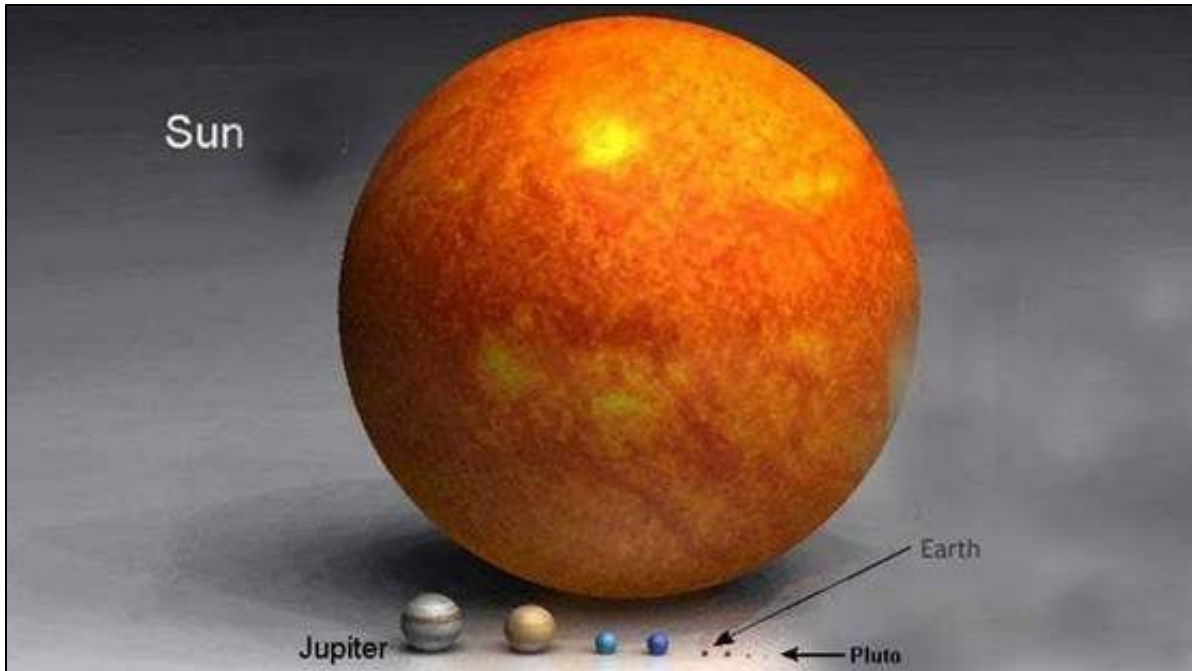


Editorial

The song by the Sherman brothers, “It’s a Small World” is reputed to be the most translated and most performed song of all time. And, despite the fact that the song was written as a soundtrack for a theme park ride, its title has some truth. The world is small. Advances in transportation and communication technologies seem to have shrunken the earth. A journey that took our grandparents weeks, can now be completed in a matter of hours. Communication over thousands of kilometres is now possible in milliseconds, something unheard of until relatively recently. Every part of the earth has now been explored and mapped, and attention is turning towards space: the last frontier.

And it is when we turn to space that we realise that Earth really is small. Of the seven other planets in our solar system, only three are smaller than Earth. Jupiter, a giant gas planet, is the largest with a diameter at the equator of 143000 kilometres. To put this immense size into perspective, eleven Earths would fit side by side across the face of Jupiter. Although larger than we can comprehend, Jupiter cannot really be considered a giant in the world of space. The Sun has a diameter of 1.4 million kilometres, about 10 times larger than Jupiter.

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Editorial (continued)

Over 100 Earths would fit side by side across the Sun, and a million planet Earths would fit inside the Sun! But it doesn't stop there. The Sun is one of about 6000 stars, visible with the unaided eye, in the Milky Way galaxy. Sirius, the brightest star, has a diameter twice that of our sun, while the diameter of Arcturus, the third brightest star, is approximately 25 times that of the Sun. Just in the Milky Way galaxy alone, there are literally billions of stars. And scientists estimate that there are literally billions of galaxies in the universe! With such an unbelievably immense number of stars, with such enormous sizes, we cannot help but feel we live on a tiny and insignificant planet.

The celestial bodies have been awe inspiring since the world began. David writes in Psalm 8,

*'When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,
The moon and the stars, which You have ordained,
What is man that You are mindful of him,
And the son of man that You visit him?'*

It seems unbelievable that God, the Creator of this vast universe, should pay any attention to mankind at all. Yet later in the same psalm David writes, *'You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet'*. God created human beings, male and female, as rulers over His Creation. His awesome Creation, including the entire heavens with the

billions of galaxies and stars, was created to bring glory to His Name. In Psalm 19 David writes, *'The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork.'*

God showed His incredible love for His people, the rulers of His Creation, when He did not destroy them after the fall into sin. Instead God choose to extend His saving grace and mercy to His disobedient creatures. Jesus tells us that, *'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life'* (John 3:16). It is this message that makes us realise that the earth is not insignificant. God created the earth as a home for His people, a people whom He loved so much that He sacrificed His own Son to save. Without this rich comfort, we are just living on an insignificant rock, floating around one of billions of stars. This is exactly the message that secular science is trying to teach us. They want us to believe that the earth is not special, that there could be millions of other planets just like it. This teaching implies that we, the people of this planet, are not significant either. But God has revealed to us that this is not the case. His Word confirms to us that He is our Creator and Saviour. And we, together with all Creation, must say, *'O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth!'* (Psalm 8:9).

Adrian Hordyk

HELLO & WELCOME

... to another edition of the Contender

You will notice in this edition two somewhat longer articles. "Showing your team colours" was a paper that was presented to the youth in Southern River Church at their youth camp. The paper was well received there by the participants and now is printed for the enjoyment of everyone.

The other article is part 1 of a modified assignment on the book of James written by Ruurd Offringa. Originally it was written for the studies in the REDC course that he is undertaking. It becomes obvious from his work, that the book of James is highly instructive on the Christian walk and talk.

It is pleasing to be able to publish articles written from a wider circle of our Free Reformed Church members. Please remember that you if you have something spiritually up-building to share, or are willing to put finger to keyboard to produce something along those lines we are more than happy to consider it for publication. We can even help with editing and offering advice for improvements / suggestions. And yes, this is a free service. ☺

Happy reading.

On behalf of all the editors, **Eric Terpstra**

JAMES (PART 1)

True Faith

The book of James is famous for connecting true faith to works. It repeatedly reminds the readers that in order for our faith to be true it needs to be accompanied by works. In the first chapter James tells us to "be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (1:22). He tells us that hearing the word and believing it to be true is not what saves us. If we think that believing that the Bible is true will save us, we are deceiving ourselves. James expresses this clearly when he says "You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!" (2:19). Believing in facts is not true faith.

In chapter two, verse 17 James says that "faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead." He repeats this again in verse 20 and 26. The word dead in this context means useless. There is no purpose to believing in the one true God and believing in what He has said if it does not affect our lives.

In chapter one, verse 27 James has defined what it means to be a Christian "to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world." The way we act

towards our neighbour and towards God's law shows where our love is. James uses the example of Abraham being justified by works when he offered his son Isaac on the altar (2:21).

In conclusion of this matter James says, "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only" (2:24). At first glance this seems to fly in the face of Sola Fida and in fact this epistle has been referred to as "an epistle of straw" by Martin Luther because of this teaching (United Church of God, 2006). However this teaching is also found in other parts of scripture, a very clear example being found in Hebrews 3. Here the author talks about why Israel did not enter the rest of Canaan and concludes by saying "And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief" (Hebrews 3:18-19). Here again we see a close connection between faith and works.

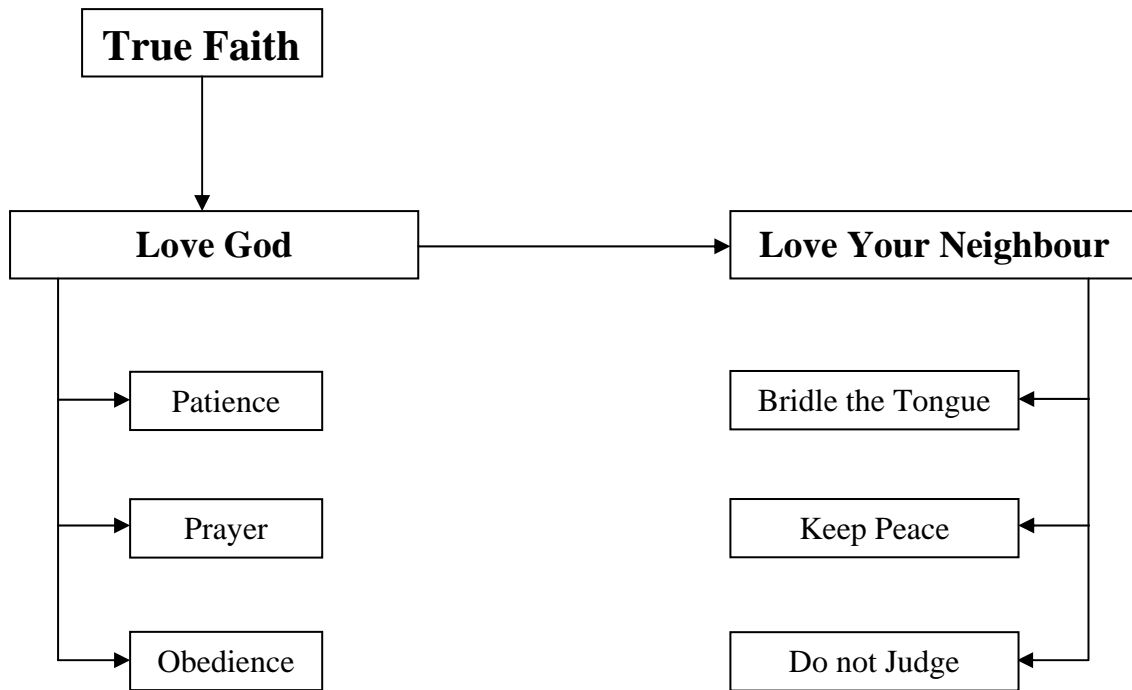
Although these texts seem to contradict Sola Fida, they are actually showing that true faith does not exist without works. Those who have true faith will naturally follow the "law of liberty" out of

JAMES (CONTINUED)

thankfulness for being saved. So while we are not saved through our works, our works do show that we have saving faith.

The following chart shows how James explains true faith. James links faith to love for God which

is shown through patience, prayer and obedience. Our love for God is linked to love for our neighbour, which is shown through bridling the tongue, keeping peace with our neighbour and not judging our neighbour.



Love God

James introduces himself as “a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” (1:1). This shows that he puts himself under the authority of God. He does not consider himself as an independent person, who does not need God. He recognises his dependence on God. He also reminds his readers that all good comes from God, especially our salvation (1:16-18).

Because salvation only comes from God we need to “lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls” (1:21). The word meekness shows that we will only receive the implanted word if we truly see the need for this grace. Loving God is submitting to His authority and not having pride in our own autonomy.

To back up this argument James quotes Proverbs 3:34 which says, “God resists the proud, But gives

grace to the humble” (4:6). God will not give the proud what they desire, but to the humble He will give eternal life. In chapter 4:10 James writes “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.” If we try to lift ourselves up, God will resist us, but if we humble ourselves God will lift us up. To strengthen this argument yet further James also writes, “Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, “The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously?”” (4:5). God wants us completely; we need to submit to Him completely.

But what does it mean to submit to God completely? James’ answer is by telling us that we need to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that” (4:15). If we do not take this attitude we boast in our arrogance, which is a great evil (4:16). God wants us to humble ourselves to His plans, even in our day-to-day living.

Patience

Because we submit to God completely and expect all good from Him we can be patient in adversity. James tells us to be joyful when we experience trials, knowing that the testing of our faith produces patience. He reminds us to “let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (1:4). The second time that perfect is mentioned in this verse it is used in the sense of mature. Complete means lacking nothing that we need to live our lives as Christians. This includes times of persecution:

You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you. Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. (5:6-8)

Here James mentions the Christians’ response to unjust persecution. Christians do not resist when

they are wronged; they patiently endure it (Calvin, 15??, Henry, 1721). James is encouraging his brethren to be patient as the Lord will come when the time is right, just as a farmer does not harvest his crop until the time is right. James gives the examples of the prophets and of Job:

My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful. (5:10-11)

This text also shows us that the Lord has a purpose behind all the suffering He sends us. This knowledge helps us to be able to endure our suffering with patience. Also again we see that those who endure suffering with patience are blessed (happy).

Prayer

After telling us that patience makes us perfect and complete, James says, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (1:5). By asking God for what we need we show our dependence on Him. We humble ourselves in prayer and promote God. God wants us to ask Him for what we need and will not reproach us for coming to Him in prayer.

However, James stresses that we need to “ask in faith, with no doubting” (1:6). We may not doubt in God’s ability or desire to help us. We cannot expect God to help us if we don’t trust Him completely to provide for us.

This does not mean that we will receive anything we ask for if we ask with confidence. We also have to ask with the right motive. James makes this clear in chapter 4:2-3:

You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.

If we want something we have to ask God for it – not resort to evil. If we ask God for something we can only expect to receive it if we ask it for God’s glory – not if we want it for our pleasures.

In chapter five James goes on to describe a number of situations where we need to pray.

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. (5:13)

**We cannot expect
God to help us if we
don’t trust Him
completely to provide
for us.**

JAMES (CONTINUED)

The first situation James gives is when we are suffering. We need to ask God for help enduring the suffering and for relief from suffering. When we are cheerful we are told to sing psalms of praise to God. We can also give God praise in our prayers.

Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. (5:14-15)

The second situation we need to pray in is when we are sick. James says we need to call the elders and get them to pray over us and anoint us in the name of the Lord. Anointing with oil was often used in New Testament times (Mark 6:13 being an example). Some say that this was only done by those who had the power to work miracles and when the miracles stopped, the anointing with oil also stopped (Henry, 1721). Others say that oil was just used as a common medicine. This text also tells us that “the prayer of faith will save the sick”. This shows that the anointing with oil was not some miracle cure as it had to be accompanied by the prayer of faith (Calvin, 15??). Here again we see the importance of praying with faith. Likewise, today we cannot depend on medicines alone to heal us; God is in control of our health and only He can make the medicine work. The Lord does not always grant healing in this life, but in these situations His children can look forward to the resurrection when all sickness will be healed. This text also shows us that the church needs to support the sick with prayer.

The last sentence of verse 15 reminds us not only to pray for health, but also for forgiveness of sins (Henry, 1721). The addition of this sentence also reminds us that sickness is sometimes inflicted

because of sin in our lives. If we pray forgiveness for the sin, God will remove the sickness (Calvin, 15??, Henry, 1721). However, this does not mean that all sickness is the direct result of sin in our lives.

Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. (5:16a)

The third situation that James describes is praying for each others' sins. This includes confessing our sins against one another and praying for one another. It also includes confessing our personal sins to one another and asking a brother or sister to pray for us. We need to help each other in our battle with sin.

Notice that we have to pray for ourselves (v13), we need to ask the elders to pray for us (v14) and we need to pray for one another (v16) (Henry, 1721). Prayer is an essential part of our lives as Christians (Psalm 116:12-19, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). Through it we show our thankfulness and dependence on God.

The last part of chapter five verse 16 says, “the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” Fervent prayer is a powerful tool that we have as God's children. Verses 17-18 give us the example of Elijah who “was a man with a nature like ours,” who prayed earnestly and it did not rain for three and a half years. When he prayed again, the heaven gave rain. God answers the fervent prayer of the righteous. This does not mean that just because we pray fervently, that God will give us what we ask; notice also that it talks of the “fervent prayer of a *righteous* man.” The righteous man does not ask for things because it is what he wants, or for his own pleasure and glory, but for God's glory.

Obedience

If we humble ourselves before God we will obey Him. However after the fall into sin we are continually tempted to live for ourselves and to be our own god. By the grace of God we have been

chosen to live for Him both now and in eternity. However this does not make submission to God easy for us.

James encourages us by saying, “Blessed *is* the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him” (1:12). We will be blessed (happy) when we endure temptation. This is a great encouragement to us. Even though we have to struggle in this life, we can still be happy as we belong to God and have been promised eternal life.

However, James follows this by the warning, “But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed” (1:14). Satan uses our own sinful inclinations to draw us into sin. We cannot blame God for our sinful conditions. Verse 15 goes on to warn us that “when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.” Desire is dangerous. It can lead to death. We must not be content at resisting the temptation to sin, but we must resist our desire to sin. We must follow God’s law as “the perfect law of liberty” (1:25). Obeying it keeps us free from the grip of sin; hearing it is not enough. James again repeats the fact that those who obey this law “will be blessed in what he does.”

In Chapter three James links good conduct with the humbleness that accompanies wisdom:

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. (3:13-14)

James also warns us that if we are self-seeking and envious, we should not boast that we have wisdom. True wisdom is seen in humility, not pride.

In chapter four James warns us “that friendship with the world is enmity with God” (4:4). If we live like the world does, we are showing that we do not put ourselves under God’s authority. This comes from an unfounded pride in ourselves; we think that we can decide what is good for us. “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse *your* hands, *you* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *you* double-minded” (4:7-8). We are again told to submit to God and to resist the devil. These things belong together, we cannot serve two masters (Matthew 6:24). The encouragement that the devil will flee from us does not mean that he will not be back, but that we will conquer and have some relief for some time (Calvin, 15??). The promise that God will draw near to us is also a great encouragement. In these verses we see God’s covenant that He has made with us: Serve God and He will care for us, His children. These verses also show us that we are in a spiritual battle; this is easy to forget in this physical World.

In verse 17 of chapter four, James also tells us another important point in relation to obedience:

Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin. (4:17)

**We must follow God’s
law as “the perfect
law of liberty”**

Omitting to do what is good is also a sin. If we know we should do something to help someone and don’t do it, God considers it sin. God wants us to glorify Him by

doing whatever is good and beneficial to our neighbour.

To be continued...

Ruurd Offringa

STONES THAT LIVE

1 PETER 2

Sometimes life is like mining. Digging to find the gemstones.

Either we stand there wondering if gems exist in the dirt that we see, or we dig around blindly hoping to find something, or we dig with purpose and information behind us, 'there are gems, let's find them!'

Let's pick up our spades and dig for gems in the church. We have work to do. To build and rebuild God's house, on Jesus Christ.

There are complaints that can keep us at the door. We complain that we don't feel a part of church. We feel we don't belong; that people don't include us. And in doing so we forget God's promises to us.

"Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house..." 1 Peter 2:4-5a.

Christ is The Precious Stone and He builds His church using living stones. We are Christ's precious, living stones 'being built up a spiritual house.'

Where then is God's house? Where do we belong? Where are we?

Are we lost in a big church? Lost in the Perth metro bond of churches? Are we standing at the door of our local church; unsure of God's promises; unsure of what kind of stones we are and where we fit in?

Let us pick up our spades because in Christ we belong in God's house. We are the precious, living stones that Christ is using to build His house.

Here in Australia we belong to the Free Reformed Church. Here in the Southwest of WA we belong to a local church. Baldivis, Bunbury or Byford.

Mount Nasura or Southern River. God has placed us in our own local church. You in your small corner and I in mine.

Where do I use my spade? Where do you use yours? Do I try fit into the city of stones; somewhere in Perth's big bond of FRCs? Or shall I start more local?

My church will likely become a heap of ruins, and likewise the bond of churches would find itself in shambles, if everyone in my local church did not value their role as a living stone there.



STONES BEING BUILT UP

For those who grew up in the metro area, many faces in church are familiar. We know everyone in church... is that what we believe? That we know everyone? *Do* we know everyone? How involved are we with our fellow church members?

When we don't pay attention to who belongs to our local church and make an effort to personally get to know them, it's no wonder we feel lost and discouraged. God promises to build us up a spiritual house; so should we be seen leaning on our spades?

Let's look at a small, seemingly insignificant way to use our spades and begin building. Purposely or subconsciously we choose when we walk into church and where we sit. God above, the Chief Builder, knows this information before we do. Yet God knows even more, for He knows the comings and goings of every church member and every living stone that belongs to His building.

God is very creative and determines who we end up walking next to as we leave church. He thereby gives us a place to start working; right here, right now. Instead of walking out blindly, eager to seek out the person we usually talk to (or stand with) and/ or getting lost in the crowd, God dares us to look at and acknowledge the Mr & Mrs or young boy or girl or fellow youth or stranger that we 'end up' walking out with. Here's a glorious opportunity to share a smile, say 'G'day' and begin a short conversation about the weather, something we read on the liturgy sheet or about the Gospel message we just heard.

For those who have already found that gem of communication, the above is of course only the beginning of our church building work, but a

beautiful beginning at that. We also discover that this gem needs regular cleaning so that it continues to sparkle and so reveal the beauty of Christ's church.

We have a lot of work to do in Christ's Name. Building up relationships with people in our local church takes time and effort. However, with a little effort every time, the heap of ruins we may sadly feel a part of today, will slowly but surely become a house well-built.

Go on. Start local. Start today. There are gems for us to discover in our local church.

Let us pray, pick up our spades and be the living gemstones of the local church God has called us to at this time, in this place.

"... Who once were not a people but are now the people of God..." (2:10a).

Jacinta Pleiter

Picture source: <http://www.elliott.com/stonechurches/bluemont-web.jpg>

ALCOHOL INTOXICATING DRINK

The topic of whether a Christian may drink alcohol has been highly debated throughout the years. There is no one commandment which states that God forbids a Christian to drink alcohol. Instead to be obedient to God we must search Scripture to see what is revealed to us.

In the Bible wine was a drink commonly used at meal times. It is included in the list of God's blessings, i.e. in Genesis 27:28, "Therefore may God give you of the dew of heaven, of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine." However, in Genesis wine is also used with evil intentions. One example is when the daughters of Lot planned to make their father drunk so that they could get pregnant by him. In Genesis 19:32 we read, "Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie

with him, that we may preserve the lineage of our father.' So they made their father drink wine that night. And the firstborn went in and lay with her father, and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose." These two texts show that although wine can be received and used as a blessing from the Lord, it can also be misused because of the effects of wine, such as drunkenness.

In Exodus 29:40-41 we read how wine is used as an ingredient when making an offering to the Lord. "With the one lamb shall be one-tenth of an ephah of flour mixed with one-fourth of a bin of pressed oil, and one-fourth of a bin of wine as a drink offering. And the other lamb you shall offer at twilight; and you shall offer with it the grain offering and the drink offering, as in the morning, for a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to the

ALCOHOL

Lord.” In this text wine is a vital ingredient in the offering. However in contrast to this in Leviticus 10:8-10 God instructs Aaron to stay away from wine; him and all the other priests, because they are holy! *“Then the Lord spoke to Aaron, saying: ‘Do not drink wine or intoxicating drink, you, nor your sons with you, when you go into the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your*



generations, that you may distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean.” So in the first passage wine is used to make a sweet sacrifice to God, and in the second case the priests are instructed to stay away from wine. Wine itself is a fine ingredient, however God wants those who serve in the temple to be unaffected by alcohol.

How does wine affect people? In Psalm 104:15 we read about the benefits of wine: *“...wine that makes glad the heart of man.”* Proverbs 31:6 recommends that we *“give strong drink to him who is perishing, and wine to those who are bitter of heart.”* However Isaiah 5:11 warns us about the desire to drink wine: *“Woe to those who rise early in the morning, that they may follow intoxicating drink; who continue until night, till wine inflames them!”* What do we understand from these two points of view? It means that wine can

benefit people, however we should also be warned that we do not become addicted to wine.

That is the danger of wine. People can easily use alcohol as an escape from stress and problems. Alcohol helps them to relax and makes them lose all inhibitions. A drunken person loses all self control and feels free to follow the sinful desires of his heart. Without a conscience to remind him what is right and wrong, a person will do things that he will regret when he is sober. We do not show love to our neighbour by offering them alcohol as a means to escape difficulties. The only way to help our neighbour is to direct him to God and His saving grace.

God commands us in His Word that we should not provide alcohol or intoxicating drink to our neighbour to cause him to lose self control and fulfil sinful lusts which are an abomination before the Lord. God says in Habakkuk 2:15 *“Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbour, pressing him to your bottle, even to make him drunk, that you may look on his nakedness!”*

So what can we conclude from all the above passages about alcohol? Should we drink wine as a child of God? It is clear that God does not condemn alcohol. However it is also clear that alcohol can cause sinful behavior. In Ephesians 5:17&18 we are instructed, *“therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit...”*

This is the key to our argument. How do we live as children of God, who want to dedicate our lives to him? What is our priority when we choose to drink? In all our deeds and choices we must consider that we belong to our Saviour, and want to serve Him.

The Lord Jesus attended the wedding in Cana and provided more wine when the supplies had run out. In John 2:9&10 we read, *“when the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not*

know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom. And he said to him, 'Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!'"

When we go to a wedding some of us enjoy a glass of wine. As Christians we cannot make rules for each other. Instead everyone must examine their own lives and motives. However we do need to be considerate of each other's weaknesses. The Bible teaches us in Romans 14:21 that if our actions cause our brother/sister to sin, we must not act that way. *"It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or made weak."* In love we want to help each other to serve the Lord. If our brother/sister drinks too much alcohol than we should discourage them by not drinking with them, and by offering them alternative drinks.

We have wine at the Lord's Supper table, as a symbol of Christ's blood that He shed for all our sins. This proves that wine is not a forbidden drink. The apostles drank wine with the Lord Jesus, and He used wine when He instituted the Holy Supper. We see this in Matthew 26:26-29 where it says *"And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.'" Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."* In this we can see that sin is not found in wine.

In conclusion we can say that alcohol may be used by a Christian in moderation, as long as it does

not cause them to lose their focus on God. People who choose to drink need to be able to maintain their self control. However people who drink copious amounts of wine may behave sinfully, especially if their behaviour becomes out of control. It is important to have a balance, and more important to have the discretion to know when you ought to stop.



Lieschen Bonker

Picture Source:

<http://blogs.jsonline.com/blogs/piblog/Wine.jpg>

http://www.sxc.hu/pic/m/c/ca/carloszk/583236_red_wine_2.jpg

SHOWING YOUR TEAM COLOURS

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in Heaven.

(Matthew 5: 16)

We would like to acknowledge that a lot of information and examples in this paper has been quoted from sermons from Rev Veldman and Rev van Delden.

It's a Saturday afternoon and the Eagles are playing football. We were fortunate to get tickets to the match. A lot of time is spent preparing for our outing – blue and yellow paint needs to be sprayed in our hair and painted on our faces and our Eagles shirt needs ironing. We arrive safely and eagerly await the start of the game. Finally the teams come onto the field and we yell and cheer with the rest of the crowd at the sight of the Eagle players. The game starts and our heart begins to pump with excitement. We cheer as our team scores a goal, then more loudly as they score another. The end of the game is near ... we are getting hoarse... it's right down to the last minute and we can hardly bear to watch as the ball heads towards the other teams goals. We breathe a sigh of relief, as the ball is cut off and heads again to the other end. A goal! We are ecstatic... standing waving and cheering ... clapping as our champion players walk triumphantly off the field with another victory!

We're sure a lot of people can recognise themselves in this little drama above. Okay, maybe for some of you the Dockers are more attractive, or you may prefer to watch a game of soccer or cricket. Maybe some of you enjoy watching pop concerts, or will buy memorabilia of favourite movie stars and watch anything that the actors are in, even choosing your own hair styles and clothing to match. Yet the same applies ... we can get very excited about these things ... but our service to God suffers. Are we just as excited about what He has done for us? Do we spend just as much, or even more time getting to know Him? Are we excited to go to church, or do we complain when we get a little hoarse

because we just sang soooo many psalms ... and the minister prayed for sooo long? And just imagine all the things we could get done if we didn't have to go to church!

Many of us will know the theme song, and all the statistics of a favourite team, yet when it comes to learning psalms and Bible texts, somehow that just doesn't work as well. Admittedly a team has one song – our psalm book consists of over 200 psalms and hymns with multiple verses to each, on top of which we also need to learn our Confessions etc. But do you know the content of them? If someone was to ask, do you know where to find it in the Bible and Confessions? And do we sing with the same enthusiasm with which we chant Aussie, Aussie, Aussie, Oi, Oi, Oi!

I hope you can understand that we are not saying that it is wrong to enjoy a game, to enjoy life. In fact in Ecclesiastes we are instructed to do so. Especially the youth. Chapter 11 – *Enjoy life when you are still young. After all, you are only young once. Before you know there will come a time, which may be less pleasant. Therefore enjoy your teenage years, and those years of young adolescence, when life as yet doesn't seem to have so many worries. Make the most of those years ... enjoy them!*

However, serving God and enjoying life are not two opposites. Service to God does not put a damper on your life, as if there are no longer any pleasures to be enjoyed. Rather we must enjoy life as a child of God, recognising it as a precious gift from Him. We have been given a place in God's wonderful creation and are instructed to enjoy it. God will only condemn us when we leave Him out of these things, when we don't thank and praise Him for them.

**Serving God and
enjoying life are
not two opposites**

At times the world seems so much more attractive – there we can enjoy life! But really we are only deceiving ourselves for the pleasures found there are only fleeting and empty. In Ephesians 4: 17-19 Paul says about the gentiles, *“This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart, who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.”*

And then in verse 20 he continues: *“but you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus ...”*

In Christ our life has been redeemed from all these empty and vain pleasures, and when we think of these riches in Christ then it becomes our heartfelt joy to live according to the will of God in all Good works. (HC Answer 90)

We would like to take a bit of time here to reflect on the sermon by Rev van Delden read recently in Southern River Church. Using 1 Peter 1: 1-2 as the text, we, God’s elect were described as foreigners and misfits in this world and were encouraged to retain our unique identity. Basically the interpretation to this was that Christians don’t belong in this world, don’t fit in with the unbelieving and ungodly. And they suffered because of this. In the time of Peter they were persecuted, as they didn’t conform to the pattern of the world, no longer acted as the world acted and no longer joined in with doing that which was evil. For us today we can fully understand this. We don’t like to be regarded as strange, the odd one out, the sore thumb from the rest of society. We would rather belong, we want to fit in. But the truth is: that we are God’s elect and as His children are sanctified and set apart from this world as holy. God has made us different and we no longer belong to this world. But this is not a disadvantage. For this world is passing away (1 John 2). The benefits of

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God’s election far outweigh any pains of the world’s rejection. The favour of God far outweighs the disfavour of the ungodly. The love of God is far greater in worth than the love of the ungodly. We can’t have it both ways – have the cake and eat it too. We can’t belong to this world and hope to belong to the world to come, can’t be a citizen on earth and a citizen in Heaven at the same time. *“Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of this world makes himself an enemy of God.”* (James 4)

We are different from this world, because God has destined us to be different. It is what He wants, and we need to pray that His Spirit may work in us so that we do live differently to the world, obeying His commandments in all things. Pray too that people may notice this difference, and see it as being good so that they too can come to know God. And this brings us to the text we have chosen from Matthew 5 - *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in Heaven.*

What is this light?

John 8: 12 – Jesus says: *“I am the light of the world. He who follows me shall not walk in darkness but have the light of life.”* Jesus Christ is the only true light, and we as His children are reflections of Him and therefore must follow Him in the way He has pointed out in His Word. By His suffering and death on the cross we are adopted as His children and through His Spirit He imputes to us the righteousness which He obtained for us by His death. How very rich God has made us in Jesus Christ. And when we realise all of this, we will no longer waste our days with all kinds of sinful entertainment, but will fight sinful desires and live according to God's will with joy and delight. This gospel of salvation requires a response of true love for God. When we live a Christ focused life we will receive direction and may be assured that

we are heading for the New Jerusalem. Thus as God’s children, we may put on our walking shoes to continue walking in the light of life, assured that this light will never be extinguished.

SHOWING YOUR TEAM COLOURS (CONTINUED)

Being a light to our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ

We are all members of one body, making up the church of Christ. He has commanded us to be a hand and foot to each other and therefore we must not let our lifestyles become a stumbling block for our brothers and sisters, encouraging them to fight against things that are of this world.

Activities like camps and congresses are good way for young people to get together and encourage each other to walk in faith. Besides Bible study these are some of the best opportunities to have good times together where abuse of alcohol and bad language is not tolerated. Good clean fun is had by all! However, it is disappointing to note that on this weekend only 25% of the youth of our church can be bothered to attend. Not only is it a pity for the organisers who put in so much time and effort, but these people who do not attend are denying themselves this opportunity. One may wonder: Where is their enthusiasm for Christian living! What are their excuses for being absent – are they more interested in going to a party with alcohol and loud music? And is it too boring to sit, listen and discuss a paper such as this?

In previous years the youth clubs had regular sing-a-longs on Sunday nights. This is another brilliant opportunity to get together and have some fun – singing praises to God and also many light hearted folk songs. Games evenings were also organised and enjoyed by those who attended. We have a fantastic church hall. Perhaps this could be the venue for many youth activities – even getting a table tennis table, Sjoelbak, Air Hockey and table soccer. Maybe these things are happening but we aren't aware of it.

Being a light to the World

Because we are God's children we have to make clear by our way of life that we are not one with this world, that our life has a different focus. This is the antithesis. Yet we cannot withdraw ourselves away from the world. Scripture has made clear that we have a place in this world. And by living a righteous, holy, humble and pure life our light is shining in this world.

The Bible often compares our relationship with Christ to that of a husband and wife. Their love for each other is typified by the way they interact and the small things they do for each other. They do not stand on a street corner, and loudly proclaim their love for each other but by their actions it is evident to all that they do. So God does not require us to wave flags or paint our faces to show our love for Him. Rather our lifestyle and behaviour must show that we worship Him, and so others may come to glorify Him.

This light must show up in our life as a stark contrast to the wickedness of this world. It cannot be hidden under a bushel, but radiate like a beacon so that those who come into contact with us may benefit from it.

What are these good works? In the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus instructs us to be meek, to hunger and thirst for righteousness, to be merciful, pure in heart, to seek peace and to not worry when being persecuted for righteousness sake. Thus when speaking of good works, Christ is not referring to something special, something spectacular, but simply to being a faithful disciple of His in our whole life. We must obey God's commandments joyfully knowing they have been given for our good. And if we live in this way, then impure elements will disappear more and more and the fruits of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, long suffering etc) will get the upper hand. (Galatians 5: 22-23)

To put on these fruits, we have to fight worldliness. Parties cannot be drunken orgies, and places like nightclubs, casinos or horse races are not somewhere we should be seen. Unfortunately the world and our own flesh affect us deeply, and it is tempting to try to find fulfilment of our fleshly desires – eating, drinking, money, sexual desires. In themselves these things might not be sinful, but we often misuse God's gracious gifts.

For example, a boy and a girl who love each other dearly may take what belongs to marriage. They may not think that this is wrong because they

really love each other. But this is only what they want, not what God wants, and is only seeking gratification of the flesh. When young couples find themselves in situations where they are tempted they must do all they can to avoid it, and turn to God in prayer.

There are other examples we could use (TV, Internet, clothing etc) which show how worldliness can creep into our lives. We can use these things, just as we can enjoy going to see a game of footy. But we must be aware of the power of the devil. Sometimes he even disguises himself as an angel of the light and does whatever he can to appeal to the desires of our sinful flesh. He will try all he can to break the bond between God and us. Then he laughs when we conform to the world, when we say, "I can still do this, it doesn't mean that I don't love the Lord." Those in the world watch us, and they know when we skip church to attend something more fun, they see the movies we watch, hear the songs we listen to and see our web pages on the net. They see when our lifestyle doesn't match that which we confess with our mouth. And so we need to be so very careful to live our faith every day of the week!

Listening to all this so far, you may think – but that's just impossible, too hard for us. Yet through Christ it isn't. We can face this battle when we put on the armour of God. And when we ask the Lord for help to stand firm against the temptations which threaten us, we are assured that He will open our eyes to see the dangers around us.

Paul says in Ephesians, *"put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil."* Of ourselves we cannot stand, but Christ is our strength in this battle. We must put our hope in Him and render our lives to Him. We are completely dependent on Him and must daily put our trust in Him and expect our help from His almighty power. Again, this does not happen by itself. Christ gives us the means to fight, but we must do all we can to put on this armour – just as a soldier will equip himself for battle before going to war. And so by studying God's word we can gird our waist with truth, put on the breastplate of righteousness, shod our feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace. We may take the shield of

faith so that we can be able to quench the fiery darts of the wicked one. We may take the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God praying always with all prayer and supplication for all the Saints. (Chapter 6: 14-19)

Then we would still like to point out here, that none of this is our own doing. It is all God's work. As His elect, He works in us the will to serve Him and to live our lives in thankfulness to Him. Even our good works come through the working of His Spirit, and are made perfect through Christ's righteousness.

And finally we do all this, living in a God fearing way, not to receive any credit for ourselves but to bring glory to God. How can a man glorify the great and awesome Creator God? We can really do nothing that impresses Him – nothing that He could not do for Himself. What gets God's attention is obedience, living in the manner revealed through His Word. God expects us to reflect His glory in our attitudes and actions as an example of righteousness to others. Glorify – honour, magnify and praise God in body and Spirit, in action and attitude. When we reflect the spiritual fruit we spoke of earlier than we will be glorifying God in our life.

Wouldn't it be nice if the Bible was a little more black and white, if it gave more specific instructions about how we are to live as God's child? And yet the Bible is clear. It shows us what is worldly, we just like to water it down and make it suit our own situations so that we can justify doing something that is wrong. Recently in a sermon Rev Veldman said that we should be stronger in calling a spade a spade, and break with things that we know is not pleasing to God. And he asked the question: Are we still excited? Excited to be a child of God, excited about what Christ has done for us, and to serve Him in all aspects of our life? Let us pray that it is so, and pray for help to show this in our entire life so that we too may share in the wonderful promise of redemption through Christ, and one day may enter the New Jerusalem and together eat from the tree of life.

Wayne & Erica Visser

Image: <http://www.sport-feriencenter.ch/tennis-fitnesscenter/spielautomaten/games/airhockey.jpg>

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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