

# WATER

Have you ever wondered how important water really is? How dependant we are on this simple molecule, H<sub>2</sub>O? Here in the Perth Metropolitan Area, we are truly blessed. We can turn on the tap and there will be water, water that is clean enough to drink!

The most abundant molecule on earth is H<sub>2</sub>O (water). The total volume of water on earth is: ~1,360,000,000 km<sup>3</sup>. 97.2% of this is contained in the oceans, which is contaminated with salt. 90% of all the fresh water is contained in the Antarctic ice sheet. Leaving 0.28% of the total water on this planet to be fresh, in the liquid or vapor form. This ~3,808,000 km<sup>3</sup> of water is present in freshwater lakes, rivers, ground water and in the atmosphere. This still seems like a very large number, seeing that 1 km<sup>3</sup> of water equals 1000 gigalitres. But not all this water is accessible for human consumption.

Our main source of drinking water here in the Perth Metropolitan Area, at present, comes from a series dams in the Darling Scarp and underground

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## WATER (continued)

aquifers. The dams are highly dependant on the winter rains. Without them, the dams may not have adequate water to supply Perth over the summer months.

Perth Metro has just experienced the lowest rainfall for the month of June on record. Only 24.6 mm of rain fell during this month. A record that was set in 1877, of 54.9 mm, was broken. Low rainfall has not only been experience in Perth Metro, but throughout the southwest, for the April to June period.

Our State Government is looking at alternative sources for drinking water. But is this the only area that the lack of rain has affected? Farmers in the southwest cannot do without rain. But are there

solutions for them in times of drought? None have been found to be economically feasible. So who do we depend on?

Our dependence on God is absolute! We can trust that He has control over our winter rains. We can trust that He will provide us with our daily needs. And as Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well: *"Whoever drinks of this water (water from the well) will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."* (John 4: 13-14)

Hugo Hordyk

## THE MOST IMPORTANT EVENT

*In the packed stadium the crowds are on the edge of their seats, their eyes intently glued to the play. Suddenly, with a neat, expert kick the ball soars though the air between the goal posts, swishing the back nets.*

*"Goal!"*

*Thousands of fans explode with excitement, coming to their feet in one wave of hysteria. Screaming with jubilation they wave their flags, banners and hug each other. On the field the players swarm the now-famous player and jump on each other in a joyful group celebration. The camera flicks back and forth between the ecstatic players and their fans, while on the other side of the world people glued to their TVs jump up from their couches and yell their encouragement at*

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A traditional, predictable Free Reformed church service and a thrilling world cup soccer match finish. Is the soccer more entertaining? Probably. More exciting? Undoubtedly. More important? Never.

*"their" team. It's four o'clock in the morning, but hasn't it been worth it! What a game it's been!*

*Singing, Bible reading, prayer and re-reading of the Bible text are finished. The Bibles are returned to their slots, and the minister takes a sip of water before beginning the sermon. There is the usual rustle throughout the church as the first peppermints come out, and the points of the sermon printed on the liturgy sheet skimmed over. Only two points today. The members of congregation settle back in their pews as the well known words begin the morning's message. "Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ..."*

Oh, come on, you say. There's nothing wrong with being enthusiastic about sport or enjoying yourself with other entertainment (especially when you're young!) And I know we are supposed to go to church, but listening to sermons is hardly *exciting* is it?

First of all, we have to ignore what our human emotions tell us when answering this question. Secondly, if you have ever voiced this attitude about church you need to stop and think about what the preaching is really all about.

Reflect on this example for a moment. If someone gives us a box of chocolates, we must reach out to accept it before we get our hands on the chocolate. God offered salvation as a free gift. But before we can enjoy *this* gift we must also reach out for it. This requires faith. Faith is an *action*. And this is where 'church' comes into it.

Entertainment of any kind  
gives life's momentary thrills.  
The preaching in church  
on Sunday gives *Life*.

We know we cannot accept God's gift in ourselves. God has to move our hands in the right direction; otherwise we would be reaching for other things – things that lead to death. God guides our hands through the Holy Spirit, who works in *the preaching of the Word*. Yes, church. We receive new life as the Holy Spirit translates God's Word into faith, into actions. Actions of accepting God's life-giving gift of salvation.

So forget the soccer (or concerts or parties or any other kind of amusement). The most important event you'll ever attend is going to church. It is – quite simply – a matter of life and death.

For in church, through the preaching, the Holy Spirit is raising dead people to life. But if we sit in church and let the familiar voice of our minister drone over our heads while we think of other things, we will *remain* dead. Wrong attitudes ("Oh, no, not this elder again"), priorities that are elsewhere ("I wonder who won the footy last night")

and closed hearts ("I never get these sermons anyway") prevent the Holy Spirit's work. Our disinterested hands will hang lifelessly by our sides.

Is this a rant against enjoying sport or other amusements? No. It's merely a reminder that *nothing* must ever become more important than church. That our hands must also be *empty*, ready to take hold of that gift that God hands out to us.

So ask yourself: are your hands empty? Are there things in your life that are more important than God's Word? Do you put the same energy into watching and talking about sport, movies or cars as you do in preparing yourself for church, *wanting* to be changed by the preaching? Are you out so late on Saturday night that you can't really focus on the sermon on Sunday? Are you someone who can manage to get up at three o'clock in the morning to watch the soccer for two hours but can't listen properly to God's Word for half an hour? Do you forget the sermon the minute you step outside the church building?

Remember, faith is an action. We need to accept that box of chocolates labeled CHRIST'S SACRIFICE. We have to let the Holy Spirit move our hands towards this gift – and this won't happen if there are other things blocking the way. Or if your hands are already clutching something else. So maybe you need to do some soul *searching* before you will be able to stretch out the *hand of the soul* and receive this gift.

Entertainment of any kind gives life's momentary thrills. The preaching in church on Sunday gives *Life*.

This article was prompted by a sermon that one of our elders recently read in church. The sermon was written by Rev. C. Bouwman.

## Milk vs. Solid Food

I have been studying 1 Corinthians, and something I read struck me. In chapter 3 Paul tells the Corinthians *“And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for... even now you are not able [to receive it], for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?”* (vv. 1 – 3)

In these first few chapters Paul is speaking against the sectarianism which was rife in Corinth, where the church separated into groups, one following Paul, one following Apollos, another Peter, and another piously saying that they followed Christ. *“What is Apollos?”* Paul asks. *“And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one”* (v. 5). He pleads with the Corinthians not to

elevate the preachers, who were simply servants of Christ, but instead to take heed of their message. Notice the language he uses. They were not servants **from**

**whom** the Corinthians believed, as if they were the authors of faith. They were also not the servants **in whom** they believed, for they were to believe only in Christ. Instead they were the instruments **through whom** the Corinthians believed, simple servants of Christ, just mouthpieces for the gospel.

Earlier Paul had begun a church there, in Corinth, and when he left Apollos carried on the work, and apparently Peter had also made a few visits to the congregation. So when checking up on the church, Paul must have been expecting to see a young church, with its struggles and difficulties, but nevertheless still together gaining in knowledge about Christ. Imagine his

surprise when he found a divided church, bickering over which preacher they followed. He was looking forward to giving them **solid** food, in other words, the preaching and doctrine which would strengthen their faith, but instead he was forced to continue to use the **milk** of the gospel, the basics which were taught to those new in the faith. As one commentary on Corinthians has it, *“they had fuzzy thinking with regards to the nature of the gospel and the nature of the gospel ministry. I wish I could say that the Corinthians were the last group to be perplexed and confused on these two subjects, but I can’t. Satan has always concentrated on befogging the minds of the saints on these central themes. This is the day of fuzzy preachers preaching a fuzzy gospel to fuzzy believers.”*<sup>1</sup> And this last point got me thinking.

*“This is the day of fuzzy preachers preaching a fuzzy gospel to fuzzy believers”*

Evangelical churches of all shapes and sizes are springing up all over Australia. One in particular, in Sydney, boasts 19 000 members and has recently bought a \$28 million property for their new church

building. And it is easy to see why these churches are so popular. There is a gaping hole in the culture of this country, and one that can be only filled by turning to God. Disregard for God and His law has become blatant, with abortion, gay marriage, euthanasia and embryonic stem cell research either forgotten issues or currently dominating the news. At the time of writing I had just read an article in the West Australian where a man with an incurable disease writes a letter to the Prime Minister pleading with him to allow the creation and then murder of thousands of human

<sup>1</sup> Ellsworth, R. (1995). “Strengthening Christ’s Church”.

embryos in the name of scientific research so that he might be cured. Such blatant disregard of God's laws and continuing unethical behaviour lead to much sin and debauchery in our country. And it is obvious to anyone who stops and thinks, that there is something missing. And although sadly many turn to drugs, and suicide, there are also others who correctly recognise that what is needed is for our culture to turn to God. And the message of the evangelical churches is very welcoming for these people. With slogans like "Jesus loves you", and "Jesus is your best friend" they appeal to those lost in this cold-hearted culture. And to their credit, such churches are often far more enthusiastic about serving God than we are. And this enthusiasm appeals. However through Corinthians 3 I would like to show where these churches go wrong. For the messages they give out are the 'milk' of the gospel which Paul talks about. This is the stuff that needs to be fed to 'newborn' believers, and that is why so many people join their churches on a daily basis. However this is where it ends. Like the Corinthians, these churches never move on from these basics to solid food. And this solid food is necessary. With a 'milky' gospel their faith may grow rapidly at first, but then it stops. Such faith can never grow roots; it is a shallow faith, like in the parable, the seed that lands on rocky soil. This nutrient rich topsoil causes the seed to germinate and grow at an amazing rate, and

it looks as if the plant will be strong. However once the plant grows beyond needing simple nutrients and seeks to establish roots, it hits rocks. A dead end. And the same is true with the 'milk' doctrine of evangelical churches. This nutrient rich milk is great at first, but it needs to be supplemented with deeper 'solid food'. And this is what our church, with its traditional preaching, provides. It is the solid food that is necessary for a strong faith, deeply rooted in Christ.

The enthusiasm and method of evangelical churches seems attractive to us, especially as youth. And enthusiasm is great, and to our shame we may have something to learn from the joyfulness of these churches, and the willingness of these Christians to share their faith with everyone around them. However their doctrine it is not what our faith requires. It is just fuzzy preachers preaching a fuzzy gospel to fuzzy believers. That is why, although such churches attract thousands of new believers, they often also lose just as many, who grow disillusioned. Because there is nothing deep for them to grasp on to. We must be thankful for the opportunity God has given us, that even in this shallow culture and era of shallow Christianity He has placed us in a church that feeds us the solid food our faith really needs.

**Ben Schoof**

## **Christian Families (1)**

On a recent Sunday morning the sacrament of Holy Baptism was administered in Church. It is a very special occasion always, because we can witness young children being grafted into the covenant, and receiving membership of the Church. It is also a very visible reminder of the covenant God established with each of us personally, when we ourselves were baptized. Somewhat unique, is the family that we see sitting there at the front of the church. Dad and

Mum are sitting there, sometimes accompanied with a few other children, as well as the new born child. And this situation is remarkably similar when you look around the church. In most cases Dad and Mum are there together, sometimes with and sometimes without children depending on their age. And it is true, there are situations where this is different, but thankfully in the majority this is the case.

## Christian Families (1) *(continued)*

**It is not acceptable though, in the age that we live to be able to take this for granted.** Especially in the society that we live in the situation is often remarkably different. It is not uncommon for Dad to be gone, and Mum to be raising the children by herself. It is also not uncommon for both Dad and Mum to be divorced / separated, to have found another spouse and to be having children together. It is also not uncommon that children will live with half brothers and sisters perhaps even where there is more than two Dads or Mums. If you live in a stable family situation yourself, it is hard to imagine the pain and the trauma that so many fellow Australians need to live with. It is hard to imagine the grief and the loss of identity other children experience, when they see the split up / divorce of their parents.

The pain that so many of our fellow Australians live with, and associated problems such as depression, mental breakdowns, addictions, criminal offences that often follow family break down can only attest to the fact that in the beginning the Lord did not create it this way. A careful study of Genesis reveals it was much different. Other passages in the Bible speak quite clearly about the structure of the family and how it should operate. I guess it is my purpose with these articles that we continue to see the value of families, as basic units which teach covenant children about their Maker and how to live before Him. And further, that we do not lose sight of the importance of making a commitment in our lives which we will honor. Later on I'd like to demonstrate how much these two aspects are under attack.

Let's start with looking at how God created it in the beginning. For that we turn to Genesis chapter 1. In this chapter we receive an account of how the Lord

God created the world; the dry land was separated from the water, the sun, moon, and stars were fixed in the heavens. The Lord made plants, trees, and herbs each according to their kind, as well as all the animals: birds, reptiles, fish, and mammals. And in doing so He also put various relationships in place. A simple science study, for example, recognizes the relationship between plants and the sun, between the tide and the moon, and between water and fish.

When the Lord God created man *He created him in a relationship with Himself.* Genesis 1:26, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness." Question and Answer 6 of the Heidelberg Catechism expands on this, "God created man good and in His image, that is in true righteousness and Holiness." This was the greatest of all relationships that the Lord God created. It was special in that it was between Himself and an object of His creation. In this relationship there would be love and goodwill flowing between them. Concerning man, this was the first relationship God created, because it was the most important.

The next relationship we read about is the husband/wife relationship. It is recorded in Genesis 2:20. We read there about Adam giving names to all the creatures. It is specifically mentioned, that amongst all the animals, there was not found a helper for Adam. All the animals were there in pairs, male and female, but there was no companion found for Adam. And following this, we get an account of the Lord God creating woman: taken from man, she too was created in the image of God, to be a *helper* for Adam.

In the context of Christian marriages and Christian families the term helper as used here can give the impression of inferior or less important. But it needs to be

understood in light of the fact that Adam, by himself, was inadequate and incomplete. He could not function properly without a woman by his side. It is against this backdrop that we can understand very well Adam's exuberant joy when he met his wife for the first time. Here is exactly the person that he required. She was similar, but she was different. This could be noticed in her physical structure, in her thought processes, and her emotional structure. In everything she was comparable to him. What he lacked she provided, and what she lacked he provided. Here they were together, and they complemented each other perfectly. They were meant for each other and they were thankful to have each other.

Concerning family relationships, the next relationship as God ordained it, did not occur in the week of creation, but sometime after. We read about it in Genesis 4. "Adam knew his wife, and she bore Cain. Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel." Through sexual intimacy Adam and Eve have become parents, Adam a Dad and Eve a Mum. When Cain was born a new relationship came into existence, the parent/child relationship. Of this relationship the Bible also gives some clear commands.

From the first few chapters of Genesis it is clearly evident that right from the beginning the Lord God established various human relationships. First He created the God / man relationship, that is a relationship between Himself and ourselves, who are objects of His creation. Secondly He created the husband / wife

relationship, between Adam and Eve. When Cain was born the third relationship was established of a parent and child. The order that the Lord God used many years ago is the same order that we follow, as we grow from adolescents, to young people, to having our own families.

As a young person grows in the fear of the Lord, often in the late teenage years or early twenties sometimes, young people publicly profess their faith in God. At public profession of faith they acknowledge and respond to that covenant of grace that God established with them at their baptism. In doing this they acknowledge the relationship between the Lord and themselves, the relationship that the Lord initiated. Public profession of faith forms a platform for the walk and conduct of those who do so, and implies amongst other things love and obedience to the Lord.

Sometime after this (or sometimes concurrently) a young man and woman may "find each other". If all goes as expected they will at some point become married. In the church, this will never precede profession of faith. If one or both of them can not first commit themselves to God, how can they promise for life to be committed to each other, which is what God commands? If they refuse to commit to God, how can they be relied upon to be the faithful spouses that the Lord requires (outlined by the apostle Paul)?

When entering the married state, a couple publicly commit themselves to each other. They go through the same process that

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## Christian Families (1) *(continued)*

Adam did many years ago. "Lord here is a helper comparable to myself, here is a person that compliments me, here is a person that makes me a better person. God thank you for my wife, or God thank you for my husband."

The Lord may also bless a marriage with children, young ones whom they can teach the fear of the Lord. Ps 128 says, "Blest is the man who has his quiver full of them." They are there to be loved and cherished. When God created Adam and Eve in paradise, He did not create them with children. Rather, the husband / wife relationship led to the parent / child relationship. Or to phrase it differently, out of the husband / wife relationship was born the parent / child relationship. For that reason, having children (including the act of pro-creation) should follow marriage and not precede it.

The order of the Lord God's relationships, like the rest of creation is very good. Any God-fearing married couple will acknowledge the joy and happiness there is in a loving faithful spouse. There is something very beautiful and exciting at the prospect of having children to look after. There is much satisfaction in having a peaceful and contented family. Indeed marriage and children, with the Lord God at the centre, is rewarding. I make it sound like bliss, but everyone will know that this is not always the case. Marriage and families are at times hard work. Times can occur when marriage is extremely unhappy, or that peaceful contented family is more like those stubborn, pig headed disobedient children. The Bible even talks about those who marry experiencing troubles. This is as a result of our own sin. However, even in the sinful state that we still are in, what the Lord allows a married couple to experience, what the Lord allows a Christian family to experience when they

put God at the centre of their lives is and remains very good.

At the beginning of this article it was noted that many fellow Australians suffer an incredible amount in their marriages and families. It is suffering on a scale that many of us can not even begin to imagine. I believe that the root cause of so many family relationship problems as we see around us today lies in the fact that people are not willing to accept this order in creation. For many people, especially in society, (but not exclusively), the denial of the God and man relationship, leads to problems in the husband / wife relationship and in the parent / child relationship. For others failing to establish properly the husband / wife relationship leads to problems with the parent / child relationship. In the next issue of Contender I'd like to develop that thought some more.

Having seen how the Lord created family relationships in the beginning, and also the joy and happiness that may be experienced in a God centered marriage, it is disturbing what we see around us. Our society says that a one night stand is ok. It says that it is okay, to live in de facto relationships and to have children. It says that it's okay not to commit yourself and enjoy all the good things that God had reserved for marriage. Why do so many television programs contain infidelity, lies and half truths? Why is Big Brother so popular? Why (according to the Bureau of Statistics) is the age of the Australian bride increasing? At times I do not wonder at all the reasons for family tragedies, and the associated grief and misery that go with it. I would suggest that we are not totally immune to these influences of society around us.

(To be continued)

**Eric Terpstra**

## From the EIC

As mentioned in a previous issue of Contender a gap was left in the editorial board after Rose Vermeulen resigned. As replacement for her Rita Vanderwal from the church of Byford has been found willing

to take on the role. Welcome to the editorial committee Rita, and thankyou for being willing to take on this role."

**Eric Terpstra**

## Response to a 'Letter to the Editor'

*What follows is a response to Rose Vermeulen's letter to the editor with regards to Ben Schoof's article: 'The Watchmen'.*

Firstly I'd like to thank Rose for sending feedback on my article. Feedback, including comments, scriptural criticism and questions are always welcome, so if you have anything you wish to say about anything that has been published in Contender, please feel free to send it through. Secondly, I would like to emphasize that my response is only my own thoughts so if you have anything to add, again, feel free.

The attitude Rose describes in her letter is exactly the reason I wrote my article in the first place. Although we all know that the Bible tells us to warn those who we know are sinning, it is a very difficult thing to do, and we are so good at making excuses. Because to say 'yeah but they know they're doing the wrong thing' or 'we just need to show love to them' is making excuses and avoiding the issue. The discipline procedures in our church, taken in part from Matt 18, are not for those who are new in the faith. They are meant for those brothers and sisters in the church who know what God has commanded, and yet still stray. For just because they know what God requires does not mean they follow it. The pull of the world is so strong, and our flesh is so weak. So even though they know what is right, Christ still commands us to go to them, tell them of their wrong, and then take a friend and tell them again. And if Jesus tells us to, who are we to say 'yeah but they...?' Often they need reminding, a push in the right direction, or some positive peer pressure to break with bad habits or

ingrained sins. We all know how hard it is to make important decisions or fight sins by ourselves. But with a friend or friend's encouragement, it becomes a lot easier.

The second comment that 'we just need to show love to them' is (to my mind) also a cop out, and actually makes no sense when you think about it. For if you do not warn them, they will continue on the road to hell, and where is the love in that? Sadly in our churches we sometimes have the perception that discipline is a harsh thing, and is exercised just to keep the church pure, banishing sin as far away as possible. And while expelling sin is certainly a factor, as God cannot stand sin, it is not the main reason for discipline. The purpose of discipline is to bring the one sinning back onto the narrow path to heaven – it is an act of love. So in this case, sternly warning someone of the consequences of their sin is in fact showing more love than just letting them continue on if nothing has happened! It's a question of how much do you really love your friend? Enough to possibly sacrifice a friendship in this life in order that they will join you in the next life? For that is really showing love!

how much do  
you really love  
your friend?

So the next time you see a friend who could use a reminder of God's word, don't hesitate, let them know where they are going wrong, they could probably use the encouragement!

**Ben Schoof**

## Valuing all members

I was recently approached by the 'Contender' to have a go at writing an article about my job as a Eucalypt worker. To be honest with you, my first reaction was somewhat hesitant as I wondered why I should be given an opportunity to write about my job anymore than anyone else would. But after several convincing phone calls I agreed that perhaps I could shed some light on what 'Eucalypt' involves but also discuss the concept 'disability' and the view we have with respect to people with disabilities among God's church.

Eucalypt is an ordinary house located at 427 Railway Avenue in Armadale (or should I say not so ordinary anymore since it has had some amazing renovations in the past few months!). There are 3 permanent residents in the home, 2 of whom require mainly supervision as they run their own fully furnished units which are attached to the home. During the week the residents attend work or other support centres, meaning that the home is only occupied in the late afternoon and overnight. Being an ordinary home it requires the same daily activities to be run as any home would require such as cooking meals, cleaning (yes, including doing the dishes), making beds and some assistance to the residents in their self care tasks. There is also plenty of time for fun activities such as games, Saturday outings, sing-alongs, and whatever other activities the residents choose to participate in.

Apart from the permanent residents, the home is also open to others for respite care. During the school holidays Eucalypt is usually buzzing with the sounds of children and 'Wiggles' videos, as we have had the company of a few extra residents. Daily activities of the home remain very similar, though one can imagine that there is a lot more meals being made and washing up to do! With the assistance of volunteers we can sometimes take the residents out, or they can enjoy 'holiday' activities around the home such as sleeping in! ☺

I am aware that many of us are directly or indirectly involved with people with disabilities such as through our schools, through the Eucalypt home or through friends or relatives. Society today is also becoming increasingly accepting and inclusive of

people with disabilities. Despite this, for those who have had less exposure to 'disability', it is not uncommon to feel initially uncomfortable with people that act or appear 'different' from what we perceive as 'normal'.

One of the first things I was privileged to learn at university concerning people with disabilities is that they are exactly that. *People*, they are first and foremost *people* and the disability is just the condition that they bear. They are not 'disabled people' nor are they 'mentally handicapped' or 'epileptic' or 'schizophrenic', but rather they are *people* that bear these conditions. Would you ever

*People, they are first and foremost people and the disability is just the condition that they bear*

refer to your mate who broke his leg as the 'broken-legged guy'? ☺ This may sound to you like a huge fuss over a mere sentence structure, but I found it amazing that this simple change in terminology can give a new attitude towards people with disabilities. Instead of looking at a disability, you look past any ailments and look at the person who is bearing their condition, a person with their own unique personality and characteristics. To some this may seem obvious, but it can honestly take some time to learn to interact with a person without letting their disability become a central focus.

Unknown to some, people with disabilities were discriminated in a shocking manner in only recent years. Asylums and institutions were not uncommon, and people with disabilities were congregated with 'their own kind' including criminals, people with diseases such as leprosy or those who suffered a mental illness. They were often shut out from the 'real world' and given no opportunities to grow or develop to their potential, no matter what their condition.

The change in family attitudes to people with disabilities occurred in the period following World War II (1945), but even then, parents who decided that institutionalisation was not an option for their children were still seen as radical and in opposition

to the 'norm'. It was during the 1950s and early 1960s that the government attitude towards people with disabilities was slowly improving and the development of social welfare policies led to a growing attitude of inclusion and equal opportunities for all. Still today there are continuous improvements and efforts made to include and involve people with disabilities into all aspects of society, and the focus is also on encouraging society to recognize and believe that every individual has a capacity for physical, social, emotional and intellectual development (Disability Act 1986).

So what does God's Word have to say about all this? What is our attitude towards people with disabilities? Perhaps we view them as an object of pity. But do we really love and value them as we would any other member of God's church?

We know that every human being was created in God's likeness regardless of their physical or mental capacities. The love that God has for every being also applies to people with different kinds of disabilities. This also means that God's command that we love our neighbour as ourselves (Lev 19:18, Matt 22:39) also includes those who have disabilities.

We can also draw from several portions of God's Word where He commands us to help those in need, and not ridicule them for their weakness. In Leviticus 19:14, God commands his people not to curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind. And in Deut 27:18, Moses tells people that to mislead a blind man on a road will lead to a curse.

After saying this, I very much doubt that any of us have a problem with lending a hand to those in need. And we are not the kind of people that would ridicule those with special needs either. But I have a question for you. Do you really view people with disabilities as a valuable member of Christ's church? Or do you think they have a less important place in God's church, because they can't do as much physically or mentally?

**Do you really view people  
with disabilities as a valuable  
member of Christ's church?**

There is a beautiful text in 1 Corinthians 12 where the analogy of the body made up of many parts is used to describe God's church. It begins like this:

*"For the body itself is not made up of only one part, but of many parts. If the foot were to say, "Because I am not a hand, I don't belong to the body," that would not keep it from being a part of the body..."*

This text really makes me think. Who are we to determine which members of the church are more important than others? And if we think we have decided who the 'weaker' members are, who are we to question what use they have in God's church? God tells us that he has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as he pleased (vs. 18). And the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable (vs. 22). It is important to note that Paul writes "seem to" and not "are". Because sometimes what seems to be weak and what is weak in reality is not always the same thing. The gifts from people who have experienced different weaknesses are often vital for a Christian church. Sometimes it is just a matter of being open minded enough to recognise what these gifts are.

So challenge yourself! What is your attitude towards people with disabilities? Do you really view them as a valuable member of God's church, as your neighbour, as your brother or sister in Christ? Do you really love them in the same way you love your other Christian brothers and sisters, and not just out of pity? It is my prayer that we may all continually strive to show love to all our neighbours, just as Christ showed his unconditional love toward us. Yes, let *everything* you do be done with love (1 Cor 16:14), for it is the greatest gift.

**Clare Bergsma**

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**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.

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