that the gospel will be preached in all the world, but as a witness to the nations. In other words, when Christ does come back as Judge, the nations will not be able to say that they did not have a chance to hear the gospel; persecution is the proof that they did hear the gospel but rejected it; false teaching is proof that they heard it but twisted its message; the love growing cold is proof that people used to believe but no longer. Only after the gospel has had this response throughout the world, only then will the end come. Again Jesus teaches the disciples that they should not think small when it comes to the return of Christ: the gospel of the kingdom is going to go throughout the earth; all nations will hear the name of Jesus Christ. Christ's return will have global significance; all nations will be affected by it.

And yet, this sign does not help us to predict the time of Christ's return either. Already in the book of Acts the apostles preached the gospel throughout the known world of the

time. Paul went throughout the Roman Empire, to Rome, possibly as far as Spain. In one of his letters, Peter passes on greetings from Babylon. Other apostles are said to have gone to India. Very early on there was a church in Ethiopia. And throughout church history missionaries have gone to the ends of the earth, the frontiers of civilization. And that work still goes on today. To date, the Bible, or at least parts of it, has been translated into 2167 languages or dialects.² With every generation come new people who have not heard the gospel before, and so the missionary task of the church continues until the end comes. Christ does not tell us to preach the gospel so that we can predict His return, but so that we work for His return. This is a sign of the times that puts the church to work.

So the first part of Matthew 24 has to do with the second question that the disciples asked: What will be the sign of Your coming? In other words, how will we know when You have come back? Jesus' answer is this. There will be people who claim to be the Christ, but don't be fooled. As long as there are wars and earthquakes and famines and pestilences, and as long as the gospel is still being preached to the nations, I haven't come back yet and the end of the age is not yet here.

In the next part of Matthew 24, Christ goes back to their first question: When will the temple be destroyed? In verse 15 He tells the disciples that they would see the abomination of desolation mentioned by Daniel the prophet standing in the holy place. In other words, the temple would be desecrated. Daniel 11.31 predicts the coming of a king who would defile the sanctuary, stop the regular sacrifices and set up an abomination of desolation. This prophecy was fulfilled already in the days of the Maccabees, in the second century BC when a Syrian king named Antiochus IV Epiphanes plundered Jerusalem, invaded the temple and sacrificed pigs on an altar to the Greek god Zeus. Now Jesus says

² See the website of the United Bible Societies: <http://www.biblesociety.org/index2.htm>.

FOOTSTEPS OF THE LORD (CONTINUED)

that the temple would be desecrated again during the disciples' lifetime.

And what should they do when this happened? Should they conclude that Christ had returned to save the believers? No, said Jesus, they should flee for their lives; it would be a time of great danger not only for Jews who rejected Christ but also for Christians. The judgments that Christ had pronounced in Matthew 23 would come upon Jerusalem; the temple would be left desolate, just as He had said, but the sword of the Romans who brought this judgment would not distinguish between Jews and Christians; anyone who stayed behind would be in danger of death. And that's why Jesus tells His disciples to flee to the mountains, to run for their lives, not even to try to save their possessions, but to flee the way Lot once fled from Sodom and Gomorrah. Jesus announced woe to those who were pregnant or were nursing babies because they would be slowed down in their flight. There are plenty of Old Testament texts which tell what enemy soldiers would do to babies and pregnant women if they captured them. Run, run, run for your lives, said Jesus, and pray that nothing will slow you down, like the rainy conditions of winter or the travel restrictions of the Sabbath. For there would be a great tribulation, a time of terrible suffering worse than anything before or since, and if those days were not shortened, no one would survive, not even the elect.

And yet, as terrible as this tribulation would be, it was not the final judgment. It did not mean that Christ had come back as judge. Sure, there would be counterfeits who would claim to be the Christ. These frauds would even be able to do amazing signs and wonders to back up their claims, and they would try to deceive the elect. But Jesus warned his followers not to be taken in by reports of Christ-sightings. When Christ comes back, you won't have to go looking for Him, because it will be obvious. Christ's coming

will be like lightning that lights up the whole sky. You can't miss it. Do vultures ever miss out on a carcass? No, they always seem to know where it is. In the same way, people won't miss out on the return of Christ. What makes His return so obvious? Well, the sun and the moon will stop shining, the stars will disappear, and the stabilizing forces that keep the heavenly bodies in place would be disrupted. Again, the message is, don't think small when it comes to the return of Christ: it's an event of cosmic proportions; it will disrupt the entire universe. You can't miss that.

And when that happens, said Jesus in verse 30, then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the heavens. What is meant by "the sign of the Son of Man"? A sign is something visible, something that people will see. And then the rest of the verse describes precisely what people will see. It says that the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. In other words, the sign of the Son of Man is the Son of Man. If that's the case, why does Jesus speak here of a sign? Because Christ is referring directly to the question which the disciples had asked Him at the beginning of the chapter: What will be the sign of your coming? In other words, how will we know that you're coming? And the answer is, you'll know when you see Me. There will be no advance warning that He's about to come: He will simply appear.

And that fits what we read in the rest of the chapter. Verse 42 says, Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. And verse 44 adds that He is coming at an unexpected hour. Jesus gives the example of a master who comes home on a day when the servant is not looking for him. He also gives the example of the flood: people did not know when it would come, until suddenly it came and swept them away. So too, said Christ, no one knows the time of Christ's return. It goes to show that the signs

of the times are not meant to calculate a date for His coming. Plenty of people have used them for that purpose. But they neglect the Lord's words in verse 44: be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do NOT expect. The signs of the times do not tell us when Christ will return.

Is that really true? Does Christ not give any indication of the time of his return? I'd like to go back for a moment to verse 29. There we read: Immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened, etc, and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear ... immediately after the tribulation. Remember that the tribulation here refers to the terrible suffering that took place when Jerusalem fell. So verse 29 seems to suggest that Christ would come back right after the events of 70 A.D. And verse 34 seems to support that when it says, this generation will by no means pass away till ALL these things take place. That seems to suggest that the return of Christ would happen during the lifetime of Jesus' disciples. Many explainers have taken the approach that all of the events of Matthew 24 have already happened, that the coming of the Son of Man in verse 30 does not refer to Christ's second coming, but that it refers to Christ coming to judge Jerusalem, that behind the Roman forces is Christ who comes to punish Israel for refusing to believe in him. But such explainers have a very difficult time explaining verse 31, about the sounding of the trumpet and the angels who gather the elect from the four winds. That verse is surely about the second coming of Christ.

But then how are we to explain verse 29, which suggests that Christ will return right after the destruction of Jerusalem? There is no simple answer to this question. This whole chapter is one of the most debated passages of the Bible, simply because it is so hard to make all the bits and pieces fall into place. And yet I think that we can make some headway.

The first point that I'd like to make is that Jesus did not know when He would return. Have a look at verse 36. It says: But of that

day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, and then the footnote adds, nor the Son, but My Father only. Now you might argue with me that it's just a footnote which does not belong in the text, but the parallel passages in Mark 13 and Luke 21 do include these words in the text. Jesus says that He does not know the time of His return. And therefore I conclude that verse 29 is not meant to give an exact time for his return. Jesus did know that His return would take place after the tribulation, but exactly when it would happen He did not know, and so He could not tell His disciples that either, even if He had wanted to.

Then why did Jesus use the words 'immediately after the tribulation'? I think that verse 33 gives us a clue: when you see all these things, you know that it is near, at the doors. In other words, when you see all these things happening, the desecration of the temple, the great tribulation, and the false christs leading people astray, then you know that the second coming is near. It's right at the doors, about to happen. That is to say, the tribulation of A.D. 70 is the last warning sign before the return of Christ. The very next sign will be the sign of the coming of the Son of Man. The great tribulation is the last sign which God reveals to us. There are no more revealed events which must happen before Christ's return. From then on there is only one message: be ready, for the Son of Man could come at any time. He's at the doors, and He could step in without warning at any moment.

From a historical perspective, when we look back, a lot of things have happened between the tribulation and the return of Christ. Centuries of history have passed since the destruction of Jerusalem. And then it is hard to make sense of Jesus' words that He will return immediately after the tribulation. But from a faith perspective, looking forwards, God has revealed only this, that we need to be ready for Christ's return. Ever since the destruction of Jerusalem, the church has been waiting for Christ to come at any moment. That is the next big event.

FOOTSTEPS OF THE LORD (CONTINUED)

In summary, the signs of the times are not meant to help us predict when Christ will return. When we hear of events such as wars, famines, earthquakes, and pestilences, these remind us that Christ has not come back yet. Creation is still groaning in travail, longing for the redemption that will come when Christ returns. So if people come who claim to be the Christ, we know that they are lying: Christ is still in heaven. Does that mean that there is nothing we can do? No. We can join in with the groaning of creation, crying out in prayer, O Lord, how long? And we can go to work in the kingdom of God so that the gospel continues to out as a witness to the

nations. That doesn't mean that we all have to be missionaries. In Matthew 24 Christ used the example of two men working in the field, of two women grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. It is there, in our daily work, in the field, at the mill, in the office, in the kitchen, on the building site, in the neighbourhood, and at school that we show forth the gospel in the way we talk and act. And when persecution comes and the love of many grows cold, let us endure to the end. If we continue to do all these things, then Christ will find us ready when He returns.

Rev J Smith

Under the Spell of Harry Potter

The books have hit the world with a storm, hitting the bestseller list almost before being published. People wait hours outside of a bookstore entrance on the morning when the new book comes out. But is there room for these books in our Christian homes?

Let's start with what Harry Potter is actually about. Young Harry Potter has to lead a hard life: His parents have died in a car crash when he was still a baby, and he is being brought up by his Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia. For some reason unbeknownst to the bespectacled ten-year-old, the Dursleys let him live in the small chamber under the stairs, and treat him more like vermin than like a family member. He then finds out that his parents were a wizard and a witch, and were killed, while protecting him, by the evil wizard Voldemort. Harry still has a lightning-shaped scar on his forehead from that event. Since he survived the attack as a baby, and also somehow deprived Voldemort from his powers, he has been famous in the wizarding world. He then gets invited to the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Harry Potter goes on to fight against many evils lurking at Hogwarts along with his friends Ron and Hermione.

So you could say "It's a fight between good and evil". But is it? Who fights the good? A wizard. Who fights the evil? Another wizard. What does God think of wizards? "*There shall not be found among you... one who practises witchcraft... for all who do this are an abomination to the Lord*" (Deut 18:10-12) Good comes from the Lord, but we can see here that a wizard is an abomination to the Lord. How then can a wizard represent good? In God's eyes wizards can only represent evil. Most Christians recognize the good vs. evil element as being clearly delineated. Evil is evil, and good is good, and good is promoted while evil is not. But in the Potter series, the line is not so clear. The "good" guys practice "white magic", while the bad guys practice the "Dark Arts". Readers become fascinated with the magic used (explained in remarkable detail). Yet God is clear in Scripture that *any* practice of magic is an "abomination" to him. God doesn't distinguish between "white" and "dark" magic since they both originate from the same source. A different argument is "but its not serious witchcraft. It's only like 'voilà' and the door opens." All witchcraft is an abomination to the Lord. Not just the hardcore elements. Every practise of

witchcraft is a sin against the first commandment.

Another thing people say is, "it's harmless entertainment". This is covered in the first commandment. Lord's Day 34 Q&A 94 reads, "***That for the sake of my very salvation I avoid and flee ALL idolatry, witchcraft, superstition...***" It can't be spelled out clearer. It does **not** say, "*for the sake of my very salvation I avoid and flee witchcraft unless it is entertainment*". It's not a matter of harmless entertainment. As Christians we are often fooled into mindlessness. We don't stop and critically think what it is we are reading and whether that literature furthers the kingdom of God. We often think that it's 'just' entertainment. But God instructs us to ALWAYS live for Him. Not just in church on Sundays or not just at club. Serving God means devoting our entire life to Him and that includes the material that we read.

In response to this I've heard it said, "But it doesn't matter about my salvation. I don't believe it. I'll put the book down and think it's all a load of nonsense." God's got his answer to this and can be found in 1 Corinthians 10:12. "*Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall*". You might think it doesn't make a difference. But take heed, lest you fall. You don't always know when you are going to fall or that you are falling at all. Witchcraft is part of the occult and it is definitely wrong for a Christian to read a book in which Satan is praised or worshipped. Occult means "hidden". It covers practices that are not approved of by God eg, casting spells (Deut. 18:11), consulting with spirits (Deut. 18:11), magic (Acts 19:19), sorcery (Acts 13:8-9), witchcraft (Deut. 18:10), and spiritism (Deut. 18:11). God is so clearly against the occult!

Paul in the New Testament also deals with it very harshly. In Acts 13:8-9 he talks to Elymas the Sorcerer with much anger, saying "*you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord?*" Witchcraft and sorcery perverts the straight ways of the Lord. Also in Acts 19:19 "*And*

those who had practised magic brought their books and burned them in the sight of all... So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed." Once the magic was eliminated God's Word thrived. Magic was the source of evil. Why should we say our lives are so much different then Paul's that we can let witchcraft and magic darken our doors?

Harry Potter is not in the "grey" area. It's clearly black. Christians can't justify the reading of such unchristian material. It is so clearly an abomination to the Lord. How can something so contrary to God's Word be pleasurable and so entertaining? People are so quick to try justify Harry Potter because they like it so much. If they didn't like it they wouldn't mind joining in condemning it. You cannot embrace Christ while you are reading/watching Harry Potter because you are directly going against God's commandments. Therefore Harry Potter does not fit in with the Christian walk of life.

To remain followers of Christ in the world today, we need to recapture the ability to think critically about what we are watching/reading. This does not mean jumping without thought onto the latest bandwagon. It does mean asking questions about what we see/read. And questioning whether what we read is of God or of Satan. We can't serve God and the devil. If we serve God then we have to realise that witchcraft/wizardry is not of God. We cannot give the devil the opportunity to laugh in our face and say, "tricked you!" And if you are honest with yourself you would not sit reading Harry Potter with Jesus in your living room.

References:

1. Reischal J. 2001 IMDb [Online]
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0241527/plotsummary>
2. Focus Radio [Online]
<http://www.facingthechallenge.org/potter2.htm>
3. Got Questions Ministries [Online]
<http://www.gotquestions.org/Harry-Potter-Christian.html>

The Attributes of God

The ultimate aim for people in this world is to be happy. Happiness can be sought in many different ways. Unbelievers seek their happiness in riches, strength, money, wisdom and control. But as believers, God tells us differently. In Jeremiah 9: 23-24, He tells us that we must not glory in riches, wisdom or might but in the understanding and knowledge of God. How do we know God? The following essay will explain how we know God through His attributes and how that provides us with peace and happiness.

We know God both through the Bible and creation. The Bible tells us of many of the attributes of God. In the awareness that knowing God brings us peace, joy and contentment, we can seek to further our knowledge in Him and the attributes of our God, shown to us in the Bible.

One attribute of God is His immutability. God never changes; He never ages over time, nor goes against what He commands or promises. And this can provide us with a lot of comfort. In Malachi 3:6, Malachi speaks God's Word to the people of Israel, comforting them and telling them that God does not change. If God does not change, if He is immutable, then we know that He keeps and will keep His promises to us. So the covenant He made with Abraham and his seed still applies to us as His children thousands of years later. He promises us forgiveness of sins and eternal life, and so we can be thankful, for the comfort these promises bring, knowing that they will not change.

We can also know God as a loving God, one who cares for His children. In 1 John 4:8, John tells us that God is love. His ultimate expression of that love was shown in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. He showed in this way true compassion, as a father does towards his

children. Knowing that God loves us brings peace. We know that through His love He sent His only begotten Son, so that those who believe in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16). God loves us so much that His love covers our sins, and we may have forgiveness and receive eternal life. What great comfort and joy we may have knowing that God really loves us!

Another great attribute of God is His knowledge of all things. He alone knows what happened in the past, what is happening in the present and what will happen in the future. There are many passages in the Bible which tells us that God knows all things. In Jeremiah 1:5, God tells Jeremiah that He knew him (Jeremiah) before he was born and that he would be ordained a prophet. The fact that God knows everything (past, present and future) can give us great joy, because we know that God knows the best for us. He knows what our lives will bring, and He has planned the best way of life for us. With an all-knowing God in control we have great comfort that the future is always bright in Him.

God is patient and longsuffering with His people. He gives us time to repent and time for the elect to come to faith. And He does this without getting annoyed at us. Psalm 86:15 says that God is full of longsuffering. He always waits for us, and we can find comfort that His patience also endures towards His chosen people. If God is not patient with us, we would not be here.

God's wisdom is also shown to us in the Bible. Daniel 2:20 tells us that wisdom and might are His. We can receive true comfort and happiness in this, for He leads us on the best path. What He has planned for us is the best for us and what

He says and does is always right. His decisions are always wise.

Psalm 103:8 mentions God's grace towards those who fear Him. He is also a gracious God. His grace covers our sins, and so we may receive forgiveness. And God's grace is abounding, it will never run out. He is compassionate to the undeserving. We deserve eternal condemnation, yet receive glorious, everlasting life, through His grace only, not on any merit of our own. We can find contentment and true happiness in this because we know that He gives us the grace we don't deserve.

Through all of the attributes of God, we can see how knowing Him provides the best comfort, joy, peace and contentment for us. We can be truly happy when we know God as an immutable, loving, all-knowing, longsuffering, wise and gracious God. Although we are sinners, and deserve eternal condemnation, we can know, through these attributes, which are revealed to us in His Word, that we can receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Kara Dekker

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor

I appreciated Ben Schoof's article in the last edition regarding 'the Watchmen'. We all need a reminder (especially as youth) that we are to watch out for each other, and warn our fellow youth when we see them go down the wrong path.

I find though, that the most common reaction to this reminder / instruction is: "Yeah, but they know they're doing the wrong thing, so why do I have to tell them?" and regularly added to this is: "If anything we need to show love to them, support them, and be there for them." Are these valid comments or are they cop-outs?

Given that most of us have been brought up in the faith, it could be argued then that none of us should need a warning if we are acting contrary

to God's commands – after all, we all know what is wrong and right.

So is this reaction in line with what is commanded in the Scriptures? Are we called to warn our brother only if he is blindly going down the wrong path? Or should we persistently warn them and remind them to give up their sinful ways?

I think clarifying this issue also is needed to spur the majority of the youth into action. I would therefore love some interaction on this point from either the EIC, Ben, or the readers themselves.

Looking forward to finding some answers.

In Christ,

Rose Vermeulen

Editor Response

Thanks for the letter Rose. We will leave a response to the next edition. In the mean time if someone else would like to share some thoughts, please do so.

Aim:

Romans 12:2 teaches all of God's people:

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

This magazine will encourage its readers to earnestly contend for the faith, and to think and act biblically, in the good traditions of the Church of all ages. Its basis is God's word, as the Church confesses in the Three Forms of Unity. It is intended for the younger members of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, and is produced in co-operation with the Una Sancta. Subscription to the Contender is automatic with subscription to the Una Sancta.

It is not meant to be exclusively for unmarried members who still attend the Youth Bible Study Clubs, but for all those who fit within the loose parameters of 16 to 30 years of age.

Editorial Board:

Eric Terpstra (EIC)	Colette Groenewold
Adrian Hordyk	Hugo Hordyk
Ben Schoof	Rose Vermeulen

Layout: Rosanne Numan

Editorial Address

C/- rose.vermeulen@frsa.asn.au

Article Deadline for Next Issue: 08/06/06

Next Issue Distributed: 02/07/06