

Editorial

The year 2008 marks the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the ‘week of prayer for Christian unity.’ This is a global initiative coordinated by the World Council of Churches to promote unity between the different denominations and faiths. In order to facilitate this, Christians are urged to “not be too set in our ways and beliefs” but to remember that “not all people can believe in the same way.” This postmodern idea that there is no such thing as a ‘true’ church, and that every believer should just find the church that suits them best, is becoming more and more pervasive in churches around the world today. We need to guard ourselves against this lie of Satan, namely that the real truth doesn’t exist. We believe that the one truth which we should seek is the Lord Jesus Christ as He has revealed Himself in His Word.

The spirit of postmodernism encourages us to believe the Bible according to our own insight and based on our own experiences, and to tolerate this in others as well. In the name of peace and love we must ignore our differences and dwell on what is the same. Therefore modern philosophers would have us believe that we don’t need to fight; on the contrary we must show love for our neighbour by respecting his individuality. When looked at from this perspective, the

VOLUME 13 ISSUE 4 AUGUST 2008

Editorial	C Groenewold	1
Hello & Welcome	E Terpstra	2
James (Part 2)	R Offringa	3
Ready & Waiting?	E Terpstra	7
SPYSC Report:		
Social Networking	B Schoof	10

Editorial (continued)

Church struggles of the past were unnecessary and even unscriptural. When our fathers fought against false doctrines, they caused factions in the church; enemies were created and people suffered. Instead of love and peace, there was trouble and strife.

However, the Bible is full of the battle that we are commanded to wage for the truth. This magazine's title describes what we must do in a nutshell: 'contend'. The meaning of contend given by the Oxford dictionary is to compete, to challenge, to argue or insist.' We must argue earnestly for the faith, using among other things the sword of truth which is God's Word. Moreover, the Bible refers to the Church as a pillar of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15), and it refers to opinions that differ from that truth as lies.

The postmodernist view, however, has as its goal to have Christian unity at the cost of the truth. This is evident when we look at the agenda of the prayer week coordinated by the World Council of Churches, which states that "while a Catholic needs the set dogma, the discipline, the superstition of the Catholic church, the more liberal churches like the 'Disciples of Christ' have a different feel and function. The type of person who feels they find truth here would never feel the same way in the Catholic church, and vice

versa." In other words, it depends on how we feel whether we find truth in a particular church.

But we know from the Bible that man is desperately wicked. His heart is a gulf of iniquity and is deceitful above all things (Jeremiah 17:9). How then can our feelings lead us to the truth? How can our hearts of themselves test and choose from the Bible what to believe?

The Bible doesn't just condemn those who deny the gospel, but also and especially those who introduce false doctrines which they cunningly interweave with truth. Clever distortions of the truth are more likely to trick us into believing them.

In 2 Corinthians 11:3 we read, "But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." False churches don't altogether deny the gospel but mix it up with their own beliefs which cause them to depart from "the simplicity that is in Christ."

Thankfully, in Jesus Christ the truth does exist. We must seek Him with the aim of finding him. Therefore we must be honest in the way we interpret His Word, because that's where it's possible to find Him as He really is.

Colette Groenewold

WELCOME

... to another edition of the Contender

By the time this magazine is distributed throughout the churches, we will be into the second month of winter already. The temperature is significantly cooler, and the rainfall is quite frequent. As I write this, some good rainfall has been recorded in the northern parts of the wheat belt area, for which the farmers over there have been quite thankful. In the Perth Metropolitan area, as well as in the south west of WA we have also had significant falls, which will also boost our dam levels quite nicely.

In observing all this, I can't help but be reminded of that song of praise in psalm 104. *He waters the hills from His upper chambers; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of Your works. He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, and vegetation for the service of man, that he may bring forth food from the earth... Bless the Lord O my soul! Praise the Lord.*

Psalm 104 continues to make reference to the beautiful creation in which we live, and through out the psalm extols and magnifies the name of the Lord for its beauty. And yet also from Gods Word we know that this earth, beautiful as it is, will pass away and will be no more. Believers are promised a restored earth, a restored Paradise, where the beauty of this creation will be untainted by the sin of mankind. And let's face it, also in this creation we are able to recognise the consequences of sin.

JAMES (PART 2)

Love your Neighbour

In the last section we saw how love for God and submission to Him in humbleness leads to our obedience of His law. Part of this law delegates how we must live in relation to our neighbour; how we must show love to our neighbour. Throughout the epistle James refers to us his readers as “brethren.” This demonstrates a strong loving relationship with us. James cares for our eternal well-being and has written his letter to tell us what we need to know. He warns us that “where envy and self-seeking *exist*, confusion and every evil thing *are there*” (3:16). Love for self rather than love for our neighbour is a sign of evil. This is shown by living for ourselves and

only thinking about ourselves. James exhorts us to show love to one another:

“Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.”
(5:19-20)

We need to do everything we can to turn our wandering brother back to the truth. We need to show love and concern for their eternal wellbeing. He reminds us that God does not see the sins of a repentant brother, but covers them in His love.

Bridle the Tongue

James first talks about the tongue in chapter one:

So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.
(1:19-20)

Because God has by grace saved us from our sin, and we are still easily drawn to sin we need to

watch what we say, especially in anger (Henry, 1721). We cannot trust our own judgement to be perfect in any matter, so we need to carefully consider what we hear. Hearing refers both to the word of God and to what others say. We easily make quick judgements about what we hear and react in anger. This anger does not produce the righteousness of God. It just leads to more sin;

WELCOME (CONTINUED)

In this edition of Contender we give some thought to this matter. We live on this earth in expectation of the Judge who will return from Heaven. This is a comfort for the elect, but will be sheer terror for those who have not lived faithfully on this earth. This expectation of a judge that will return from heaven, is what drives us to our knees to ask forgiveness of sins. It also moulds our will in such a way that we will live in obedience to His Word.

That also applies in the way we use the technology with which we have been blessed. Technology can be used in an excellent manner in our service towards God. But at the same time it can also be a tool of Satan that pulls us away from our service to God. Ben highlights this in his SPYSC meeting review.

In this edition Ruurd concludes his study and explanation on the book of James. As we also saw in the first instalment of his article, the book of James is highly instructive on living the life that is pleasing to God. Recognising our own shortcomings in this respect does provide eager longing for Jesus' return.

Enjoy the read...

Eric Terpstra

JAMES (CONTINUED)

breaking of relationships, insulting our brothers and sisters, showing hatred, causing division in the church and so on.

We can also be quick to voice our opinion on matters, without carefully considering whether or not we are right. This can lead to false doctrines being promoted, injury to brothers and sisters because of a harsh unthought comment, gossip, and the like.

In fact James goes on to say that “If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion *is* useless” (1:26). This is said in context of being doers of the word and not hearers only. If we say that we are a Christian but do not talk like one, we are not one.

In chapter three, James continues this warning about controlling our tongue:

For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. (3:2)

The tongue is the hardest thing to control and yet it can cause the most damage. How often don’t we hear disputes and arguments over words said? When James says that if we can control our tongue we can control the whole body with the same wisdom, he is showing us how difficult it is to control the tongue. He then goes on to explain in verses three to four that a horse is controlled with a small bit and a ship is turned by a small rudder. “Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things” (3:5). We can cause much trouble with our tongue, we should not underestimate its power.

He continues in verse six by saying that even as a forest is set alight by a small flame, so “the tongue *is* a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.” Here again a repeated stress on the danger of the tongue. It affects every part

of our life and is easily receptive to the fires of hell, that is the fire sent by Satan (Calvin, 15??).

James then goes on to say that although man has tamed every kind of animal; “no man can tame the tongue. *It is* an unruly evil, full of deadly poison” (3:8). Again, a repeated strong warning against the deadliness of the tongue. It is as deadly as poison. But the statement that “no man can tame the tongue” needs closer examination. James is trying to get us to control our tongues, and then he says that man cannot tame it. Why then try? Looking at our lives as a whole, we know we will never be perfect, yet we try out of thankfulness to God. Likewise, although we know that we will never tame the tongue completely, this does not stop us from trying to do so out of thankfulness.

James then makes a very convicting statement;

With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. (3:9-10)

Although we as Christians will not curse God, we can be very quick to curse men. Here James says that this should not happen; good and evil should not come out of the same mouth. He goes on to explain that this is not natural; you do not get fresh and bitter water from the same stream, a fig tree does not bear olives, and a grapevine does not bear figs (3:11-12). We should have the same dislike of cursing men as we do of cursing God; if we are unwilling to curse God, we should be

unwilling to curse our fellow men.

In the first 11 verses of chapter five James tells us to be patient and wait on the Lord to

**“... let your “Yes” be “Yes,”
and your “No,” “No,” lest
you fall into judgment” (5:12)**

take action when we are being persecuted and are suffering. He then says “But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your “Yes” be “Yes,” and *your* “No,” “No,” lest you fall into judgment” (5:12). As Christians we need to be honest in what we say, not using our tongues for deceit.

Keep Peace

Closely related to bridling the tongue is keeping peace in the church. In fact if we do not bridle the tongue we can cause much hardship and division in the church. However, keeping peace in the church also has to do with our actions towards one another.

James first mentions peace in the church when speaking about living in the meekness of wisdom. In contrast to self-seeking and envy he says, "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy" (3:17). This is everything that shows concern and love for our neighbour rather than self-centredness. We need to be pure, that is without sin. We need to be peaceable, that is not seeking conflict. We need to be gently, that is treating the other person with care. We need to be willing to yield, that is not forcing our preferences or desires on others. We need to be full of mercy, that is willing to forgive our brethren their faults, just ask God forgives ours. We need to be full of good works, doing good to all around us. We need to be without partiality, that is, not treating one brother as better than another, thinking the best of all our brethren, without minutely examining them for faults (Calvin, 15??). We need to be without hypocrisy, that is, sincere in all that we do. Imagine if we all lived like this all the time!

This does not mean that we accept heresies in the name of peace, but that we deal with those who are teaching heresies in a peaceful manner,

***For peace to exist we need
to be content with what
God has given us.***

knowing that often these brothers are sincere and do not know that they are promoting heresies. If we assume the worst of our brothers, which would be that they are deliberately promoting heresies, we will not be inclined to treat them as brothers, but as enemies. If we attack rather than carefully examine the heresy in light of the Bible with our brother, we are causing conflict and war, but "the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace" (3:18). Righteousness comes from the rich soil of peace, not from conflict. Only if our brother refuses to lay aside the heresy after clearly being shown from scripture that it is wrong, may we use outright condemnation of the heresy and go to discipline.

In chapter four James says that fights can also come from envy:

Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? 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. (4:1-2)

Fighting in the church comes from illicit desires. Wanting more than we have, being discontent with what God has given us and depending on our own actions to get us what we want. This is the opposite of peace. For peace to exist we need to be content with what God has given us. If we envy each other and our main goal in life is to get more, we will not be happy if anyone has more than us, and therefore will not live in peace.

Do Not Judge

In chapter one James says that there is no difference between the poor and the rich, both need to be humble. The lowly are brought up only by God's mercy and the rich are brought down by God's mercy (1:9-11). Both are equal before God's mercy. James continues his warning not to esteem one over the other in chapter two. In the first four verses he warns against showing partiality when dealing with people. In the verses

five to seven he shows that there is nothing about the rich that makes them any better than the poor, in fact, they often show less love than the poor. He goes on to say that "If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors" (2:8-9). He also warns us in the following verses that if we stumble on

JAMES (CONTINUED)

one point of the law we are guilty of breaking the entire law.

After saying that breaking one part of the law is the same as breaking all of it, James warns us to speak considering this. James also warns us against judging our neighbour in regards to their righteousness:

So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. (2:12-13)

If we do not show mercy to our neighbour, how can we expect God to show mercy to us? We are just as evil. It is also important to note that the law is called the "law of liberty." We keep the law because it keeps us free from sin (Romans 6:1-2), not because it will condemn us (Romans 8:1-2). Therefore we cannot condemn our brothers for not keeping the law perfectly. James warns us of this again in chapter four:

Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door! (5:9)

Conclusion

The book of James is full of instruction on how to live our lives to God's glory. Imagine if we all lived to the standards that the book of James demands! The church would radiate with love! Outsiders would wonder at the awesome relationship that we have with each other. However this is not possible without God. Our relationship with each other depends on our relationship with God. Pray that God will show his mercy to you and give you the strength to show such a love. Study God's Word: study how depraved you really are: study how much God has done for you: study how to live in thankfulness to God (LD 1 Q&A 2).

Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another? (4:11-12)

If we judge our brother we are deciding for ourselves what is required for salvation; we are putting ourselves above the law, saying that we know what it requires (Calvin, 15??, Henry, 1721). However only God as Lawgiver can judge to save and destroy. We are equally guilty under the law, so how can we judge each other?

In chapter five James again warns us against judging each other:

Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door! (5:9)

It is so easy to find faults in someone and use that as an excuse to grumble against them! This includes gossip and malicious slander. We are given the warning that the Judge is standing at the door. If we don't show mercy to our brothers, we cannot expect God to show mercy towards us. Here we also see how judging our brother is closely linked with guarding our tongue and keeping peace within the church.

Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles!

Laud Him, all you peoples!

For His merciful kindness is great toward us,

And the truth of the LORD endures forever.

Praise the LORD!

Psalms 117

Ruurd Offringa

References

Calvin, 15??. *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles.*

Henry, 1721. *Commentary on the Whole Bible.* Volume 5.

United Church of God, 2006: "The Book of James: An 'Epistle of Straw'?" Retrieved from

<http://www.ucgstp.org/lit/booklets/faith/james.html> on 19/10/06.

READY AND WAITING?

*Come, O Lord, with power and glory
And descend before our eyes
When the sounding of the trumpet
Shall re-echo through the skies
And the voice of Thy archangel
Shall command the dead to rise.*

*No one knows the day or moment
When the Bridegroom shall appear.
Let us then be ever watchful;
May our lamps be bright and clear.
Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!
Thy great Day is drawing near.*

Hymn 50: 2 & 7



Each Sunday afternoon when we make confession of our faith, we confess, “from there He will come to judge the living and the dead.” It is a short statement of faith about what we believe concerning the end of time on this earth. For some 2000 years now Christians have been waiting for the return of the Lord. This event though, is talked extensively about in the Scriptures and also in the confessions. Due to its serious nature the Bible does not leave us in the dark in regards to what we should expect. Rather it is explicitly clear about God’s anger over sin and the damning consequences that a life of sin will lead to. At the same time it is abundantly clear on God’s mercy toward sinners who turn to Him in Jesus Christ and the eternal reward that will be given to them. Let’s have a closer look at what we know about Jesus return and the judgment that will follow.

(Throughout the article the italicized quotes are from Art 37 of the Belgic Confession.)

“*When the time ordained by the Lord has come...our Lord Jesus Christ will come.*” No one knows when the Day of the Lord’s return will be. P Dejonge correctly concludes that “because this is information outside what God has revealed to us, it therefore lies outside the bounds of legitimate Christian investigation.”¹ Nevertheless there have been many people who have made (incorrect) predictions of when the Lord will return. The Lord Jesus Christ made it plain and clear in His teaching in Matthew 24:36 that it is only the Father in Heaven who knows when this time will be. Also from Matthew 24, we learn that the

¹ P Dejonge, *The Church’s Witness to the World*, Paideia Press Canada 1980

READY AND WAITING? (CONTINUED)

Lords coming will be unexpected. People will be performing their daily work, will be busy in their families, busy in the church, studying, shopping, holidaying... and suddenly amidst all the normal things that make up daily life as we know it, our Saviour will reappear.

“He will come from heaven bodily and visibly with great glory and majesty”. In Acts 1 we read of the Lord’s ascension into heaven. In verse 10 and 11 we read, “And while they steadfastly looked toward heaven as He went up, behold two men stood by them in white apparel who also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing into heaven? This same Jesus who was taken from you in Heaven will so come in the manner as you saw Him go into Heaven.” This emphasizes that He will return in bodily form just as the disciples witnessed him ascend into heaven. Similarly we read in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, “The Lord Himself will descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God.” Indeed the return of Christ will be a glorious and awesome display of splendor and majesty.

On His return we confess, *“Jesus will declare Himself Judge of the living and the dead.”* To all people God will render according to their work. In Daniel 7 as well as Revelation 4 and 5, (which both are visions of Daniel and John respectively) we get a mental image of the judgment about to begin. Daniel 7:9 reads, “I watched until thrones were put in place and the Ancient of Days was seated... A thousand ministered to Him, ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him, the court was seated and the books were opened.”

“All people will render account for every careless word they utter.” These are the words of Jesus Christ in Matthew 12:36. What a scary thought this is! James points to the tongue as an unruly evil, by which we bless God and curse our neighbour. (James 3:1-11) Our tongue is a member of the

body that so easily entangles us in sin; a swear word that slips out, a personal insult, an offensive comment/remark, a juicy bit of gossip. Yes how often doesn’t our tongue cause us to sin? And then we need to give account for every careless word that we utter! On top of this the secrets and hypocrisies of men will be publicly uncovered in the sight of all. The confession also touches upon sinful thoughts and actions that will be judged. In this way our whole walk of life will come under God’s scrutiny.

God’s judgment on that day will be absolutely final. It will set the eternal destiny of believer and

***“the final judgment ...
will magnify His holiness
and righteousness as well
as His grace and mercy in
the sight of all.”***

unbeliever alike. There will be no opportunities for appeals, no appeals to the constitution, and no begging for a pardon. There will be no necessity for God to reconsider His decision, or reverse a man’s destiny because “some new evidence comes to

light.” The fact that God knows the hearts of men, and sees everything which happens allows him to make a perfect judgment each time. This is very much in contrast to human law courts, which being human does mean they are subject to fallibility but at the same time does sometimes leave you wondering about the state of justice.

Dejonge writes, “Yet the final judgment occupies a very significant place in God’s judgment for the world. It will magnify His holiness and righteousness as well as His grace and mercy in the sight of all.” In this life we find it hard to comprehend that balance of God’s justice and His love. It is difficult to fathom why I embrace His revealed Word and my neighbour rejects it. Why is it that my work-mate receives God’s judgment and I find his mercy? Why does he find God’s wrath and I find His love? On this earth and on this side of the grave I don’t think we can fully answer those questions. However on Judgment day, God’s name will be magnified and glorified, to him will be honour and glory and power and blessing, as He demonstrates in a most marvelous

and excellent way, His judgment and His mercy on the peoples of this earth. It will be God's day – yes His alone and nothing will distract or interrupt the proceedings.

As a result of God's judgment, men can expect salvation or condemnation. The confession states, *“for good reason this judgment is horrible and dreadful to the wicked and evil doers.”* The Lord Jesus confirms this in His teaching as well. In his parable of the wedding feast, outside the kingdom of Heaven is described as outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. In Revelation hell is described as a lake of fire burning with brimstone (Rev 19:20, 20:14). In Revelation 6:15-16 we read, “And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb. For the great day of His wrath has come and who is able to stand?”

On the other hand the confession states that the thought of this judgment is a great joy and comfort to the righteous and the elect. It will be the arrival of the full redemption as Christ has obtained for us. It will mark the end of sin, and having to live with the consequences of sin each day again. It will also mark the end of those who have tormented us, who despised us, who ridiculed and persecuted us, for then they too will recognise that our cause was the cause of God. It will also mark the beginning of the eternal reward the Lord has in store for us, something the Bible describes as something so gloriously wonderful that the heart of man cannot even begin to imagine it. (1 Cor.2:9)

Knowing that those who truly seek forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ will receive God's mercy, what a great thing it will be to be completely delivered from sin and the consequences of sin which we have to live with on a daily basis.

The Day of the Lord, Judgment Day, it may be just around the corner or perhaps it will not occur in our lifetime. But either way, some day we will need to face it. Are you ready for Jesus' glorious return? Do you look forward to His return – yes even with great longing as the Belgic Confession puts it? Or do you find Jesus' return somewhat daunting and unsettling? Do you need to clean up a few things in your life before He returns? I do remember struggling with these questions myself as a youth, especially when all of life's opportunities lay in front of me. These personal questions are hard to answer sometimes for yourself, and therefore it's valuable to talk about them with your friends and family, but also with parents and older people as well.

My own response is this: I recognise that God is a righteous and Holy God. The sin of this world as well as my own sin is offensive in His sight and grief to His heart. The fact that we will be judged on account of these is both horrible and terrifying. The thought of even wicked people suffering an eternity in hellfire is also chilling to say the least. Recognising therefore that we will be severely judged for our sin, drives me each day again to ask for the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ and acts as a catalyst to live in obedience to God's commands. Knowing that those who truly seek forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ will receive God's mercy, what a great thing it will be to be completely delivered from sin and the consequences of sin which we have to live with on a daily basis. For then we can say:

No more sorrow, no more shame,
No more death, no more pain,
Lord Jesus please come again!

Eric Terpstra

SPYSC REPORT:**SOCIAL NETWORKING**

We live in a changing world. Especially in the world of technology, things move remarkably fast. New technologies spring up daily, and one of the fastest ways the world is changing is in communication and socialising. In the last few years a new way of socialising has sprung up, online, in the form of social networking. Social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace attract millions and millions of users, and they have also become prominent in our churches, mainly among the youth. So what should we think of this new phenomenon? Are online social networks something to be avoided at all costs? Or should they be eagerly embraced? Well this was the topic of the recent SPYSC meeting, where Mr Bert Veenendaal gave a presentation entitled “Social networking: Friend or Foe?”

Mr Veenendaal began by giving a definition and history of communication. It may be described as an essential part of our everyday lives, given to us by God in order to serve and praise Him, and do good to our friends and neighbours. Peter tells us this in 1 Peter 4: 10 – 11, “*As every man has received the gift, so minister the same to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God, if any man ministers let him do it as of the ability which God gives: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus the anointed One, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever.*” Like everything in this life, communication was created perfect, but has fallen due to the effects of sin, and is now filled with depravity. Only God’s Spirit and Word can make it wholesome again.

There are many different ways and means of communication. We communicate between ourselves and our siblings, parents, friends, and God. We can communicate about spiritual matters, talk about work, or just socialise with our friends. We can talk face to face, over the phone, via email or SMS, instant messaging, or online. Communication has changed much since our grandparents’ day. The older generation had a strong focus on face-to-face communication. This can never be totally replaced in our lives, for it is important in matters of church, family, and the communion of saints. Our grand-parents also had

the postal system and later telephones. The next generation also had a strong focus on face to face socialising, but also used emailing and SMS. Emailing is different to the traditional form of handwritten letters, since they are mostly short, more frequent, and also quite cryptic. SMS takes this even further by limiting the size to just 160 characters, so they are very short, very frequent, and very cryptic. And for the youth of today, communication has changed even further, with the added use of instant messaging over the internet, online chatrooms, and social networking. And communication will continue changing. In 10 years time who knows what forms of communication will be used.

Having given us this history of communication, Mr Veenendaal proceeded to define ‘social networking’. Social networking sites are a new kind of space. In the same way our bedroom is a space, and the park, a restaurant, and a friend’s house is also a space, so also network sites are a space but instead they are online. Many similar things are done, such as chatting, sharing jokes, sharing pictures and music. The first social networking sites began at the same time as public use of the Internet took off in the mid 1990’s. However they were soon abandoned, as not enough people were online to make it worthwhile. However in 2003 they began to gather popularity, and soon replaced online dating as the second highest usage of Internet traffic (after pornography). The early adopters were computer ‘geeks’ and social outcast groups such as gays. However many other groups soon realised the benefits of such sites.

The two most popular social networking sites today, Facebook and MySpace (both with over 300 million users) were started by universities and rock bands respectively. Some of the features of these sites include a public profile, ‘friends’, a wall (for others to write on), links and quizzes, videos, and more. One of the biggest differences between an online social network and a normal group of friends in real life is an online network’s publicity. Depending on your personal privacy settings, those able to view everything you’ve written

ranges from anyone who types your name into Google, to all those who you have accepted as a 'friend'. This includes private details such as your date of birth, religious and political views, and even photos. Youth who are normally reluctant to give out their personal details will sometimes do so online without thinking. Those who are reluctant to socialise face to face will spend hours socialising online, and for many people Facebook has become an addiction. Wall postings, the online versions of conversations, are completely public and can be viewed by all your friends. Another big thing that has changed with social networking is the concept of 'friends'. A friend in a biblical sense is someone who shares your beliefs and values, and thus someone you can be very close to. However in an online setting, since it is publicly displayed, the number of 'friends' has become a status symbol, leading to people adding acquaintances, workmates, and even people who are a friend of their friends. This means that we are 'friends' with many non-believing workmates, schoolmates and other people who we would never call friends in real life, and it makes it very easy to form close relationships with those people we would never consider otherwise. Not only this but those people who we hardly know have complete access to our profile and can view personal and private information. Since these sites are so popular and such minefields of information, they are used extensively by marketers and social and political activists. Access to all these people is power and money. Rupert Murdoch's News Cooperation bought MySpace in July '05 for \$80 million; the value of Facebook today is estimated at \$15 billion.

What are we to think of all this? We shouldn't just dismiss new things, new technology just for the sake of it. We must approach it the same way we do the rest of our lives. So what should our response be? The first thing to realise is, it is not just a simple change in technology; it is a fundamental change in communication. Who do we communicate with? What personal details about ourselves do we share with others? What is a friend? What is a real friend? How much easier and more distant is online and email communication than face to face? These are important questions to think about.

Online 'space' and online communication should be treated with the same principles as all other spaces, for example our bedroom. Like all technologies it can be used positively for outreach, marketing and as an alternatives for other means of communication. But like all technologies it can also be used in many negative ways. We must approach social networking according to our task in the world as prophets, priests and kings, just as we do with our bedrooms. Our bedroom is private, but our parents also have some control. They also have control over our other spaces: church, restaurants, bars, clubs, etc. With all these places, it is not the going out and hanging out that is the problem. It is with who, where, when, and why. So these same sorts of questions need to be asked of online space. Where are you doing? What are you doing? Who are you with?

A covenant child must be spiritually responsible on a social networking site, and have the self-control to be able to say 'no'. Thus in Mr Veenendaal's opinion covenant children shouldn't use social network sites until after they graduate from high-school and have done or are busy doing profession of faith, for the responsibility isn't there yet, and the exposure to secular and ungodly material is very high. It is important to maintain the antithesis: in, but not of, the world. Does your Facebook site show that you are a Prophet, Priest and King? Choose your friends wisely and scripturally, not according to a secular concept of friends. Be careful that your profile does not release too much personal information. Just as in all of life, you have a responsibility to warn your friends when they have inappropriate content. Remember the public nature of social networking sites. Don't forget other things that you are busy with, and also other forms of communication. And just as with your bedroom let your parents have a role, communicate with them, and let them advise and supervise.

In summary, like all of life, social networking brings a huge responsibility, towards God, yourself and your friends. Remember to conduct yourself according to your task in the world as prophet, priest and king. Your site is an expression of who YOU are, that is a covenant child of God. Don't treat it lightly.

Aim:

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

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

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

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

Editorial Board:	Eric Terpstra (EIC)
Colette Groenewold	Adrian Hordyk
Brendan Pitlo	Ben Schoof
Julian Slobe	Rita VanderWal

Layout: Rosanne Torenvliet

Editorial Address:
eherpstra@westnet.com.au

Article Deadline for Next Issue: 31/07/08
Next Issue Distributed: 24/08/08