

EDITORIAL

Many of you would have heard about the current debate on therapeutic cloning and embryonic stem cell research that is raging in Australia and all over the western world. For those who haven't, let me explain. *Embryonic stem cells* are the building blocks of the body; the original cells present just after fertilization which have the ability to become any cells in the body – some will become bone cells, some brain, some blood, some skin, etc. As you can imagine, these cells have tremendous possibilities in perhaps one day curing diseases such as multiple sclerosis or muscular dystrophy. However, they can only be harvested at the very beginning of an embryo's life. And the current procedure for this results in the destruction and death of the embryo.

Adults also have stem cells, but since these have developed further into specific tissue they do not have the same possibilities as *embryonic* stem cells. For example an adult blood stem cell can become any type of blood cell, but **cannot** become a bone or brain cell. They also cost a lot more to harvest, and are not researched as

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much. However, scientists have not yet discovered how to make embryonic stem cells into the type of cell they require, thus this research has achieved nothing, while adult stem cell research has contributed to numerous medical advances.

Therapeutic cloning is the technical term for the creation of embryos specifically intended for research and destruction afterwards. This procedure goes completely against God's word; firstly in the artificial creation of life, and secondly in the murder of this helpless little child shortly afterwards. However it is exactly what is being debated currently in federal parliament as I write this article. The current Bill put forward by liberal backbencher and former health minister Kay Patterson would legalise the creation of embryos for research provided they are **not allowed to live** beyond 14 days.¹ This is such a hypocritical and horrific viewpoint. Apparently, to be merciful, scientists will not experiment on embryos for longer than two weeks, so then they murder them instead! How is this merciful? Unfortunately, following a conscience vote in federal parliament in 2002, there is already a law in place that allows surplus IVF embryos (ones not needed for implantation) to be used for research. Both of these laws are in complete contradiction with God's Law, and, especially for the current Bill, please write to your member of parliament and the Prime Minister telling them why you do not approve of the Bill and encourage them to vote against it and uphold God's will.

Furthermore, as I write this, in the past week US scientists have discovered a way of harvesting a single stem cell from an embryo, so that the embryo is not destroyed in the process as it is with

current methods. Many people all over the world jumped at the news, hoping it would be a solution to the moral issue of killing embryos. However a leading scientist, Dr David van Gend commented correctly that this is not a solution to the problem, as the embryo would still be destroyed after the stem cells had been harvested. "You are not going to let it be born as a baby, because no one wants that", he said. "What happens to the cloned embryo? It's still being destroyed."²

Thus unless scientists find another way of harvesting embryonic stem cells without actually creating and destroying life, it is obvious that God does not wish us to participate in such science. Scientists instead should focus their efforts on adult stem cells, which kill no one, and have shown positive advancements already. And although writing to your member of parliament helps, the best thing we can do is pray about it, asking God to guide the members of parliament in voting according to His Will, for He is the one that gave them their authority in the first place.

Also, in the US, where a similar debate is taking place, President Bush used his powers to veto a similar Bill proposing to lift the ban on therapeutic cloning, saying that he opposed the use of public funds for research programs involving the destruction of human life, and that the bill "crosses a moral boundary that our decent society needs to respect."³ God willing, our leaders will have the same convictions!

Ben Schoof

¹ Ruse, Ben. "Stemcell trick no ethical fix" *The West Australian* 25 Aug. 2006: 4

² *ibid*, p. 4

³ Babington, C. *Stem Cell Bill Gets Bush's First Veto*. 20 July 2006

<<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/07/19/AR2006071900524.html>>

AMOS

The book of Amos is a book of Judgement – judgement upon Israel during the times of Uzziah, King of Judah, and Jeroboam, King of Israel.

Amos was a herdsman from Tekoa – which is about 16km south of Jerusalem. Amos was not a poor wanderer but a sheep breeder, like Mesha the King of Moab in 2 Kings 3:4 and a producer of cash crops such as sycamore trees. He was a relatively rich man, yet obeyed the Lord's call immediately, just as Christ charges us in Matt 16:24:

“If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.”

Are we willing to give up all that we have and follow God, or will we dash back into the blackness to grab something we don't want to leave behind?

Amos' first task is to pronounce God's judgement on all nations – Chapters one and two. Each Judgement begins with *“Thus says the Lord...”* showing that this was not a tirade from a man but a divine curse and judgement. No longer is there room to repent.

Each judgement uses a form of poetry not captured by the English language, *“for three transgressions, and for four...”* But each judgement reveals God's unchanging stand against sin and judgement upon transgression. The nations have made their sins a part of their way of life, and thus continued in them. God addresses each of them, the first three non-blood relations and the second three blood relations to Israel.

The Army of the Syrians committed many atrocities against Israel, including those seen by Elisha in 2Kings 8:10-13. The Syrians laid down the men of Gilead in a field and ploughed them into the ground. Elisha's tears are now revenged by God in this Judgement, sending them back to exile and hardship.

The Philistines practised slavery, selling the Israelites to the Edomites and at the slave markets of Gaza. The Phoenicians also sold the Israelites. They broke the trade agreement made between Solomon and Hiron, King of Tyre. Edom committed racial injustice, hating Israel with Esau's hatred. Just like Cain and Abel, Edom violated blood ties with hatred. Ammon was the son of Lot's daughter. Ammon proved himself the seed of Sodom by ripping open pregnant women and watching them die. They did this for enjoyment and the feeling of power. Satan used the want for power to annihilate some of the women seed. Lot's other son, Moab, is not condemned for sins against Israel but for desecrating the deaths of his brother, Edom. The stench of death polluted the air as the king's bones burnt foul smelling incense rising to God. Through his judgement on Moab, God shows that he condemns all sin.

But now God turns to his own people, His covenant people to whom He has given His law as clear guidelines:

Judah despised God's law and sinned by blatantly forsaking it to follow false gods. Israel was enjoying a time of peace and prosperity.

However, these 10 tribes sinned by ripping off the poor and God condemns them for this. It was Israel's responsibility to care for the poor, the widow and the oppressed.

After reading the book of Amos, we are called to examine ourselves. God has given Christians clear guidelines in the New Testament but also the Old Testament as a warning and example. The sin of Israel is a strong warning to us Christians today because we know our duty to care for the poor, the widow and the oppressed, especially those of the household of faith. We are responsible also to support and encourage each other, especially the weak in faith. When members leave the church, their blood is on

Are we willing to give up all that we have and follow God?

AMOS (CONTINUED)

our heads. We, each and every one, of us have failed in our duty to maintain the unity in the church. The privilege of knowing God comes with the responsibility to serve him and do what is right.

Like the Philistines, do we enslave our brother to do something we want them to do rather than what they agreed to do? Do we treat those below us, employees or younger brothers and sisters, with love and respect?

Like the Syrians, do we run our brother into the ground with our comments? Do we use peer pressure to reject and isolate those not 'cool' among us? Is there someone in the church who you just don't like? Or someone you just tolerate but won't go out of your way to help? Do we call other's names such as "stupid, empty head or dumb". In matt 5v22, such language is cause enough to be judged – we must work to be a hand and foot to ALL our brothers and sisters.

Like the Tyrians, how often have we broken our word? One moment saying one thing and the next another. As Christians our yes must be yes and our no no. And how easy is it when you're Mum asks you to do something, and you say "Yes, mum" but as soon as she is gone tell one of your siblings "Mum told you to do this"? Its gets done and you look great but you have just committed the sins of Tyre and the Philistines.

Let there always be a path of reconciliation. Love is believing the best of every one, don't let one little incident forever ruin your view or trust in someone. This love is not to be kept within the church; we are to help everyone around us.

Are we anything like Ammon, do we murder unborn children in our lust for power? Society does, with abortion, but do we? Do we question the motives behind wars? I know we as Christians don't believe abortion is right, but have we said anything about it? Sins of omission are as great in God's eyes as sins of commission.

And to counter Satan's push into the church have we done everything in our power to expand God's kingdom? Or is it good enough to sit comfortably in church and stick some money in the collection bag and pay for someone else to evangelise? Can we say we have done the best we can when God returns?

And what about Moab, can we all say that we have never burnt anyone's bones? But what about when someone inside the church sins, oh doesn't then the news just spread like wildfire! We judge those people, not looking at the sins we've done. We crucify their image, pride, and self-esteem, because of one sin. All sins are the same to God, yet inside the church some seem to be greater than others. And can anyone say that they have never talked about someone else behind their back.

Do we show mercy to the poor? Do we give without asking for anything in return? Are the disputes in the church fairly and justly settled or is one party favoured because they have a "better" standing in the church. What do we do to earn that extra dollar? Do we look after the poor, or is that just the deacon's job? What about visiting those poor in health and helping those poor in mind? What about encouraging those poor in faith, poor in self-esteem? Each member of us has a weakness, so what do we all do to help each other?

Like Judah we know God's covenant, His statutes and His laws, we have the Bible. And we must live by it, inside and out. Not just showing that we go to church, or to club, but that we study and practise God's work, shining as a light, practising the fruits of the Holy Spirit to all those around us. Do we have zeal for the Lord?

The Israelites sinned by defiling God's temple the most sacred place of all. We are the temples of the Holy Spirit; are we keeping it pure and holy? Sure we're sinful, but with the privilege of knowing God comes the responsibility to serve Him. God gave you talents and now your responsibility is not to

hoard them, nor to only help those close around you, (help comes so easily between friends) but to help those who stand on the outside. Try writing a list of everyone, all the people you like best down to those you like least, and starting from the bottom, use your talents to make them smile, feel comfortable, content and better their welfare. Don't do it for a reward just do it because that's what God wants you to do. God has always loved us, and has always turned everything to our

good. Don't you feel ashamed when you look back and see all things that we have done wrong?

God is also a God of Justice requiring payment and that day in v 16 came for the children of Israel when they were sent into exile for their sin. 'That Day' will come for us when Christ returns – are we ready?

Joslyn Berkelaar

Christian Families (2)

In *Christian Families 1* three basic family relationships were identified from the first few chapters of Genesis. The first was the relationship between God Himself and man (Gen 1:26). The second relationship that God put into place was that of husband and wife, where Adam and Eve were joyful to be able to have each other because they complimented each other so perfectly. Thirdly, sometime after creation, the parent-child relationship was established with the birth of Cain. In the first article it was also pointed out that as we grow up from adolescents to young people, to having our own families the same pattern is followed. First, a relationship with the Lord is firmly committed, (witnessed by the church at public profession of faith), then entering into marriage (a promise of commitment and faithfulness between husband and wife), followed by the birth of children, (the establishment of the parent-child relationship).

In *Christian Families 1 I* also noted that in society, the family structure is not always so straight forward. Divorce and separation is common. De facto relationships are commonly recognised. There is so much pain and suffering, grief and trauma (especially for children) when

a stable family unit breaks up. And at the end of the article, I tried to allude to some of the reasons why (I think) we see these things happening in our society.

In psalm 119 the author expresses in song, his love for the law of God and his desire to obey it. Take for example verse 9, "How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word" or verse 15 and 16, "I will meditate on your precepts and contemplate your ways. I will delight myself in your statutes; I will not forget Your word." This whole psalm, gives indication to a man who loves the Lord deeply. And entwined very closely is the authors desire to do the will of the Lord, because he loves the Lord.

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Love is obedience. Love equals obedience. Also, in your life in the 21st century, loving the Lord means being obedient to His Word as He has revealed it in the Bible. When a youth stands at the front of the Church and professes the faith, he/she implies amongst other things, that they love the Lord and they will be obedient to His Word.

Now let's see how this love and obedience to the Lord translates into the other

Christian Families (continued)

relationships. Ephesians chapter 5 is a well known section where the apostle Paul gives instructions on Christian living. In chapter 5:22 it says, "*Wives submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.*" What therefore, can you expect from a Christian wife? Expect her to think something like this: "Husband darling, I love you, and therefore I want to assist you, and help you, and care for you. I'd like you to be happy with me." In every day practice, it could be translated as "Husband darling, it's going to be a cold day tomorrow, I've packed some scrumptious sandwiches into an esky, which you can heat in a toasty machine." She thinks in this way because she loves the Lord and wishes to be obedient to His Word. Love equals obedience.

In verse 25 of the same chapter, it says, "*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved His church.*" What can you expect from a Christian husband? You can expect him to think something like this: "Wife darling, I love you, and therefore I want to guide you, and protect you and assist you and care for you; I want you to be happy." In every day practice it might be translated as, "Wife darling, I see you've had a super busy day, and with that baby in your tummy as well, what if I shower the children tonight?" Why would you expect that attitude from a husband? Because the husband loves the Lord, and wishes to be obedient to His word. Again, love equals obedience.

**Society says that a one night stand is okay.
God says **you shall not commit adultery****

This same train of thought continues in the parent-child relationship. In Colossians 3:21, God says to fathers, "*Do not exasperate your children, by unjust requirements or undue discipline.*" What would you expect from a Christian father? Provoking them in such a way that they become angry? Certainly not. You would

expect him to love and nurture his children, to cherish them, play with them, teach them etc. And you would expect that because Dad loves the Lord and has committed himself to the Lord. Loving the Lord equals obedience to His word.

In Exodus 20, the 10 commandments are preached to Israel. We hear them preached to us strictly every Sunday. Concerning parent-child relationships, God says in the 5th commandment, "*Honour your Father and your mother...*" A young child sometimes needs to be forced into obedience. This will sometimes require a smack or some other form of discipline. But as a child becomes older, 9 or 10 years of age say, we more or less expect that love, obedience, patience and respect (which are all linked to honoring your father and mother) will come habitually. Why? Because already at this age the covenant child is developing that God-man relationship, and as the love grows, the obedience follows.

Do you see how closely the God-man relationship affects the husband-wife relationship, and the parent-child relationship? Do you see why the order of these relationships is so important? God created it in this way for our own well being. In *Christian Families 1* I drew attention to some of the misery and problems of our fellow Australians in their (family) relationships. Should it surprise us, when there is no God-man

relationship, no obedience to His word?

It is evident from God's

Word that God hates divorce (See Mark 10). Should the pain and hurt; the associated problems with divorced parents and split up families surprise us? It shouldn't, it was never meant to be this way. Society says that a one night stand is okay. God says you shall not commit adultery. Should the pain and hurt and

the associated consequences (pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases for example) of disobedience to this command be at all of a surprise? I don't think that it should.

Society says that it's okay not to commit yourself, and still enjoy all the good things that God has reserved for marriage. Television is a particularly bad medium that promotes this. And yet this isn't the Lord's will. The Lord gives clear guide lines in the Bible, of how our relationships should be conducted.

Recently I read a feature article in the West Australian Newspaper about people demographics. It was based on information from census forms and provided a general over view of the way we are compared to times past. It is true that you should not believe everything that you read in a newspaper, but even if you only believe a part of it, it did not paint such a nice picture. I do not have a copy of the article any more, so I am not able to quote. In a nut shell, the article described young people as living pretty much care free. Because of the property boom, a growing number of people are choosing to live at the parental home – even into their late twenties. In terms of “settling down” to have a family, many are putting this off to their late twenties or early thirties. In the mean time condoms and contraceptives avoid any STD's or pregnancy. In fact, the article even suggested that if you are married by the age of 21 you are seen as a bit of a copout (because you are not willing to experiment around for a while and just have some fun for a few years).

The article was interesting, but it is disturbing to know that this is the kind of culture that we have to live in and that young people have to grow up in. We live in the midst of this society, and we'd be fools if we say we can be immune to all the bad lifestyle messages that come our way. Readers, young people, it causes me to shudder when I see and read about relationship problems in the world. I shudder too when I read about the lifestyle of worldly young people. How great must be the wrath of our Father in heaven!

In conclusion, I'd like to urge all readers to give serious thought to the different relationships that are in their lives. Consider your relationship with the Lord, and assess if it forms the driving force in your other relationships. Examine your marital relationship. Does it mirror Christ's love for his church? What about the parent-child relationship, does this run on par with what the Bible teaches? Young people, consider that one day you will probably be a husband or a wife, and with the Lords blessing a father and a mother. How can you prepare yourself for these roles? What qualities would you look for in a marriage partner? What kind of a role model do you want to be to your children? (And no, you are not a cop out, if at 18 – 20 years of age, you are giving thought to these kinds of questions.) These are all questions for all of us to think about and work with, and you can probably add some more yourself. But in the mean time, if we truly love the Lord and are obedient to His word, we are able to have happy, special and meaningful relationships also on this earth.

E Terpstra

In the beginning of *Christian Families 1* I stated, “*It is a very special occasion always, because we can witness young children being in grafted into the covenant, and receiving membership of the Church.*” It was correctly pointed out to me, that children even before baptism are members of Christ's church. They are members by virtue of their parents being believers already. Question and answer 74 of the Heidelberg Catechism states (in part), “*Therefore, by baptism, as sign of the covenant, they must be grafted into the Christian Church and distinguished from the children of unbelievers.*” It was along those lines that I was thinking, but I do acknowledge there is a difference in the two statements. Apologies for the error, and thank you to those that pointed it out.

Eric Terpstra

Who's "That little guy with the big glasses" again?

As those who read *The West Australian* last weekend (2/9) may already know, surveys have revealed an "appalling ignorance" amongst West Australian youth regarding our political environment. For those who don't know, a survey was commissioned by *The West* and HBF involving 470 adults aged 18-30 measuring the level of political awareness amongst Australian youth. And as the newspaper reports: "findings were woeful." 41% couldn't identify which party is in power in WA and less than half were able to identify Alan Carpenter as our premier. Only 17% were able to identify Paul Omedei as WA's opposition leader, with many hazarding a guess at Kim Beazley, the federal opposition leader. And in a separate poll, only 1 in 6 out of those surveyed were able to correctly answer a basic set of six questions regarding our political system, featuring questions such as: "Where is Federal Parliament?" "Which parties are in power federally and in WA?" and "Who is the federal Opposition leader?"

Understandably, political analysts are more than just a little disturbed. One such analyst, Greg Craven (in an article in *The West* on the same date), has labelled the generation from 18-30 as being the "I could not give a stuff generation" saying that "This generation is deeply, deeply self-obsessed." The issue has prompted WA's Liberal opposition leader Paul Omedei to call for mandatory political courses for our secondary school systems in order to prepare kids for elections (let's try and work that into OBE). After all, over 18's are all subject to compulsory voting and if half of them don't even know who our Premier is, how are they able to make a good choice at election time without choosing the party with the most colourful How to Vote Card?

However, of perhaps more concern, is the situation in our community. As Reformed youth, are we being busy with current events and issues concerning politics? When we grab the paper, are we more inclined to flip to the back-page and check out who is most likely to win the AFL premiership this year while barely sparing a glance at the opinion page, or

even the front page? Quite often we have this tendency to remain non-committal and neutral about issues concerning our government. It's certainly a very popular and safe a position to be in: it's difficult to disagree with someone who doesn't have an opinion.

Another popular conviction is that political involvement and awareness is useless because we have a secular government. It is a strongly self-interested entity, concerned only with catering to what the people want when it's an election year, and the media is forever hyping up everything anyway. Certainly *The West Australian* cannot be considered guiltless when it comes to bias and hype; remember that newspaper editors don't consider their mandate as being to reveal the truth: they have a purely commercial incentive to sell papers. And hype sells papers. But this doesn't mean we are to exclude ourselves from a basic awareness of the political setting of our nation.

To show the importance that political interest and participation has, as well as the importance on having a Reformed world-view on the issues confronting our politicians, it is worth taking a little excursion through history. It was Emperor Constantine in 312 AD who first installed the church as being head of state. Over the centuries, the Holy Roman Empire collapsed into a variety of different kingdoms and nations. However, the concept of the Church, led by the pope, as being the head of all states, gained quite a momentum over the next couple of centuries. By the eleventh and twelfth century, the Catholic Church was not merely the head of all European states; it dominated these states, inserted itself into every aspect of their society and enforced its un-Scriptural doctrines with full executive control. Pope Gregory VII enshrined the role of the pope in his *Dictatus Papae* (1075) and said: "The pope alone may use the imperial insignia; all princes should kiss his feet and his alone; he may depose emperors; he may absolve the subjects of wicked rulers from their allegiance." He

claimed the power to raise armies, lay taxes, and depose kings and so forth. This was despite the not-so well-hidden scandalous lives of many of the popes in this period. It wasn't until the Reformers of the sixteenth century began to publicize against Catholicism that the idea of a separation of church and state first began to develop.

Martin Luther was probably the most vocal of the Reformers in this regard, by publicly rejecting many of the Catholic church's heretical practises, especially the practise of indulgences, in his 95 theses. Those theses nailed to the chapel door in Wittenberg were considered a direct challenge to the Pope's authority and led to Luther's subsequent label as a heretic. Luther was tried before the Imperial Council, which included officials from both the church and the state. Standing before the top secular and religious authorities of his time, he declared that they had no authority to command anything that violated Scripture. The government's role, he said, was to enforce natural laws such as "do not commit murder" and "do not steal," and other laws needed to preserve society, not to make rules about the redemption of the soul, such as the selling of indulgences. Hence Luther was willing to stand in front of the highest authority on earth and witness for Christ and fight for the purity of His Church.

Now obviously the purpose of this article is not intended to encourage everyone to jump on a political bandwagon and join the media in flinging dirt at every politician that we disagree with. The comics on the opinion page of *The West* provide an excellent example of how not to treat our leaders, whether state or federal. "That little guy with the big glasses" is our Prime Minister, and hence ought to be regarded with the respect and honour that comes with his position. Romans 13:1 & 4 says: "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God...For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain: for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practises evil." And as our catechism states in regards to what is required

of us in the fifth commandment: "That I show all honour, love and faithfulness... to all those in authority over me... since it is God's will to govern us by their hand."

We also confess in Article 36 of the Belgic Confession that the reason we have our government is "because of the depravity of mankind... He wants the world to be governed by laws and policies in order that the licentiousness of men be restrained and that everything be conducted among them in good order." This also includes the protection of the church, which brings another point into focus. That is, we are to obey the government in every respect insofar as they do not prevent us from serving the Lord or coerce us into a situation where we will transgress the Lord's commandments. When Peter and John were placed in front of a high council, which included the high priest and officials of the city, the council, fearing contention and the incredible growth of the church, asked them to refrain from speaking or teaching in the name of Jesus Christ: "So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge" (Acts 4:18-19).

So it is definitely important that we as Reformed youth have a good awareness of our political system. Not that we must be able to recite all of Australia's prime ministers since Australia was federated in 1901, but instead that we are well aware of the issues confronting our politicians today. Even skim-reading the editorial page can tell us much about what people's opinions are concerning issues such as gay marriage rights and stem cell research, and even, when a certain bill relating to such issues is going through the motions in parliament, writing a letter or email to a local MP (member of parliament) is always worthwhile. And finally, as the Belgic Confession reminds us, we must remember to include them in our prayers. The government has a heavy burden of responsibility placed upon them, and they need the wisdom of God to rule the nation well in a world that is rapidly changing.

Angels

The Bible is clear about the fact that angels do indeed exist. In Scripture the Lord leaves no doubt that there are spirits in the air around us. Personally, the topic of angels and demons has always interested me and in this article I hope to give an overview of the biblical data on obedient angels.

We are not told in Scripture exactly how the Lord formed the heavens and whatever else might exist there. We are only told that the Lord created the heavens and so we are not told much about the creation of angels. I think it is safe to say that the reason we are not told is because the purpose for our existence on this earth is to praise, worship and bring all honour and glory to our Maker and we do not need to concern ourselves with how the angels were created to be able to praise God for bringing them into existence and using them to His glory.

Why was it that the Lord fashioned angels? The Lord tells us that the reason for their existence, like ours, is so that these creatures might praise and glorify Him, the Creator (see Isaiah 43:7). Nehemiah also makes mention of the angels and puts their purpose into words:

"Thou art the Lord, Thou alone; Thou has made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host...; and the host of heaven worships Thee" (9:6).

The angels over the fields of Bethlehem sang God's praise because God had acted, that is He had sent His Son to earth (Luke 2). In the revelation shown to John, the angels praise God because of the saving work of the Lamb (Rev 5:1) or because of God's just judgments upon the sins of the earth (Rev 19:1). So we can see that these heavenly beings do not attract attention to themselves, nor do they desire praise for themselves (Rev 19:10), rather they are ever and again directing attention to God and His wondrous works.

In light of their task, God has given to angels their specific *"being, shape and form"* (Art 12 of the BC). To carry out their task, God did not give angels bodies of flesh and blood, rather He made them *"spirits"* (see Heb 1:14). These heavenly spirits have knowledge of God and can think (see 1 Peter 1:12 & Ephesians 3:10). It is this knowledge of God, and their ability to think, that assists the angels to respond to God's actions with songs and words of praise (Job 38:7; Lk

2:13; 1 Cor 13:1; Rev 5:11). Scripture speaks of various classes of angels, beside "regular" angels, Scripture speaks of cherubs or the cherubim (Gen 3:24; 1 Kgs 6:24; Ezek 10:3) and serafs (Is 6:2), as well as of archangels (Jude 9).

God created the angels for His own glory and they were objects of His election (1 Timothy 5:21). From eternity God had determined which of these innumerable angels would remain faithful to Him, and which would not. In accordance with this divine election, a certain number of angels – no more and no less than God had determined – rebelled against God shortly after God finished creating the world. Once the angels had chosen whether they would remain faithful to God or would join in the rebellion, it was no longer possible for the angels, be they fallen or not, to shift allegiance anymore. As a result, those angels who remained faithful to God are now committed to God with absolute allegiance. It is that absolute allegiance to God that gives rise to their exemplary obedience to God. The faithful angels are characterised in Scripture as *"hearkening to the voice of His will"* and *"ministers that do His will"* (Ps 103:20). There is no hesitation on the part of angels, no reluctance to obey, no desire to disobey. It is for that reason that Jesus Christ was able, in the third petition of the Lord's Prayer, to hold up the angels as an example for the kind of obedience He desires from His people. To quote the Catechism: Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven is a prayer in which we ask God that *"everyone may carry out the duties of his office and calling as willingly and faithfully as the angels in heaven"* (LD 49).

The word "angel" describes the task of these heavenly creatures in so far as it relates to man. For the word used in Hebrew for "angel" means *"messenger"*. God's messengers who carry messages from heaven to earth and from earth to heaven. Jacob's dream about the ladder is a case in point (Gen 28:10). It is in that same light that we are to see the various angels God sent to specific persons with messages from God. For example, Abram and Lot (Gen 18), of Gideon (Judges 6), of Manoah and his wife (Judges 13), of Zechariah (Luke 1), of Mary (Luke 1), of John (Rev 19:9). Similarly, it is that task of being God's messengers that is pointed out in the angelic meeting around God's throne described in Job 1 (also Zechariah 1:11).

This task of being messengers between heaven and earth, however, implies more than that angels say things on God's behalf to individuals on earth or report to God on how persons on earth are faring. It is as messengers of God that angels are also instructed by God to do certain things on earth, and by doing certain things to communicate a message from God to those who live on earth. It is this thought that is captured in the words of Hebrews 1:14. In that text it is said of angels that they are *"ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation"*. God sends forth these angels in order to do specific things for the benefit of the elect. Here we may think of the words of Ps 91:11 which states: *"He will give His angels charge of you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone."*

We may likewise think of what Elisha's servant was allowed to see when he and the prophet were surrounded by the Syrian army: *"the Lord opened the eyes of the young man and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha"* (II Kings 6:17). These angels were messengers of God, messengers sent by God to remind the young servant that God always protects His people.

What about guardian angels then? Do we believe in individual "guardian angels"? I found a quote which I think gives us a good point to consider in respect of guardian angels, *"This is an element of Roman Catholic theology that has been rejected by the Reformers as Scripturally unsound. It's more a case of that the angels in general guard God's people at any given moment."* So I think we can conclude that yes, God provides His angels to watch over and protect His people (the saints), but whether there are specific angels assigned directly to each individual of God's elect, we do not know. I think it is enough to know that God has His angels there to protect and serve us.

Are there angels around us today? Do the angels today serve God's elect, guard us on our way lest we

dash our foot against a stone? The answer is yes, they do. Though we live in this day and age, there are always angels guarding us, serving us. These angels, we know, are sent from heaven for our good by our Heavenly Father. How can we be so sure of it? Because that's what Hebrews 1 tells us: *"angels are ministering spirits sent forth to serve those who are to obtain salvation."* By

the grace of God in Christ, we are to obtain salvation. To ensure that we be not harmed, and so that we can give glory to our Creator/Redeemer, the Lord sends His angels to us day by day to have charge over us. What is said in Scripture about angels is not a truth that was only valid in the days of David or Paul. Today – though we may not see them, let alone recognise them as angels – they always accompany us, lest we should dash our foot against a stone. It is by means of angels that the Lord our God guards us so that we are able to serve our Creator day by day.

Once again it is impressed upon us just how truly blessed we are to be safe in the protection of our loving heavenly Father. I have one last point that I will leave with you to ponder:

Do we believe that angels appear just before a child of God dies? Or, just as a saint passes away, is it possible that he/she sees angels? Many people claim to have heard persons, as they die, repeat quotes such as "Oh, it's beautiful!" "I hear music!" "I see angels!" What do we think of this? Is it possible?

Here is a response that I found in respect of that. Read it, think on it, search out the Scriptures and then take a moment for yourself to find out where you stand and what you believe: *"Our response should be that it is entirely possible. Who*

are we to say that it is not true? If we keep in mind that the soul of the redeemed child of God enters into glory at the moment of physical death, and if we keep in mind that Christ sends His angels to gather His people home, why is such a thing impossible to believe? Although this may not be experienced in every case, we see no reason to doubt the authenticity of these remarks."

they are *"ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation"*.

Do the angels today serve God's elect, guard us on our way lest we dash our foot against a stone?

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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