

Christmas Day

The 25th Day of December known as Christmas Day was originally a Christian holiday to observe the birth of Jesus Christ.

Observe – study, remember, consider, reflect, to think about and believe.

However this day has become a day to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. But note the difference.

Celebrate – party, pleasure, make merry, to commemorate and enjoy.

What is Christmas Day for you? A party? A matter of feeling? An opportunity to have fun? Or a song about glory to the newborn king?

As Andrew Kuyvenhoven says, “people should really “hearken” a little better when the “herald angels” sing. For they never sang “glory to the newborn king”. The newly born king had taken off His royal robes; He put His glory aside and came not to be served but to serve. Neither did the angels ever mention the “men of goodwill” as most Christmas card poets talk about”. We tend to forget that when the angels appeared to the shepherds on that special night so long ago, they actually sang: “*Glory to God in the highest*” (Luke 2:14).

VOLUME 11	ISSUE 8	DECEMBER 2006	
Christmas Day		R VanderWal	1
From the EIC		E Terpstra	2
Christmas: To Celebrate or not...		E Terpstra	3
The War on Christmas		B Pitlo	6
Work and Leisure		S H Terpstra	8
Comfort in the Death...		R VanderRos	12
Navigating the Journey of Life		A Hordyk	14

Christmas Day (continued)

God's first commandment is: "You shall have no other gods before Me." In other words, "Glory to God in the highest", and the first thing we are taught to pray is: "Hallowed be Thy Name". In other words, "Glory to God in the highest".

Many people say, "Have a merry Christmas", or ask, "Did you have a nice Christmas?" but after reflecting on the birth of Jesus Christ we should actually be asking "is it easier, now, to say, 'Glory to God in the highest'?"

Christmas Day is the day we hear the Christmas story, the good tidings of the birth of Jesus Christ: "*For there is born to you this day in the city of David, a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord*" (Luke 2:11). We observe that on this day

References:

1. Daylight/Daily Readings with the Bible/ Andrew Kuyvenhoven/ Paideia Press/ 1978
2. Calvin's Commentaries Volume XVII/ Harmony of Matthew, Mark, Luke/ By John Calvin/ Baker Books/ 1998
3. The World Book Encyclopedia/ C-CH V3/ International/ Page 487/ 1992

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God fulfilled His covenant promise by the birth of Jesus, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger in the insignificant town of Bethlehem.

And so on the 25th Day of December, remember that this is what makes Christmas such a joyous occasion. That "*God so loved us that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should have everlasting life*" (John 3:16). This is indeed an event to be celebrated, so let us consider God's wondrous works and follow the example set for us by the angels and respond with one accord: "GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST!"

Have a blessed Christmas!

Rita VanderWal

FROM THE EIC

Welcome to the last issue of Contender for this year.

In this edition of Contender we have a number of articles that focus on the celebration of Christmas. Yes, it is that festive time of the year again, a season for us in Australia, which is characterised by holidays, bright sunny weather, the beach, family and friends.

Holidays give us time to reflect on the year that has just been, to think about the important things in our lives, and also to consider and plan for what we will be busy with in the New Year. It also gives time to do some extra reading, yes also Christian reading, and hence our bigger end of year issue.

Published in this issue is an article from S H Terpstra. We have deliberately placed it in this issue of Contender. As we embark on a period of holidays, we do well to consider our leisure / holidays / free time in the broader

context of our life of work in Gods service. It should just be mentioned that brother Terpstra first constructed this work back in 1986 – 20 years ago – as a presentation for the adults association of Byford. It has also been presented in other congregations. As old as it is, it remains just as relevant to today.

Editor Hugo Hordyk is intending to go overseas next year for a longer period of time. For that reason he is giving up his work which he did for the Contender editorial committee. Thanks Hugo for your efforts and we wish you well on your travels next year. A replacement for Hugo has not been finalised as yet.

From the editorial committee, we like to wish all our readers a joyous Christmas as we celebrate the birth of our Saviour and a happy and joyous new year, as we continue to wait for the second coming of the Lord.

Eric Terpstra

CHRISTMAS: TO CELEBRATE OR NOT TO CELEBRATE

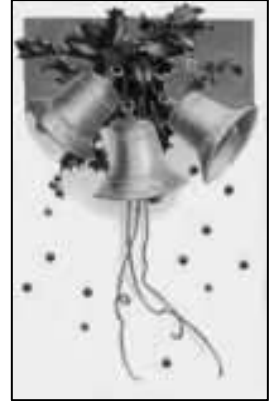
With Christmas being not so far away now, and shops and supermarkets intensively advertising party wares, the question of whether to celebrate or not to celebrate Christmas is hardly on everyone's lips. As it has been for many years now, Christmas Day is the day in the year that is known for its indulgent celebrations, followed by New Years Eve and New Years Day just a few days later. If the intensity of advertising and marketing is anything to go by, it would be expected that it is only a matter of course that Christmas is celebrated.

It was therefore somewhat to my surprise, when I did an internet search on celebrating Christmas, that I found web pages which very strongly advocated not to celebrate Christmas. And it was even more surprising when I discovered that the authors are indeed devout Christians as opposed to other mainstream religion or non-religious at all.

What follows is an excerpt from an article from Harry Bethel, *Should Christians Celebrate Christmas*. Note how strong his language is. The author even calls ministers, parents and others to repentance for celebrating Christmas and thereby not to further dishonour Him.

There is a season of the year during which there are more suicides than any other equivalent period in the year; a time when there is more drunkenness and revelry, and the sin of covetousness is more obvious than any other time. What I am referring to is the Christmas season. Many well-meaning Christians display slogans such as "Let's Put Christ Back Into Christmas" or "Jesus Is The Reason For The Season." But the unvarnished truth is that Christ never was in Christmas and it is not Jesus, but Satan who is the reason for the season.

Should anyone question my devotion to, or love for, Jesus because of my attack on the widely accepted tradition of celebrating Christmas, let it be known that I love Jesus Christ with all my heart, all my soul, all my mind, and all my strength. And the question that should be asked regarding the subject at hand should not only be what is wrong with celebrating Christmas, but also what is right with it?



Jesus never said to remember His birth until He comes--quite the contrary, our Lord said to remember His death until He comes (1 Cor. 11:24-26). God's people in the Old Testament never did celebrate birthdays. This was a pagan practice that the Jews did not do. In all of Scripture there are only two birthday celebrations mentioned; and both were by ungodly men. And it is interesting that on these two occasions, the Holy Spirit inspired the recording in Holy Writ of murders by these heathen men. One was when Pharaoh celebrated his birthday; he hanged the chief baker (Gen. 40:20-22). The other was when King Herod celebrated his birthday that he had John the Baptist's head chopped off (Mt. 14:6-10).

Because celebrating birthdays is a pagan, heathen practice, it is not honouring, but rather dishonouring to our Lord. Celebrating Jesus' birthday is a subtle trick of Satan to get God's people to focus on Jesus' humanity rather than His deity. Jesus is God incarnate; that is, He left heaven and came to earth (miraculously born of a virgin), but He did this to die for your sins and mine that we might be given eternal life and saved from our sins which includes coming out of the Babylonian world system and not participating in her pagan, heathen practices! (Please see 2 Corinthians 6:14-17 and Revelation

CHRISTMAS TO CELEBRATE OR NOT... (CONTINUED)

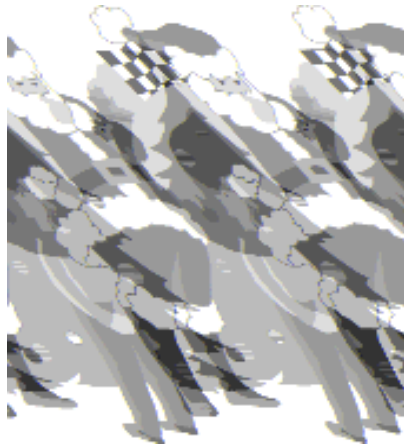
18:4). *Jesus is not 2000 years old, He is eternal, without beginning or end; He was not created, He is the Creator! ...*

In Jeremiah 10:2-4 the Word of God says, "Thus saith the Lord, Learn not the way of the heathen....For the customs of the people are vain: for one cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe. They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not." This was written several hundred years before our Lord Jesus condescended and was born of a virgin. And the demonic idea of Christmas (Christ-Mass) originated in the pagan cult of Roman Catholicism, hundreds of years after the birth of Christ. The apostles and early Christians did not celebrate Christ's birth. But Satan, who perverts God's Word and tricks God's people into violating God's commands, has been very successful in getting true Christians to participate in the abominable, pagan practice of decorating "Christmas" trees, and doubtless, Satan and his minions, the enemy of our souls, has spent many a Christmas season laughing and mocking God for what His people are doing in the name of Christ! This is only one way in which Christians have "given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme" God (2 Sam. 12:14).

This says nothing of lying to children about Santa Claus, and instilling in them a spirit of covetousness. This says nothing of the pagan art of drama and all the plays to entertain people concerning the birth of Jesus. And there are many other things that could be said about the abominable practice of celebrating Jesus' birthday, but space does not here permit, nor is it necessary for those who have ears to hear.

The author is very correct in his first point that Jesus never said to remember His birth until He comes, but to remember His death. Remembering His death is something we do daily, when we confess our sin before the Lord, and also periodically at the celebration of the Lords Supper. Is the celebration of Jesus birth then perhaps unwarranted or worse offensive to the Lord?

The author makes a point about the celebration of birthdays, noting that this is a pagan tradition and was not practiced in Israel. In my opinion, the author's comments about birthdays bring us to the important question, are we celebrating Jesus' birthday on Christmas Day? I don't believe we are, not in the same sense that we celebrate each other's birthdays. On Christmas day, we are celebrating the miracle of God becoming a man, of the Word becoming flesh. It was essential for our



Santa Claus is a deception we ought to avoid, because his presence and his presents undermine Jesus and His gift to us.

salvation that this occurred. (H.C. - QA 16) Further, we pay attention to the lowly state of His birth, how Jesus did not enter the

world as a man but rather as a vulnerable and dependant baby, so that in all things He might be like us. In this way the author is correct, Jesus is not 2000 years old, He is eternal, without beginning or end.

In many ways I could appreciate the quotation from Jeremiah 10. Whilst I

would question whether a Christmas tree is indeed idolatry in its truest form, I have no doubt that in the society that we live, the presence of the tree with the lights and decorations and the presents underneath, significantly takes away from the message of the gospel. I would agree too, that Santa Claus is a deception we ought to avoid, because his presence and his presents undermine Jesus and His gift to us.

There are others who argue a little bit differently. Henry M Morris writes about Christmas presents: *“Except for the spirit of commercialism and covetousness that tends to intrude, the practice of exchanging gifts at Christmas is a reminder of the one, Who so loved the World...And while we are giving special gifts to our loved ones, it is singularly appropriate to give a special gift to the Lord Jesus, first “our own selves,” and then special gifts to those who in a special way are “ministering” in His name (2 Cor 8:4, 5).”* And about the Christmas tree he writes, *“The Christmas tree and other traditions have been adequately divested of their original pagan connotations by now so that a Christian can, in good conscience utilize them to encourage the spirit of love and reconciliation that honours Christ.”*

So the question remains, should we be celebrating Christmas?

The Church Order of Dort, (Art 65) as well as the Canadian and Australian Church Order (Art 53 Can C.O.) call the Churches to commemorate the birth of the Lord Jesus, as well as His death, resurrection, ascension and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. As was stated earlier, there is no command from Jesus Himself to celebrate His birth, nor does the Bible state anywhere that we should. At the same time, Jesus does not say anywhere not to celebrate His birth, and nor does the Bible prohibit it. This argument by itself is somewhat weak, but is probably important never the less.

Henry M Morris gives some indication why Christians commemorate Christmas when he says, *“... there is much in our Christmas observances which, even though not explicitly found in the Bible, makes it a legitimate and wholesome application of the significance of the incarnation to the world. In a society which is becoming increasingly secularised and fragmented, it is surely good to have an annual and universal remembrance of the great historical fact that “ in this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.”*

In my opinion, the words of the Apostle Paul also give some good advice, and provide some freedom to Christians in the way they celebrate Christmas. I am referring to Romans 14: 5, 6. There Paul writes, *“One person esteems one day above another, another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day observes it to the Lord and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord He does not observe it. In other words, if you are going to celebrate Christmas, celebrate it to the Lord.*

In conclusion: Christians who do not celebrate Christmas, as such are not to be condemned. It is not commanded anywhere in the Bible, and the origins of Christmas celebrations as well as the commercialism and covetousness surrounding modern Christmas celebrations is a hindrance to these people to celebrate Christmas at all. On the other hand, when we consider the wondrous work of God concerning our redemption and salvation, the conception and birth of the Lord Jesus Christ is indeed an event to be celebrated. As Christmas 2006 approaches, let us observe the day to the Lord.

Eric Terpstra

References:

1. <http://www.bethelministries.com/CHRISTMAS.htm>
2. Henry M Morris, *The Bible Has the Answer*, 1996 chapter xv page 200

THE WAR ON CHRISTMAS

The media have dubbed it the 'War on Christmas.'¹ It's that time of the year when you



are scared to walk into a retail store lest you get ambushed by a salesman wearing a pair of plastic Rudolf the Red Nosed Reindeer antlers and an equally plastic smile. That

time of the year when the police are out in full force in a desperate attempt to curb a tidal wave of hundreds of revellers, usually drunken, from causing one safety hazard after another. That time of the year when we are bombarded by advertisements insisting that the product they are promoting will, without a doubt, grant us a truly memorable Xmas (note the strategically placed 'X', even if it once represented Christ's name in Greek). The overwhelming selling and buying and celebrating and holiday making phenomenon of Christmas in the 21st century is astonishing. Far more focus is placed on 'Father Christmas' than on Jesus. Satan has secularised Christmas, wrapped it up in a cute little colourful box and placed it under a tree. You can buy the meaning of Christmas now: check out all those little Nativity scenes available from a store near you. Hurry while stocks last...

This article could be seen as a sort of newflash. It will inform you of four different ways that Christmas is being treated. That is, either people are indulging in a secular version of Christmas as personified by Santa, or they avoid any mention of Christmas, or they

observe Christmas in the way we as Reformed people strive to achieve by focusing on Christ. Finally, there are those who try to remain in no-man's land, and achieve a sort of mixture of the

three previously mentioned responses, and inevitably get caught in the crossfire.

The secularisation of Christmas has largely occurred due to the commercially-attractive practice of gift exchanging. To understand how Christmas has undergone secularisation, it is necessary to outline a few instances in history where measures have been taken to prevent an overwhelming celebration during this holiday season for the wrong purposes. The tradition of giving presents has not been scholarly linked to any Christian-based activity. It has been directly related to a pagan festival from the ancient Romans, called Saturnalia. It was part of a weeklong celebration, which included observances such as the postponement of businesses and the releasing of slaves to their own holidays, and it stretched from the birthday of the pagan god Saturn on December the 17th till December 25th, upon which gifts were exchanged. According to various poets of the time, it included drinking, gambling and the singing of various songs related to that particular holiday season.²



Now obviously Santa and Christmas presents and a sparkling Christmas tree are not ideas encouraged by retailers to consciously remind everyone of the birth of Saturn, so technically there is no need to worry that we are observing a pagan festival by giving presents. Aside from this point, a notable fact is that our early

church fathers established Christmas on the 25th of December, the winter solstice, partly in order to coincide with these various pagan festivals, including Saturnalia.

Most pagan festivals were

designed to lift the spirits of people who were struck by superstitious worries about the demonic forces supposedly prevalent in the dead and darkness of a harsh European winter. In

*The Battle Lines
are drawn...*

¹ cf. Matthew Davis. "Lines drawn in battle over Christmas." *BBC News*. 22 December 2005.

² cf. the Roman poet Catullus. ref: Julilla Sempronia, "Ancient Voices: Saturnalia", *AncientWorlds* 2004.

fact, right up until the Reformation, people in Europe still clung to old pagan beliefs such as that December 25 was "Rauhnaecht" (especially prevalent amongst the Germanic principalities in the centuries after the fall of the Roman Empire) where the ghosts of old warriors would supposedly rise up in the dead of night and punish those who had committed disloyalties that year.³ By placing the remembrance of Christ's birth on that same date, it gave the church fathers an opportunity to reveal to the people bound by the misery and darkness of pagan rituals that true hope and salvation is found only, and wonderfully, through the birth and death of Jesus Christ.

Naturally, and unfortunately, the festive nature of the holidays quickly became a dominant feature of Christmases, especially in England from about the 11th century to the 17th century. Already by the 12th century, the true meaning of Christmas had been lost in revelry and merrymaking; the activities of monarchs such as Henry III being especially notable, including gluttonous feasting, heavy drinking and sexual promiscuity. In 1644, when the Puritans gained control of England, they introduced a whole number of Acts of Parliament which removed what they considered secularisations of the church. It included a total ban of the observance of Christmas, their reason being that the day had promoted, according to the then Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell: "an extreme forgetfulness of Christ, by giving liberty to carnal and sensual delights."⁴ With the Restoration of the monarchy in England in 1660, the ban was lifted, and yet Protestants, Catholics and Anglicans continued to dispute over the legitimacy of celebrating Christmas for decades afterwards.

*...Santa dominates
most of... Christmas,
but the tides of battle
will turn...*

With the advent of industrialization and the growth of commercialisation in the 1800's, Christmas was revived, especially by writers who felt that the so-called true spirit of Christmas: peace, family, and companionship was being neglected. Hence books such as that by the enormously influential Charles Dickens: *A Christmas Carol* (1843) were written and became very popular. The myth of St Nicholas (now Santa) and his wagon full of presents was born during this period. Charles Dickens sought to promote a family-centred festival of generosity, but the unfortunate result was that the practice of present-giving led to an ironical swing in emphasis to a community-oriented focus, and eventually the commercial focus we are confronted with today.⁵

A more recent and perhaps an inevitable result of the secularisation of Christmas, is the very avoidance of the term 'Christmas' or even its observance. On Christmas cards it is less usual

to see "Merry Christmas" (and rarely, "Have a blessed Christmas") and more usual to see "Season's Greetings." Christmas is just another public holiday forcing all employers to grant employees a week-long celebration of the fact that

another year's work had just passed. This is a reflection of a growing mentality in society to "work to live" rather than to "live to work" as Genesis 1:28 teaches us. Further, it is seen as more politically correct for retailers to use "Happy Holidays" as an advertising gimmick rather than "Merry Christmas"⁶ simply because followers of Islam and Judaism celebrate Kwanzaa and Hanukkah, not Christmas, even though a poll in 2004 indicated that 96% of Americans observe Christmas in some form or another and less than a percent follow Kwanzaa or Hanukkah.⁷

³ Ruth Reichmann, <http://www.serve.com/shear/germusa/xmasintr.htm>. Accessed 25th November, 2006

⁴ Laura Sauer, <http://www.janeausten.co.uk/magazine/page.ihtml?pid=271&step=4>, Accessed 25th November, 2006

⁵ cf Ronald Hutton, *Stations of the Sun: The Ritual Year in England*. Oxford: Oxford Press, 2001

⁶ Bill O'Reilly, "Soros is 'Moneymen' Behind War on Christmas." *Daily Kos*. 2 December 2005.

⁷ Nathan Burchfield "Jewish Group Defends 'Merry Christmas' Greeting" *CNSNews.com* Correspondent December 01, 2005

THE WAR ON CHRISTMAS (CONTINUED)

And so, it leaves us as Reformed youth a difficult task indeed: to steer clear from secular and avoidance influences on the observance and celebration of Christmas. That we must observe Christmas is evident from the Church Order which provides us with a list of days we are to commemorate, including Christmas. Further when we observe Christmas, we must keep in mind the words of Matthew 6:24: "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." Mammon is a word of Aramaic origin and denotes wealth, avarice and is often also deified, as evident from this chapter. Christ is warning us of the idolatry of wealth, and is making it very clear that we can't serve both God and wealth. Should we then mix Jesus and Santa, two such opposing figures in Christmas history, in our own Christmas celebrations?

Of course, the purpose behind the hyper-commercialised nature of Christmas, many will no doubt argue, is due to the fact that traditionally Christmas has included the giving of gifts and presents to each other. Many believe that the tradition of providing presents stems from the actions of the wise men from the East in Matthew 2: "And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshipped

Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense and myrrh." (Matt 2: 11) However, even if this were the case, the fact that the wise men gave these expensive presents to the Son of God, shows that they were honouring Jesus Christ. It appears that they were not Jews, and yet they bestowed honour on Him whom they

recognized as worthy of all honour. Who are we honouring when we give presents to each other on Christmas? Perhaps we ought to leave present-giving for each other's birthdays, and this Christmas honour Christ by our observance of the commemoration of His birthday.

The battle-lines are drawn. Santa dominates most people's perception of Christmas, but the tides of

battle will turn. Let us not get caught in the crossfire, but instead remain faithful covenant children of God. Let us follow the example of the myriads of angels who appeared to those shepherds on that momentous night long ago singing and glorifying God as they watched and marvelled at the unfolding of His strategic plan of salvation. And let us look forward eagerly to the Second Coming of Christ, when we will rise up to meet Him in His final glorious conquest, and witness the restoration of true peace and goodwill to all men.

*...Let us not get
caught in the
crossfire...
instead remain
faithful children of
God*

Brendan Pitlo

WORK AND LEISURE

In our western society an increasing number of people make their living by providing leisure time activities or facilities for a leisure and pleasure hungry population.

Whereas in the past work was deemed to be the serious business of life, and leisure as

secondary to it, today the opposite seems to hold true for many people. With the erosion of the Christian work ethic, and the increasing secularisation of society, leisure is often seen to be the real aim of life, and work as merely a means to attain it.

This change in life's view has not passed us by. While we have been set apart from this world in a covenant relationship with God, we do live in it and are influenced by it in all sorts of ways. How often in our circles don't we hear criticism about people who work too hard and long hours, or about those who are busy in unpaid church related activities?

Often from the pulpit this subject is also addressed. Frequently emphasis is placed on the need to use leisure time productively, to study in preparation for men's, women's, or youth club meetings, to be available for participation in all kinds of church related activities; to be busy in God's Kingdom. It is not infrequent that we hear warning against leisure activities of all kinds, or that we read in the church press articles directed against leisure type activities, especially those of a passive nature.

The purpose of this paper is to briefly examine the scriptural perspective on work and leisure, and to place our leisure activities in a scriptural framework. It is hoped that this framework will be able to function as a guide to the many questions we are faced within today's leisure and pleasure hungry society. By doing so it is hoped that it will help each and everyone on an individual basis to analyse their own perspective towards work and leisure, thereby helping them to make their own decisions when confronted with questionable leisure activities.

To properly analyse the topic it is necessary that we define our terms. For the purpose of this paper work means more than just paid work, work we do for the employer. I take "work" in the broader sense as being all those things which require exertion, and which are not done for the purpose of relaxation. That which is done for relaxation becomes leisure and everything else is work.

The question then arises: *"Does the Bible really give us such a framework? Does it really shed any light on the question of leisure?"*

In answer to this I refer you to Mark 6:31 where Christ says to His disciples. *"Come away by yourselves to a lonely place, and rest a while"*.

We see here that the disciples have just returned from an extremely busy journey in which they *"...preached repentance, healed the sick, and cast out devils."* They have just returned to the Master and have reported to Him what they have done. He responded by urging them to rest, to have a little time away from the pressures of their daily existence. *"Many were coming and going and they had no leisure even to eat."*

Thus we see the Lord equated "leisure" to "having a rest". We can draw a number of conclusions from this:

1. Leisure only has meaning, is only possible, in the framework of having worked, of having being busy in either the physical or the mental sense, or both. Then the spring which has been under considerable tension needs to be released for a while, before being again put under the tension of renewed exertion.
2. After exertion leisure is good and necessary.
3. We often hear the exhortation to study as one of our leisure activities. However Bible study, preparation of men's, women's, and youth clubs, or other church related work cannot be regarded as part of our leisure activities. These things are very much a part of our work.

In the beginning God created man and gave him a mandate. This mandate became known as our culture mandate. In it God made us co-workers with Him in His creation.

He also stipulated how we were to be His co-workers. We were to serve Him in our daily work and family life. These two aspects encompass the totality of our life and place it completely in the context of our service to Him. This service requires exertion; work.

4. It would be a mistake to equate leisure with doing nothing, with emptiness, with eating and drinking and being merry, with being entertained by the efforts of others. While in the proper context all these things may have a place, it should be understood that what is work for the one can be leisure for the other.

*After exertion,
leisure is good and
necessary.*

WORK AND LEISURE (CONTINUED)

But the Scriptures tell us far more about leisure. Almost as soon as we open the Bible we read that already in the very beginning upon the completion of the six days of the creation the Lord 'rested' on the seventh day. A closer examination shows that the Lord reveals to us more about the Sabbath day and helps to give us a clear framework of leisure.

We read that God hallowed the seventh day "for in six days the Lord made Heaven and Earth, and rested on the Sabbath day."

The Lord rested on that day, and yet we also know from the Scriptures that He worked on. We read, for example, in John 5:17 "My Father is working still, and I am working."

He continued to uphold His work of the first six days. Not for a moment did He let go of that work His hand had completed in those first six days. He continued to care for and to uphold, to direct, His creative ordinances. If He had not done this, His work of those first six days would have collapsed into ruins.

We see then that the Sabbath day was a day of rest placed firmly in the framework of the previous six days. The emphasis is not in the first place on the day of rest, but on the demand to do all your work in the six working days of the week. In those days you are to exert yourselves and do all your work, both paid and unpaid, and to do it well. You could almost say that in normal circumstances a prerequisite to a happy and edifying day of rest is that it is preceded by a busy week of work.

It is clear that the Sabbath day became the climax of the preceding days. It did not become a sit down and do nothing day, but

a day in which we stop our work and assemble as a congregation, to celebrate, to be festive, and to together be happy about our work and about our position as co-worker with God in His creation. That is how it was in the beginning.

God rested and viewed His work of creation. We read that He saw that it was good. And He called man to enter into that rest with Him.

At the same time it is good to realise that for Adam and Eve this was their first day. Their first day was a day of rest. They could commence their life on earth, and could approach their mandate to fulfil and subdue the earth, to be God's co-workers from out of the rest into which the Lord had called them. The seventh day of the Lord was for them their first day, the day from out of which they could enter the coming week of work. The Lord called man to enter into that rest with Him. That rest is worked in us through God's Word and Spirit, on the

Sunday where God comes to us with the beginning of the eternal rest, the eternal Sabbath (Lord's Day 38). Thus our rest too is placed in the framework of His service where true rest can only be found.

In this way the Sabbath day is the climax of our work in our office as

God's co-worker. On this day of rest we take the opportunity to pause and reflect on our task in Gods service, and then it again becomes clear that our work has meaning, both now and into eternity. For it is the beginning of a new week, a new week of work which we may approach refreshed and rested because we have been given that day of rest from which to begin each week. And that day of rest is one in a number of Sabbaths which leads to the eternal Sabbath which will come when all the work which had to be done has been done and has been completed.

The first day was a day of rest.

The Sabbath day is the climax of our work...

Each and every one of us in our place and position, are co-workers with God and contribute in that role in the fulfilment of His plans and work towards the return of Jesus Christ His Son, and the establishment of His eternal Kingdom. We do this with our work, and He has given us the command to rest from this work at regular intervals, and to place our work time and again in the proper context of His great work.

This article, brief and superficial though it is, would not be complete without some examination of the effects of sin which brought God's curse over all man's endeavour. As a result of the fall into sin we see man chasing after ever increasing standards of living for an ever decreasing amount of effort. We see work being lowered to the status of being done only for money. To do the job well is not considered as being important, as being a mandate given by God.

We also see a corrupt world chasing after leisure, after being entertained continually only by the effort of others, after being active in doing those things which have little or no value, even in the context of resting.

Families are smaller because parents don't want children anymore because it restricts their leisure and freedom. Young people, even among our circles, literally hang around with their peers, indulging in empty talk, which leads only to emptiness of thought. We hear of parties degenerating into drunkenness and fighting. Increasingly we hear and read about the use of drugs, and of crime. More and more we come across the thought that one cannot enjoy himself without the help of alcohol, and the best place to find fun is in nightclubs and bars.

In the world around us we hear less and less of the importance of the family, the

home, as a place of relaxation, a place of work and leisure, a place which is a bulwark against the influence of the world, against the stresses and strains of working in a broken world, as a place where we can pause before we commence our work anew. More and more we 'go out' to find leisure and often in a way which makes us more tired than our work ever did. It is not for nothing that we hear people speak of Mondayitis, of the

need to rest at work to recover from a weekend of leisure.

As we read in Ecclesiastes, all is vanity, unless it is redeemed by Christ.

That is the answer to our questions. Christ has given both our work and leisure purpose. He has completed all things on the cross. He is called the second Adam. He restored the situation as it was in the beginning in Paradise where the week of work was commenced from out of the day of rest, the day of rest, which permeates the working days that follow.

Christ said to His disciples that they should go away to rest for a while. Because of Him we can again enjoy our life here on earth. We can again enjoy our work and leisure because it has renewed purpose. He has restored our position as God's co-worker and He directs and leads all things so that eventually we will enter the eternal rest with Him. In Him we seek and find fulfilment in work and leisure.

This is the framework, which was mentioned in the beginning of this article. The framework for our life in work and leisure is to find pleasure in it because it is in the context of our service to Him, because its aim is the glory of His Name, because it has renewed purpose, and because it contributes to the coming of Christ's Kingdom.

We see a corrupt world chasing after leisure.

"...All is vanity unless redeemed by Christ..."

COMFORT IN THE DEATH OF UNBELIEVERS

◇ Is there?

◇ How do we handle it?

This topic, 'Comfort in the death of unbelievers' is not an easy one. Some of you may ask, "Why would someone choose such a depressing topic?" Good question.

Well this is a subject I think about frequently and have also pondered about quite recently with the passing of several friends and family I knew over the last several months, not to mention over the past answer to the questions I will bring up. This is purely an exercise to see what people's thoughts are and in what ways people view this issue. In this way maybe we can realize what God teaches us regarding 'Comfort in the death of Unbelievers'.

During the past week (*I completed this on the 1st Nov*) we all became aware of the passing of the late Rev VanRongen. We should all know of him and be aware of what he has done for us in regards to his ministry and literature. We are comforted by the knowledge that those who died in Christ, God has granted salvation, therefore placing

them into an incredibly better world than the one we live in. We are even comforted in the knowledge that the salvation of infants and children is ensured as they are part of the covenant through their parents. God gives us a glimpse of the better world, not only the life of Adam prior to the fall into sin but also in the book of Revelations and events such as the stoning of Steven (Acts 7:54-60). We read here that God opens his eyes and shows the condemned messenger the glory of heaven. It had such an effect on Steven that he could only pray to God and not worry about his execution. Steven knew where he was about to go to and he was happy to enter into it! This is a great comfort to us all during a time of grief.

Most, no I will put my neck out and say ALL people in our churches come into contact with unbelievers. You may think that you keep yourself inside the church as much as possible but I can guarantee there is not one reader that does not have a relationship, in one form or another, with an

years also. Somehow this topic has never really been discussed, for all the research I did and all the people I have asked I got the same response, "Oooh, that's not an easy one Rick...!" So I thought, great we can discuss it in the time given to us at the present.

In this paper I intend to bring several points to the fore, I will by no means try to come up with an

unbeliever. Let us think here: we who are privileged to work have workmates, or in some business means we would have well known clients, bosses, agents or bank managers who are unbelievers. Ok, let's think of the students, whether you are a University or TAFE student. You, as a Free Reformed person, take up a very small minority in your class

room let alone being the only one! Let's see, how many of these students have study partners that they don't see at youth club or church? Any adults who own their house or rent? I am sure you didn't specifically buy a place that would have a brother or a sister from our congregations as a neighbour on either side of your boundary, now without living in

Fair Haven this would be impossible.

Yes we come across unbelievers everywhere. Now these instances I have just mentioned would involve a possible friendship. You may think they are friendly people, helpful neighbours or trustworthy employees etc. This could develop into a mutual friendship. Regardless of their belief, they could be one of those part-time Catholic's who go to church three times in their lives (for their baptism, marriage and funeral), a Muslim who enjoys discussing the difference in religion, or quite possibly an atheist who, albeit totally respects you and your belief in God but has quietly asked you to keep your religion to yourself and not to 'bible-bash' them. I could go on but by now I hope you get

**We are comforted...
that those who die
in Christ, God grants
salvation...**



the point. They are everywhere and all around us. Even the members of our churches who live the most sheltered and isolated lives will meet, and be acquainted with, these people.

There is one thing that especially makes this topic very valuable to me and that is the word family. I know that there are families in our congregations with members, however so close, that are unbelievers. To me this is what makes this topic so thought provoking. How do we cope with the death of a parent, child or a step-relative that we love dearly? Some of the way these situations can arise is through adoption, repentance, and evangelising.

For those people who may not know how the difference in feelings surrounding a Christian's or an unbeliever's death, I urge you to read two passages that centre around the mighty king David: Firstly 2 Samuel 12: 15-23. Here we read of the death of the son of David. Here we are told of a young child born to him by Bathsheba but struck down with illness by God. While the baby was still alive David fasted and showed great distress, until the child passed away. You can read the resulting passages for yourself to see the reaction of David. The second example can be found in 2 Samuel 18: 32-19:8. This tells the account of Absalom's death. Absalom was also a son of David, but we know of the life that he led and the sins that he committed without repentance. Once again I ask you to read the resulting passages. The reaction given by David will show what the difference is in grief between the passing of an unbeliever and a person under the care of our great God.

New members to our church may experience worlds of grief if their dearly beloved dies as an unbeliever. How do we comfort these fellow believers during their time of mourning, not to mention ourselves?

One point is for certain; once an unbeliever has passed away there will be much grief. They are gone and there is no more contact with them, so how do we deal with this? Here are our options: Firstly, we need to be active in striving to win them for Christ by our words and works, and praying that the love of God might be poured into their hearts (*cf. Rom 5:5*). This is the only way we as a family member or friend can pray for them and attempt to put the love of God into their lives.

In Romans 1 and 2 we accept that God will judge justly both the righteous and the unrighteous. God, through the writings of Paul, clearly dictates that those who reject God or, who have never heard of God, will be turned away to everlasting condemnation. We also believe that in order for us to be righteous we must have faith, we read this in Lords Day 23. Faith comes from God via the Holy Spirit. It's not something we can go out and acquire of our own self. By rights, had it not been for the saving grace of God and the hand feeding of the gospel from our Lord, we would be no better off than those who do not believe.

This leads me to look in Ecclesiastes 8 and 9, where the author outlines the fact that we all will die and we all know that our days are numbered. The number itself is never known but we know we will all die eventually; believers and unbelievers. We have a chance to teach these people to store up treasures in heaven because what we do on earth will mean nothing if we do not believe in God.

Secondly, the divine act of predestination assures us of our salvation, as long as we truly believe it (see

Eph 1:11). We agree that it is God who ultimately judges a person on their life's actions and beliefs. Therefore we CANNOT and WILL NOT know of anyone else who is a chosen child of God, once again we must believe! Now this involves *hope* and *knowledge*. *Hope* as in prayer for the saving of loved ones and the *knowledge* so that we are able to approach unbelievers and evangelise to them about the gospel.

To be an elect child of God is not based on a foreseen faith, it is purely based on God's own choice (COD chap 1, article 9, 10.) Remember I mentioned the atheist who respects you but does not appreciate the 'Bible bashing sessions'? Yes there is still hope for them too, while they are alive.

We don't know if the people we have come to like and get acquainted with actually will believe before they pass away. But when I think of this I always remember the passage in the Bible where Jesus is being crucified and one of the condemned next to Him asks and receives the gift of eternal life. He was a believer for a split second compared to the hours he was alive. Jesus has showed us a split second is all you need. To me this is a comfort.

Jesus showed us a split second is all you need... this is a comfort.

Ricky VanderRos

NAVIGATING THE JOURNEY OF LIFE

It is peak hour, it is hot and the roads are busy. Slowly you weave the vehicle through the traffic, keeping a steady eye looking out for the nearest sign. ‘Was it second left...or third left?’ You begin to doubt your recollection of the directions given to you. Turning down this road, and back up the next, the panic starts to set in. “Help! I don’t know where I am!” you mutter to you’re self. It’s too late...your lost.

It’s a feeling that we are all familiar with. Perhaps it was when you were young and out shopping with Mum; one minute you’re right next to her, next minute she’s gone and you’re alone. Maybe it was during a walk through the bush; after walking for a couple of hours, you discover that you no longer know the way back to the car park. Or possibly it was like the introductory example; you go for your first big drive in your car when you just got your license, and end up horribly lost. “Help! I don’t know where I am!”

When you think about it, our cry for help is not really correct. When we are lost, we do know where we are. We are parked right outside a large grey building, or sitting against the trunk of a jarrah tree. We know exactly where we are. The problem is we don’t know how to get to where we want to be. Although it may be an unpleasant feeling to realise that we are lost, this realisation is the first important step to finding our way back to where we want to be. Much more dangerous

then being lost is not realising that we actually are lost. It is the time spent driving happily through the traffic, or marching confidently through the bush, perhaps leading others, that we are doing the most damage. While not realising it, we are lost; and each kilometre travelled makes us more and more lost.

Our life on earth is often referred to as a journey. From birth, we travel through life making different decisions, accomplishing different achievements, until, at our death, we arrive at our destination. As Christians, the path which we follow leads us to our glorious destination, eternal life with God.

John Bunyan, in his book *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, portrays the life of a Christian as a dangerous journey, filled with danger and temptations. Just like on a physical journey, it is very easy to go off course and become lost on this journey. When we go walking through the bush, or travelling in the car, we arm ourselves with a map, a compass and perhaps a GPS, to ensure that we do not become lost on our trip. But just carrying the equipment will not prevent us from going off course and becoming disorientated. While travelling, it is important to regularly check our position with that on the map to ensure that we actually are where we think we are. The bush all looks the same when we’re hiking through it, and without a compass or GPS and a map to reference our position, we have no idea if we are on course, or trudging completely in the wrong direction. The same is true for our spiritual journey

**...By God’s
grace, we’ve
been provided
with a Map to
direct us**

through life. Without something to compare our lives to, we have no idea if we are walking on the correct path.

Fortunately for us, by the grace of God, we have been provided with such a map to direct us through life - the Bible.

God has given us His Holy Word as a guide,

clearly illustrating for us the path to salvation. The

writers of the Old Testament

understood this concept and

acknowledged that it is God who reveals the path of righteousness. In

Psalm 23 David

acknowledges that it is *'He [who] leads me in the paths of righteousness.'* Psalm 119

speaks wonderfully about the excellencies of the Word of God. In verse 35 the author asks

God to *'make me walk in the path of Your commandment, for I delight in it.'* Again in

verses 101-102 he claims, *'I have restrained my feet from every evil way, that I may keep Your Word. I have not departed from Your*

judgments, For You Yourself have taught me.'

In verse 105 the author speaks those well known words, *'Your Word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path.'* Solomon also

speaks about the paths of life often in his proverbs. In Proverbs 4:14 he is recorded as

saying, *'Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of evil. Avoid it, do not travel on it and pass on.'* In chapter

12:28 he also says, *'In the way of righteousness is life, and in its pathway there*

is no death.'

The Holy inspired Word of God has been given to us as our map for the journey of life.

It is filled with many situations and examples from which we can learn and apply to our own

lives. But, just like the map we use for bush walking, the Word of God can only keep us on

the correct path if we use it. Like the map, the Bible will not stop us going off course if we

do not refer to it constantly, to check our position and progress. And, similar to the hike through the bush, it is dangerous to simply assume that we know the way, to think that we can remember the path. If we do not

consistently check our spiritual position with the Holy Map, we can, and will, quickly begin to go off course without realising. This is a

dangerous position to be in. While

confidently marching through life, we do not

realise that we are becoming more and

more spiritually lost, perhaps while leading

others. Just like when we are driving our car,

or walking in the bush, it is often not till we

stop and check that we realise that we are off course and lost. It is only through constant

comparison of our lives to God's Word that we can ensure that we are on the path of

righteousness. When He was on earth, Jesus warned that the path of righteousness, which a

Christian must follow, is a difficult one. In Matthew 7:13-14 Christ says: *'Enter by the*

narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction and there are

many who go by it. But narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and

there are few who find it.'

The world in which we live is filled with many distractions which try to tempt us away from

travelling the path of righteousness. We have been warned that the path to salvation is not an

easy one. In order to be prepared to navigate through the difficulties that lie ahead in the

journey of life, we must know our Bibles, and be prepared to let God guide us through on the

path of righteousness. And together with David let us pray,

'Show me Your ways, O LORD; Teach me Your paths.' (Psalm 25:4)

**The Word of God
can only keep us
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path if we use it.**